Spotlight on Staten Island: Wildlife Replaces Landfill at Fresh Kills Park

By Michelle Kaminsky · Updated: December 13, 2021

Video Tour

Critique from Staten Island, chances are you've never been to the borough, except to take the ferry down to see the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, only to turn around and head back to Manhattan. Or you've driven through on your way to the Jersey Shore, one third of Staten Island (which is bigger than Manhattan) just across the Hudson River is devoted to park land. A great chunk of that, Gateway National Park, was saved as green space by the Environmental Protection Agency. Fresh Kills, by the by, was, Mark Murphy, a part of New York City Parks.

Below, Mark explains how Fresh Kills, once the site of the largest landfill in the world, is now teeming with wildlife, including birds, bobcats, bugs and iconic American birds of prey. And no, there's a lot about Staten Island along the way.

Photographs by Valerie Rosen for Gardenista.

A red tailed hawk (alright) sits on a cage, a trick of Mariphasia's photo.

Fresh Kills covers 2,200 acres, big of which is wetland that is named after the Staten Island naturalist William T Davis. "It's reclaimed land that Robert Moses, the four-parks commissioner, was trying to dump on, and it was ultimately turned into a park," says Mark, a Staten Island native who lives in Fort Hill, "Davis was a naturalist who was ahead of his time." Moses did succeed in "filling in" what is now North Mound, originally intended to accept household waste for three years to make the land more solid for development. Seven years later, the landfill was closed, and Davis, who had been fighting the development, was vindicated (some that so he fighter prize) is rather than the Statue of Liberty. It marks Phase One of the development of the whole site into what Mark predicts will be New York's biggest park.

Above, The Pit Trees has an observation deck that overlooks Main Creek and the William T Davis Wildlife Refuge.

Landscape architects Hanna Cornell Fields Operations were the competition to reconfigure the site; it is slowly being developed and opened to the public in stages. The periphery is open to all. "It's a fantastic amenity for the communities of the southeast shore of Staten Island," Mark says; while North Mound Phase Two, adjacent to the wildlife refuge, is a go now she that is accessible through prior covers.

Above, The Fresh Kills landscape is mostly planted with native grasses, although invasive Phragmites, shown here, is ever present. Along with Chinese bush clover and wingseed, "we manage it as best we can," says Mark.

"One percent of the entire native grassland in the northeast United States is in Staten Island," says Mark. "So native grasslands, a city of animals and life is under the grass, and they all fend off of such either in this great ecosystem." Tree roots don't get very far in the geotextile that Davis part of the capping of the landfill, so they do not become big.

Above, Salt of pine pitch on the shore, including red fox.

"We have no problem encouraging any type of wildlife to come into Fresh Kills, whether it's a plant or an animal," says Mark. "The fauna and flora out there are incredibly robust."

Above, the American kestrel nesting at home in New York City.

"It's interesting because you see some some significant evolutionary changes in the woods that rank nodes, and birds nests, during the mating season to compensate for the sound of cars and and background noise," observes Mark. "They improvise, and they are becoming stronger out there."

Above, One of several osprey nests around the park.

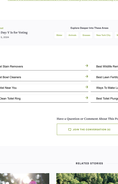
"We're seeing the edge wave come back, grandsnipper specimen bob whites are making an impressive," says Mark. "We also have other wildlife that is not problematic but 'interesting': we have bobcats, we have coyotes, we have foxes, we have a lot of rodents, and we have had bats and big, which are more grounded. That's habitat we are overlapping, so we're not seeing the bite-this-the-turkey flock. There are too many of both, but it will fall back into balance, and we don't have to be a 'huge' population of a specific breed. A coyote, we have been spotted at Fresh Kills, so the bobcat might try to eat its way to change. There are wild turkeys all over Staten Island.

Above, A flare station, where gases from decomposing waste are turned into synthetic methane, which is sold to the national grid.

The "farm in place" engineering at Fresh Kills ensures that the gases and toxins captured from decomposing waste are processed at a flare station, via an underground network of pipes. Methane is sold to the grid, and the remaining carbon dioxide is "sequestered" in the site's 4.5 million cu. Class and has been spread over that at varying depths, while over the whole site there is a guaranteed top-two feet of "parks-residential grade soil."

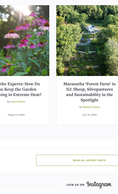
Above, Maritime Terrace: Graffiti (actually, Fresh Kills has total cradle that wind through the landscape of wetlands, "non-sentimental 'not-parade-path' by-nature.

Above, One way to see Phase One of the 30-year transition is to sign up for a kayaking tour, along segregated conservation waterways.



Above, All of the trees at Fresh Kills are Manhattan Pines, says Mark. It is essentially a grassland, and saplings are either the grass is not even a stem.

"This landscape has to be in a grassland," says Mark. "It is not a necessity to have new canopy. We are not trying to do that. We are trying to do a grassland." Mark explains that the birds that they would forage in these forests, but they called this the "Place of the Bad Woods." The woods weren't good because they were growing out of wetlands." He points out that grassland is the most efficient at carbon sequestration, so it's a big reason it doesn't give the surface up to the atmosphere in the way that a tree does when it is chopped down.



Above, Salmon stage direct stormwater toward the creeks and waterways, Kristen is a very wet scenario.

Keeping the land in place, covering the landfills, is clearly a priority. "The entire site has been capped with a geomembrane, and then we have 4 feet of soil on top of that, so we have created two gardens walls and maps, that are erosion-resistant" says. This helps the water that comes off the mounds go into the drainage ponds."

Above, The off-grid, absurdly attractive bird station, with its clearly a priority. "It's exactly screaming what's in the foreground.

The scope of Fresh Kills goes beyond the that of more traditional city parks. "It's an entirely different sort of mindset than we have on here, which is still about getting this built, and making this inevitable. Fresh Kills is an entirely new park in New York City, and the inevitability of that is what I want to convey."

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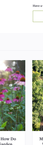

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