



*Fresh tidal marsh; arrow arum, foreground; cattail, background*

Photograph by William Sipple

## Exploring Maryland's freshwater tidal wetlands

by William Sipple

My first experience with wetlands came at the age of seven in Grassy Sounds, New Jersey, where my family lived in a small house over a salt marsh. In the evening, I leisurely passed time catching slippery eels off the elevated walkway leading to our house; during the day, my older brother Gordon and I frequently collected milk bottles in the marsh. I gave most of the eels away, but each milk bottle meant a penny and the return of ten bought a few fishhooks.

Little did I realize that 26 years later I would be managing salt marshes in Maryland and digging for old bottles as a hobby on weekends. My family stayed only two years in the house on stilts. Tropical storms meant evacuation to the mainland and our return meant finding seaweed almost in our kitchen. Consequently, most of my boyhood

days were spent at Runnemede, a rural town in southern New Jersey where, at the age of eleven, I discovered freshwater marshes. Almost daily I rambled along the floodplain leading to a small man-made pond supporting an interesting cattail marsh. A few years later I discovered a bigger, more interesting natural history paradise--the nearby freshwater tidal marshes of Big Timber Creek.

I spent many of my teen-age years at the creek trapping muskrats, hunting black ducks, fishing for carp, camping, and just plain enjoying nature. For the next ten years or so, I traversed numerous outdoor landscapes in New Jersey in pursuit of natural history experiences. In retrospect, I suppose I was drawn to the wetland sites by the interesting plants and animals, and to some extent, by the excitement of just being near water. At the time, however, the