

Footnotes on nature

298 from Elly Connelly

1981 had good, bad points for

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It was a year of discovery, and a year of loss; and like every other year it had moments of joy and moments of sadness. From a Staten Island naturalist's point of view, here are just a few highlights of 1981:

The rediscovery of the Willowbrook Woods. A favorite haunt of early Island naturalists, the Willowbrook Woods have not been explored much in the past 40 years, because they are the property of the state and visitors have been discouraged. This year, however, with the assistance of some local officials, exploratory field work was started, to catalogue the area's plants — and the results were astounding. Groves of sugar maples, large stands of wild ginger and the Island's only wild leeks, bladder-

brations at the Staten Island Institute. New exhibits (on geology and breeding birds) have transformed the first floor of the museum on Stuyvesant Pl. in St. George. A centennial wildflower garden at High Rock Park has reintroduced many native plants which have been extirpated from the rest of the Island. The Centennial Trail at the William T. David Wildlife Refuge has opened a new and interesting section of that park to hikers and strollers. The 12-part lecture series sponsored by the Nature Section is exploring every facet of local natural history. The Study Group series on Staten Island naturalists has just begun. And two publications, the **Flora** and the **Breeding Birds**, are the definitive works in these fields and the culmination of years of work.

The confirmation of two new breeding birds. Both the Glossy Ibis and the Great Egret were confirmed as nesting on Pralls Island in May. Each had been suspected of breeding for the past few years, but it was not definite until 1981, when Scotty Jenkins and Bernie Paul took photographs showing nests, eggs and nestlings.

The addition of two new species for the Staten Island bird list. When Al Peterson reported the arrival of three Black-necked Stilts at the Goethals Bridge Pond last May, he became the first person ever to see this southern species on Staten Island. Little did he realize that before the year was out he would add still another "first" — the

pected, but when that man is as outstanding as Mr. Cleaves, and as great a part of the natural history scene, it is an occasion of sadness nevertheless. Still, he had a long and fruitful life; he made his living doing the thing he loved best; and he made contributions to science and to photography which will be appreciated for generations to come.

The beginning of the Greenbelt study. At last it has gotten under way, the long-proposed and much-debated study of our most valuable open land. What the Greenbelt is, which pieces of land should be included in it, what their geologic and botanical features are, which animals feed and breed there — all this and more is being studied now, and the results will be compiled into a comprehensive report which will be used as the basis for future decisions. We hope the city planners will be as impressed as we are when the Greenbelt's unique features are fully described. The heart of Staten Island is at stake.

So there it is, a sampling of 1981's highs and lows — neither the best of times, not the worst, but a year to remember.



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nuts and hop hornbeam tree, were the major finds. Local botanists look forward to additional discoveries there are more of the territory is explored. We were happy to be part of this "rediscovery"