

Swamps

in the

Springtime

BY BILL FAVER

We often think of the springtime changes along our beaches and roadsides as flowers begin to bloom and birds begin migrating northward or begin their nesting activities. There are changes taking place in our freshwater marshes and swamps which are equally as spectacular.

Like the beaches, swamps are dynamic areas; they are never static and are always changing. Decaying plant and animal matter settles to the ground and builds up the rich soil. Winter rains add to the water levels and help bring about the changes. Aquatic plants and animals share the swamp with those living on the adjoining land with only an inch or two of elevation separating the two habitats.

Freshwater marshes become swamps over the years as the buildup slows the moving water and brings about more vegetation. Eventually alders, maples, cypress, cedars, bays, and other trees and shrubs become a part of the marsh-swamp scene. Unique plants find a specialized home in the swamps and fill a niche unlike that in other places.

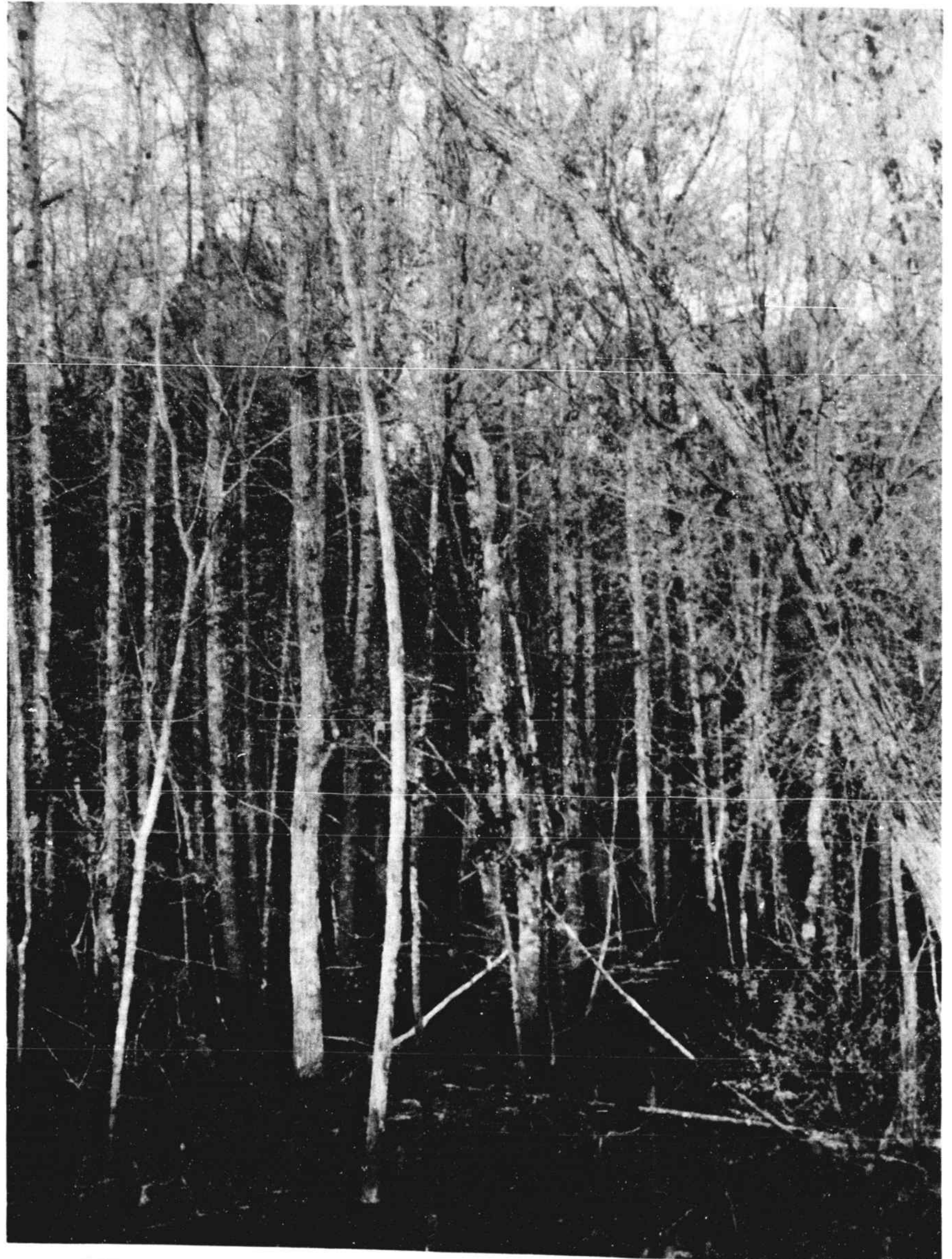
We in Brunswick County are fortunate to have the Green Swamp in our area. We also have highways which traverse other swamps and bays and give us a look at a swamp ecosystem.

Depending upon the degree of succession in a particular swamp we can expect to find a wide variety of bird species. If there are open shallow water areas, we'll find herons, egrets, and ibis. A few ducks may join them at some time during the year.

Usually there are owls, hawks, and ospreys if there are good tall nesting trees available. Woodpeckers share the swamp with wrens, sparrows, swallows, and some of the sandpipers.

Probably the most exciting group of birds in the swamps are the warblers — some who are year-round and some who are migratory. These colorful birds are small and secretive, but stalking them is worthwhile when you encounter one or two of the rarer species. We can also expect to find the buntings during the summer months.

Take some time this spring to investigate the swamps. You don't need to don waders and mosquito netting or even wear old clothes. Just stop along a roadside and use some binoculars and look for the budding maple trees and the new growth on the cypresses. See the unique plants and the dark water. And, if you're lucky, you may catch a glimpse of some of the birds who call our freshwater marshes and swamps their homes.



Budding maples give some color to the springtime changes in our swamps.

PHOTO BY BILL FAVER