

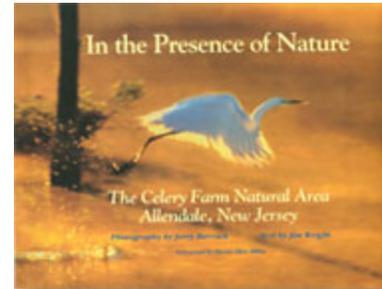
# In The Presence Of Nature

The Celery Farm Natural Area  
Allendale, New Jersey

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## From Chapter 3, "A Walk Around the Refuge"

*"The witness of the eye alone would persuade us  
that nature had achieved the whole result."*

—Frederick Law Olmsted on parks and wetlands

The man who planned Manhattan's Central Park and Boston's Fenway, Frederick Law Olmsted, knew a thing or two about incorporating marshes into his designs--out of pure necessity. By the time town fathers understood that open space was crucial to their cities' health, the remaining land was usually swamp.

Similar circumstances explain the Celery Farm Natural Area. The property has always been too swampy to build much on. The refuge, established on bog-like celery fields more than two decades ago, looks to the casual observer that it has always been thus: a naturally formed collection of ponds and marshes with ancient paths. In fact, it took a lot of work—primarily by volunteers—to develop those trails and shape the old farmland into a wildlife sanctuary. If one of America's major environmental challenges of the last century was to save dwindling open space, then the challenge for this century could well be to restore these lands to a more pristine state. The Celery Farm can help show the way.

The biggest expanse of water is Lake Appert, the size of a few football fields. Circling the lake is a flat path, a country mile long. Two large observation platforms, a smaller stand, and benches provide places for people to sit and watch the wildlife. Side trails lead to two smaller ponds, Heron Pond to the east and Phair's Pond to the north.

What you'll see depends on when you go.

In winter, the refuge is sleeping, recharging its batteries. On a cold windless morning, with the ground crunching underneath, a visit to the Celery Farm resembles walking through a sepia black-and-white photograph.

Late April and early May offer the best times for viewing nature. The weather is warming, the migrating birds are arriving in force, and, since most trees don't have their leaves yet, the wildlife is easier to spot. This is when such rare sights as a mink, a red fox, a prothonotary warbler, and a cerulean warbler have appeared.

Summer is the season of herons, egrets, and swallows. The flowers and plants are at full throttle, and so are the frogs and turtles.

In autumn, the attractions are changing foliage and the arrivals of the migratory birds, including ducks of every feather.