

Long Island Botanical Society

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The Quarterly Newsletter

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In the Field with Roy Latham, #5

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Introduction

In 1991, the Southold Indian Museum in Cutchogue, Suffolk County presented the “Roy Latham Special Exhibit” largely coordinated by the museum’s president Walter L. Smith. The exhibit displayed some of Roy’s vast natural history and archaeological collections from eastern Long Island in addition to selected copies of his *Journal*, samples of his publications, correspondence with prominent biologists, field gear and notebooks, and more. Guest speakers presented talks on the legendary naturalist from Orient, Long Island. Additionally, an 8-page pamphlet was published that included a biography of Roy by his daughter Diana Latham; this biography continues to be widely cited whenever the work of Roy Latham is discussed.

In 1993, a special issue of the LIBS Newsletter was published devoted to the life and contributions of Roy Latham. Lance Biechele wrote “Roy Latham and the Liverworts of Long Island;” Barbara Conolly wrote about the time she and her husband Joe made a “mini-expedition to Orient Point to seek out Roy Latham” and ask for help in identifying an unusual fish; Robert Dirig wrote an in depth

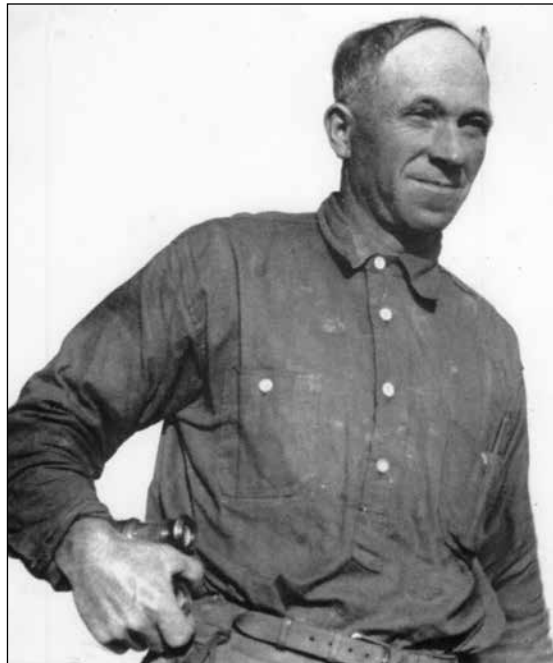


Figure 1. Roy Latham (1881-1979), a native of Orient, Long Island, New York, was one of the most prominent field naturalists of northeastern North America. A potato farmer and commercial fisherman by occupation, Latham was deeply interested in all disciplines of natural history, including archaeology. He collected and deposited in museums approximately 245,000 specimens and published extensively in scientific journals. Photo taken October 3, 1920; photo courtesy of Diana Latham.

Acknowledgement. The authors thank The Robins Island Foundation for a generous grant awarded to the Oysterponds Historical Society for assistance in transferring and curating the writings of Roy Latham.

paper on “The Botanical and Lichenological Work of Roy Latham, Legendary Long Island Naturalist;” Eric Lamont provided a list of “Roy Latham’s Botanical Publications;” Paul Stoutenburgh contributed “Roy Latham, a Man for All Seasons;” and Diana Latham’s biography of her father was reprinted. Additionally, from 1995 to 1998 the LIBS Newsletter included a series of four articles entitled “In the Field with Roy Latham” by Eric Lamont. These articles included selected excerpts from Roy’s 1916 and 1918 *Journal* and letters from Roy to Stanley Jay Smith and Henry Bookout.

Jump ahead 25 years to 2023 when Diana Latham decided to donate her father’s papers to the Oysterponds Historical Society in Orient. John Holzapfel has been assisting Diana with the transfer of 1000s of pages of Roy’s writings, including his *Journal* (1904-1978), correspondence, field notes, and more.

