

**Description:** Straddling the West Virginia-Maryland border is Cranesville Swamp, a peatland bog formed during the most recent ice age 15,000 years ago. While most northern species retreated as the climate in the region warmed, a small area of northern flora survived due to the cooler microclimate in this area.

The Nature Conservancy has preserved this unique area, which is the southernmost stand or occurrence of tamarack in North America. The vegetation is typically Canadian and the preserve boasts 19 distinct plant communities, including sphagnum moss, cranberries and insectivorous round-leaved sundews.

**Viewing Information:** The Nature Conservancy maintains four separate trails that provide access to most parts of the preserve. Many mammals inhabit the area, and hikers are likely to see white-tailed deer and possibly a black bear. Wild turkeys inhabit the preserve.

The end of May is best for seeing warblers, returning from points south to breed and summer at Cranesville. Hike one of the many trails to see and hear red-eyed vireos back from the Amazon basin in South America, golden-winged warblers back from Guatemala, yellow warblers from Mexico, and hooded warblers from Central America. Northern saw-whet owls also nest here.

**Directions:** From Terra Alta, travel north almost 7 miles on County Road 42 to County Road 47 (also known as White Oak Road) all the way to Faith United Methodist church. This church will



*Cranesville Swamp's beauty lies in its lush landscape made up of beakrush, larch and cinnamon fern. Its conifer swamp forest is also home to several species of migratory songbirds, such as the hooded warbler below.*



*Northern saw-whet owl*

be on the left as you travel north. At the church, turn right (east) on County Road 49 and follow for one mile down to a gravel road that intersects from the left (north). Turn left (north) on the this gravel road and continue about 200 yards to a large electric power line right-of-way and the Preserve drive-

way/parking lot will diverge to the right.

**Ownership:** The Nature Conservancy, West Virginia Chapter (304) 345-4350

**Size:** 1,000 acres

**Closest Town:** Terra Alta

*Excerpt from West Virginia Wildlife Viewing Guide by Mark Damian Duda. For a free copy (plus shipping and handling), call 304-637-0245.*



*Hooded warbler*

Bob and Peter Wood

## Did You Know?

The permanent cool, wet setting of Cranesville Swamp is ripe for the formation of peat. Peat is made of compacted sphagnum moss, which over thousands of years grows into thick, damp, mats of vegetation. The breakdown of sphagnum moss creates an acidic, nutrient poor environment for other plants, called a bog. While few trees can grow in the bog, plants that can tolerate the conditions—like cranberry, sedge, and sundew (a carnivorous plant) – thrive in these open areas. In addition, the peat itself can have a chilling effect—studies at Cranesville have shown the peat to be 10 degrees cooler a foot below the surface.

--The Nature Conservancy



*Sphagnum moss*

Elizabeth Byers

Elizabeth Byers

Rob Tallman