The following excerpts are mostly from Roy’s *Journal* but a few are

from the *Suffolk Times*, *Long Island Naturalist*, and *The Auk*. Some quotations have been lightly edited and the subtitles have been provided by the authors. **Part I: Reflections on Nature** reveals Roy’s deep passion for nature and provides insight into some of his philosophy; it also illustrates his ability to express himself as a writer equal to other American naturalists like John Muir. **Part II: Conservation** reveals an aspect of Roy’s life that is not well known (e.g., advocate for wild-

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Long Island Botanical Society

Founded: 1986 • Incorporated: 1989

The Long Island Botanical Society is dedicated to the promotion of field botany and a greater understanding of the plants that grow wild on Long Island, New York.

Visit the Society's Web site
www.libotanical.org

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Society News

LIBS gratefully acknowledges donors. The society would not exist without support from its members and LIBS takes this opportunity to express sincere appreciation to the following members for their generous donations in 2023:

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LIBS Life Members. One way members support the society is by becoming a Life Member. Such support keeps the society vibrant and able to achieve its goals. Please show your support of LIBS by becoming a Life Member. Current Life Members of LIBS:

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(Roy Latham, continued from front cover)

life sanctuaries on Long Island) and establishes him as one of America's earliest conservationists; it also provides examples of sadness and anger against the encroachment of development and disrespect for nature.

Latham's writings chronicle and document engagements with eastern Long Island's flora and fauna, landscapes, and seascapes in the early 1900s, and provide valuable access to this region over 100 years ago. His writings are valuable historical and scientific sources for documenting eastern Long Island over a century ago in a now changed landscape.

Part I: Reflections on Nature

Spring's Warm Breath

"Spring is the birth of the year to me. I adore her bright charms, her warm breath, and her songs. Her flower garden with all its fragrance and beauty touches me deeply." [*Journal*, February 20, 1912]

"The grass is now getting quite green, buds are bursting on the trees, catkins are hanging on hazel bushes, early spring flowers are blooming . . . and the birds singing freely gives the world a most gladsome aspect." [*Journal*, April 15, 1911]

Smiles of Sunshine

"Spring will be doubly welcome this season to all of us. What must the enjoyment of the wild creatures be after such a severe cold spell continually tormented them with hunger and cold. Spring. Spring. Could we better see and understand the rare beauty and joy of that word and its meaning. All nature feels it and starts into rapturous life and joy. Perhaps man – man with his great intelligence – is the slowest to feel the life of Spring. Civilization stunts man's instincts and robs him of nature's keenest charms and purest joy . . . Nature within nature: The little wild bird feels the throbbing of Spring's pulse within its own feathered body and pours out its gladness in song. The wild plant springs upwards at Her caress and blossoms forth Her joy in beautiful bloom. So Spring touches and coats every living thing into greater life and then caresses them all with her bright smiles of warm sunshine, her love." [*Journal*, March 10, 1912]

The Glory of Autumn

"A beautiful summer-like day, warm, soft wind and the glory of autumn on the woodlands, it has been a perfect Sunday. Have wandered out in the open most all day; collected a little, but most of the time dreamed and drank in the deliciousness of the weather. A Red-shouldered Buzzard drifted westward with a herd of demon crows trying to hurry it faster than it

seemed to care to move. Red-breasted Nuthatches bleared their weak trumpets from the leaves of dull gold. A greater Yellow-legs or two called in mellow notes as the scallop fishes disturbed them on the clam flats. All afternoon the plaintive call of a Horned Grebe came from the waters of Long Beach Bay. Toward night a Great Blue Heron labored northward over the moor to the fish traps in the Sound." [*Journal*, October 27, 1918]

King Winter

"My first record of temperature below zero two mornings in succession. All last week the temperature got to 32 degrees just once. This is winter, King Winter in his iciest crown." [*Journal*, February 11, 1912]

"Seems like I never suffered with the cold so much before in my life . . . coming home over the beaches in the moonlight with the wind increasing and the temperature down to 15 degrees . . . it was raw and cut through all clothing. Verily, winter is here to nab at us still awhile yet." [*Journal*, March 3, 1912]

The Most Beautiful Hour before Dawn

"The moon, the last quarter, came up over the dark Long Beach cedars at 3:30am. As it rose among the constellations the Heavens were most beautiful at this quiet hour before dawn. The coming dawn lit up the frozen sea with a whiter light. Gulls and crows came calling from their night's roost. Then, the sun . . . in a mighty, dark-red globe . . . larger than the fisherman's shanty as it left the horizon." [*Journal*, January 24, 1911; eeling in the early morning]

Dark Clouds

"A peculiar day. It started to rain before dawn, turned to snow, and snowed heavily for two hours at sunrise. The ground was entirely covered. This was all gone in an hour. Then, throughout the day dark clouds would swing up from the west and the wind would whistle a gale and snow came in blinding squalls. These squalls would pass in ten to twenty minutes and the sun would come forth in the clear sky, the wind would drop to a calm, and the white-crested waves on the bay smoothed to a glassy surface. Soon, more dark banks piled in from the west with more gales and snow. These came at intervals all day." [*Journal*, April 16, 1911]

Spring Time Music in Mid-winter

"In the fields that adjoin Heath's Swamp were 15 or 20 meadowlarks feeding in company with several flickers, song sparrows, and two robins. The larks were singing freely in a jolly sort of mood and were once joined by a song sparrow whose

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(Roy Latham, continued from page 3)

sweet little, half humming melody mingled with the fluting of the larks and filled the soft air of the weeping April-like day with a rare touch of spring time music in mid-winter." [Journal, January 10, 1909]

Meadowlarks Fluting Sweetly

"A clear warm day with heavy white frost in the morning . . . Meadowlarks were fluting sweetly on the frosty salt meadows in the early morning. In the dusk of early evening a red bat was flying." [Journal, November 1, 1907]

A Sad Note, Delicious to My Ears

"I heard this sad note on the Sound this afternoon near sundown, a beautiful evening, and the note was delicious to my ears. I don't know when I had heard one before." [Journal, October 1, 1918; referring to the call of a black-bellied plover]

A Day in the City

"How restful the country looks to the eyes even after but one day in the city. Nature in the open country seems gentle in its natural beauty, so quiet and blending alike to the mind and eye in its peacefulness. Especially is this manifested upon one after tramping the concrete walks and straining one's eyes upon man's great and wonderful masonic skill." [Journal, January 7, 1911; after returning from New York City]

Open Your Eyes

"A perfect day . . . a snappy brightness in the air that was a delightfulness to see and feel. A man that cannot see joy in a day like this should be totally blind for a week to get his eyes open." [Journal, May 11, 1918]

Nature's Breadth is Beyond Man's Reach

"Cloudy, steady rain in the late afternoon and evening, wind S, light to fresh, 25 to 41 degrees. So came the birth of the New Year 1911. Ushered quietly in on a calm breeze under a clear sky at dawn, which gradually gave way to frowning clouds, and lastly, tears of rain and angry bursts of wind. The dawn of the year is always flooded with hope and promise, and surely those deep in the realm of nature must stand on the summit of the loftiest hill with the greatest, finest view of life before them. The review of the preceding year only illuminates greater possibilities in nature studies – as a relaxation in our more necessary grinds of every-day labor. Like a tree is nature study. The trunk being but one lesson of study – from the trunk branch out various limbs in all direction, and from these other smaller branches and twigs, and so on down the line. So also is nature study almost endless in its variation and broadness of reach. From the stars reached only by our

eyes through billions of miles of space, to the mines in the heart of the earth is the height of nature, and her breadth is beyond man's reach." [Journal, January 1, 1911]

Along an Isolated Path

"One day in January 1953, while tramping an isolated path in Montauk, I stepped to one side to examine lichens. While I was there, two foxes came around the bend in the path. When nearly opposite me the foxes stopped and one pointed to something in the brush, sprang into the cover, and came out holding a weasel by the back of the head. As I stood up the fox dropped the small mammal and ran back down the path. In the mouth of the weasel was a deer mouse. The mouse had been eating seeds of the wild rose when captured by the weasel." [Roy Latham, 1954: Nature Notes from Orient; In: *Long Island Naturalist*, vol. 3]

Part II: Conservation

Wild Pets

"The shooting season opened for rabbits and quail. A cruel season for wildlife which to me are pets." [Journal, November 1, 1907]

Shallow and Short-sighted Minds

"Today is the conclusion of another shooting season – war with the dumb. May peace, calm, and rest be in the atmosphere and in the habitat of our wild fields, in the woods, the marshes, and the salt seas. But even while peace and comfort is reigning in the abode of feathers and fur, there is an evil current flowing, an influence as deep and powerful as it is shallow and short-sighted. For while the winged creatures of the seas are unconsciously enjoying life undisturbed, everything possible is being accomplished to repeal the measure known as the Black Duck Law. Why cannot this class of man, whose interest is benefitted by the present protective law, get his eyes cleared and his mind elevated to a purer standard? The time to protect and save the ducks is when they appear plentiful on our waters. Not wait until it is too late. In spite of all its valuable assistance to recuperate many species of wild fowl during the few years the law has been enforced, its enemies will make a greater effort than ever to erase the good results affirmed by it this season believing that they can succeed under the change of legislature. The valuable results attained from the enforcement of the law is a very useful "big stick" in our hands but, nevertheless, we feel keenly the spiteful hammering to repeal this reasonable measure." [Journal, January 10, 1911]

Making History

"Probably several thousand White-winged Scoters have been

killed in Long Beach Bay, Orient, this week. This is history-making for this species for this bay. The shooters seem to have only one idea and that to exterminate the species if that is possible." [Journal, November 19, 1932]

"Very peaceful after the close of the shooting season. The numbers of wild fowl killed in Orient waters has been many times more than ever before in my lifetime. The kill runs into thousands, mostly in Greater Scaup (Broadbill) and White-winged Scoter (Coots) with Red-breasted Mergansers (Shell-drakes) third. Although Bufflehead (Butterballs) were this season placed on the protective list many were shot and not in error. The Black Duck kill was not so great as usual, but numbers were taken unlawfully after sundown." [Journal, January 2, 1933]

Wildlife Sanctuaries

"It is my suggestion that this section of Long Beach be set aside as a permanent breeding ground for birds and allied species which habitually nest there." [Roy Latham; In: Preserve the Natural Bird Life of L.I., *Suffolk Times*, June 12, 1925]

"Mr. Latham, who is a well-known amateur naturalist, is deeply interested in the establishment of sanctuaries on Long Island for the preservation of the bird life of the Island, and is well known to the readers of the *Suffolk Times*, having written several interesting articles on this subject." [*Suffolk Times*, October 6, 1925]

Destroyers of a Cedar Forest

"They have cut a swath through the Cedars on the south side from east to west, two acres are gone of the finest and most beautiful woodland of evergreens on all of Long Island. Curses be on the souls of men that walk with blind eye-sight and shriveled ideals, they are not less a destroyer than the war-makers that are ripping the breast from the world today." [Journal, January 21, 1918; referring to a "Maritime Red Cedar Forest," a globally rare ecological community]

The Stump-puller's Murderous Work

"It is extremely saddening to me to see the complete destruction of the Cedars. The south third was entirely cut off last winter and the brush was raked and burned last week and today the stump-puller started on its murderous work which means permanency. Each stump that comes is like pulling a tooth to me." [Journal, May 2, 1918]

The Fate of Long Island's Last Stand of Native Red Spruce

"The sun-of-a-gun Wilcox and his crowd of mosquito workers have let a fire go through Gid's Island and every one of the red spruce seedlings have burned to a crisp. This is a crime, and their end is a sad one. If the fire had been an accident it would be differ-

ent, but when deliberately set on the marsh and no attempt made to check it going through the woods is a stain on the rights of life and a sin against science." [Journal, May 16, 1922]

DDT and the Osprey

"Many sprayers going with DDT." [Journal, May 31, 1946]
 "... some sprayed sprouts and cauliflowers with DDT." [Journal, September 3, 1946]

"The osprey's nest at locust grove is all grown over with woodbine. Birds must have left both nests before the eggs were hatched." [Journal, June 27, 1965] "Six osprey nests in Orient in 1968 and none hatched a chick." [Journal, November 5, 1968]

Eelgrass and Mosquito Oils

"No eels in the bay because of no eelgrass (*Zostera marina*)." [Journal, January 3, 1933]

"Most pools are ruined in Orient for bug collecting because of mosquito oils." [Journal, May 24, 1942]

Raising the Devil at Moores Woods

"Greenport Village is raising the devil at Moores Woods, making roads and building houses and other buildings in there – I'm afraid they will ruin this, the finest woodland on the North Fork of Long Island and the nearest thing to a primeval forest we have!" [Journal, March 26, 1939]

The Cursed Land Boom

"One regrets the thought that the few small wild spots left in Orient may soon be swallowed in the cursed land boom which is now racing over Long Island. May the bubble burst before it takes everything wild from us." [Journal, January 2, 1926]

A Fine Old Swamp

"Mouser is filling in the fine old swamp at the Jack Beebe farm at the point – too bad!" [Journal, December 6, 1941]

Coming to Blows

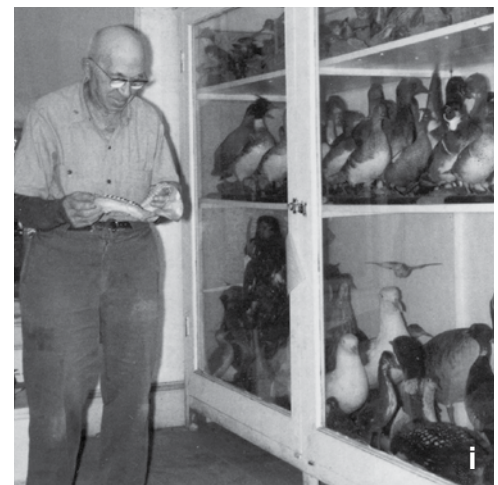
"I appreciate your feeling in regard to the killing of the Blue-winged Teals. It was a great disappointment to me that these birds were destroyed, as they were not killed by me. They were shot by a clam-digger who had run up the creek in his boat. It was a regret that I could not punish him by law. As it was we came to blows over the dead Teals and I took the birds from him by force. This party was a stranger and has never returned here, for very good reason." [Roy Latham, 1924; In: *The Auk*, vol. 41]

(Roy Latham, continued from page 5)



Appendix. Roy Latham Photo Gallery.

a. Roy Latham in 1912, from a portrait originally belonging to Stewart H. Burnham; photo courtesy of Robert Dirig. b. Roy Latham on Gardiners Island, 1918. c. Roy Latham, 1906. d, e, f, g. Roy Latham with wife Lulah Mae Vail Latham and daughters Rosemary, Lydia, and Diana. g. Roy Latham with insect net among stunted pitch pines (*Pinus rigida*) and bear oak (*Quercus illicifolia*) probably in the Dwarf Pine Plains in Westhampton, Suffolk Co. h & i. Roy Latham with some of his collections shortly before donating them in 1969 to the New York State Museum, Albany. i. Roy Latham holding a shark's jaw among some of his bird collections. Special thanks to Sarah Leety-Stevens for researching and digitizing some of the photos.





Save the Date:
April 12 & April 13, 2024

Brookhaven National Lab



Long Island Natural History Conference

Brookhaven National Lab

LIBS member **Bob McGrath** will present a talk on some of Long Island's greatest naturalists.

Other topics include:

- sea turtles, eastern box turtle,
Atlantic menhaden, fireflies
- “Threats to Our Maritime Beech Forest”
- “From the Wrack Line to the Twilight Zone: A Tour of New York's Less-famous Marine Creatures”
- “Dynamics Within Small Mammal Communities on LI”
- “Impacts of feral cats and red foxes on threatened shorebirds during a mange epidemic at Fire Island”

For more information and to register go online to:

<https://seatuck.org/2023-li-natural-history-conference/>



(Field Trips, continued from page 8)

June 15, 2024 (Saturday) 10am to 2pm

Cunningham Park, Southeast Preserve, Queens Co.

Trip Leader: Zihao Wang

email: zihaoWAN@buffalo.edu; cell phone: 347-498-6050

Joint field trip with the Torrey Botanical Society

Meeting location: Northeastern corner of the parking lot in Cunningham Park, south of the intersection between Union Turnpike and 196th Pl. (GPS Coordinates: 40.730898, -73.773091)

Description: We will explore the southeastern section of Cunningham Park, where the forest is the most intact and contains interesting species such as *Brachyelytrum erectum* (long-awned wood grass), *Lilium canadense* (Canada lily), and *Agrimonia gryposepala* (tall hairy agrimony). The numerous vernal pools in the park will also be habitats for potentially interesting mosses and liverworts.

Transit Directions: By public transportation: from the last stop of 7 Train at Main Street, take the Jamaica-Merrick-Blvd-bound Q17 bus and get off at 188 St/Union Tpke and walk east for 10 minutes. By car: take exit 20A from Grand Central Parkway.

October 12, 2024 (Saturday) 11am

Big Reed, Montauk, Suffolk Co.

Trip Leader: Vicki Bustamante

Joint field trip with the North Shore Land Alliance

The Big Reed area is the jewel of the 1,100 acre Montauk County Park and host to many rare and unusual plants. The hike will pass through some vulnerable ecological communities including a red maple-blackgum swamp, coastal oak-hickory forest and a coastal oak-beech forest. We will overlook Big Reed pond, a pristine 57 acre coastal plain pond without a house, building or road in sight. The area was the last ancestral home of the Montaukett tribe. We will be on the lookout for interesting plants and birds along the way.

Register with Vicki Bustamante (vickibustamante@gmail.com) and more details about the trip and directions to the meeting place will be sent.

FIELD TRIPS

April 20, 2024 (Saturday) 11am

*Spring Stroll through Shu Swamp
Shu Swamp Preserve (Charles T. Church Nature Preserve),
Mill Neck, Nassau Co.*

Trip Leader: Virginia Dankel
Joint field trip with the North Shore Land Alliance

Enjoy Shu Swamp's natural beauty through an exploration of its spring ephemerals, a history of the property, and a reading or two. Space is limited, so register early with Bob Chapman (chappy516@aol.com) and more details about the trip and directions to the meeting place will be sent.

June 1, 2024 (Saturday) 10am

Muttontown Preserve North, Nassau Co.

Trip Leader: Al Lindberg
email: ajlindberg@optonline.net; cell phone: 516-317-8837

Muttontown Preserve has a rich geological history, and its knob-and-kettle topography influences the Preserve's varied ecological communities. At the center of the northern section, the "Seven

Ponds Woods" is the last remnant of pro-glacial "Lake Muttontown" which was locked between the Harbor Hill Terminal Moraine and the retreating Harbor Hill ice sheet. Once part of the H.I. Hudson Estate, this area has been recognized as a significant wetlands since 1916. While exploring the woodlands and fields, we will view Muttontown Preserve's persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) population, and look for Hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) and other botanical finds along the way.

Email Al Lindberg or call to register. We will meet at The Bill Paterson Nature Center. Dress for the weather, waterproof footwear may be useful. Hand lens, camera, and binoculars are recommended. Bring a drink and snack or sandwich if desired.

Directions: The Bill Paterson Nature Center is located at the end of Muttontown Lane south of Northern Blvd. (Rte. 25A) in East Norwich. From the Long Island Expressway take Exit 41 North (Rte. 106) to East Norwich, make a left on Northern Blvd (25A) for one block to Muttontown Lane. Turn left (south), the road ends at the Nature Center Parking Area.

(Field Trips, continued on page 7)