

## The Color ORANGE and the Atlantic White Cedar Swamp

I was just about to plug into my iPod and begin my 30 minutes on the treadmill when Jack, a friend from work, hopped on the treadmill next to me. "Hey Jack, I haven't seen you here in a while. Getting ready for the Holidays?"

"Sure am. I'm planning some major holiday dining", he laughed. "I like to do my walking outside, but this weather is forcing me to plan B. Speaking of walks outside, the other day I was walking in the Town Cedar Swamp and I saw the strangest thing—a crude ladder hammered into the side of one of the cedars. It went up about 15 ft to a small platform. Didn't look like the work of some kids. Thought you might know what it is."

I knew exactly what it was. "Yea, I've seen a couple of those too on town property. What you saw is a deer stand."

"What do you mean? Hunting!? Hunting's allowed on town land? I could've been shot...or pierced by an arrow. And right before the holidays!" he cried. Jack could find drama in the most mundane things.

"Well, lucky for us all you weren't," I said with a smile. "You survived shotgun deer season that just ended here on the Cape; and bow season that ended in late November. Right now until the end of December, it's hunting season for primitive firearms, like muskets, only. I don't think there are many hunters out there shouldering muskets."

Jack picked up his pace. "So hunting on town property is legal? There's so many homes built around town land."

"It sure is legal. But there are rules, like hunters can't fire a weapon within 500 feet from a home or some such thing. And most know what they're doing and respect the lands on which they're hunting. Still you should wear your orange on town property during hunting season," I cautioned. "And keep Molly on her leash—hate to see either of you grazed by a musket ball."

"So that tree platform I saw was the work of a hunter?"

"Quite surely. Usually tree stands are not a problem for the tree. But I've seen one where the hunter stripped off most all of the branches on an Atlantic White Cedar in the Town's Cedar Swamp which is of concern."

"What's the big deal about an Atlantic White Cedar?" he questioned.

Another teachable moment right here at the gym (they seem to be everywhere lately). "Well, the Atlantic White Cedar is an important native evergreen for starters. I recently read that the species is considered one of Special Concern in Maine, it's now RARE in New York state and it's been extirpated in Pennsylvania. Seems cedar forests are disappearing in our own time where they were once plentiful. These wetland forests are only found in the isolated hollows within a 100-mile wide strip along the US Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Truth be told, Atlantic White Cedar swamps are a *globally* threatened ecosystem, so we shouldn't take them for granted. There's the one in the Cape Cod National Seashore in Wellfleet with a boardwalk, so you can get a first hand view of their unique characteristics. And we have one right here in Chatham too!!, albeit smaller and no boardwalk...."

Jack seemed to be listening, so I continued, “Atlantic white cedars only colonize open boggy areas because its seedling do not grow well in the shade. These cedars grow straight and tall, reaching a height of 70-80ft after 75-100 years. They serve as important food source for deer during the winter months. Atlantic white cedar swamps are home to a variety of plants and wildlife, some rare, like the rare orchid - the heartleaf twayblade which is only found in Massachusetts in one swamp on the Cape. These forested swamps also act to buffer the surrounding land from flooding by holding large amounts of rainwater and spring runoff. “

I noticed Jack was jogging at a good clip now. I was still walking at a comfortable pace so had enough breath to continue, “This globally rare habitat was once abundant, but was largely destroyed, along with the rest of Cape Cod's native forests, for lumber, fuel, and through the conversion of land to agriculture. As I mentioned, there is one at Marconi Station in Wellfleet which is the largest cedar swamp remaining on the Cape (11.9 acres). Unfortunately, there are few wetlands suitable for cedar colonization left on highly developed Cape Cod, and the current number and distribution of seed-producing cedars is low. Remaining swamps are threatened by development, which may fill the wetland, or channel excessive runoff directly into a swamp, thereby drowning the cedars.”

Jack was running now. To get away from me I wondered? No, but I figured I better conclude and focus on my workout. “So Jack, we can hope that hunters will treat our last open spaces where hunting is permitted with care.”

Jack was riveted on the TV screen in front of him, and didn't notice when I popped in my earbuds. I wondered when he had tuned me out. Just 10 more minutes on the treadmill—the time was going fast.

This article is provided by the Chatham Conservation Commission for informational purposes. For more information on cedar swamps, contact the Chatham Conservation office at 508.945.5164 or check out these websites, to name a few:

<http://www.stockton.edu/~wcedars/articles/treepInt.html> AND

<http://www.nps.gov/caco/planyourvisit/upload/AtlanticWhiteCedarcolor.pdf> AND

[http://www.whrc.org/capecod/critical\\_habitats/Cedar\\_Swamps.htm](http://www.whrc.org/capecod/critical_habitats/Cedar_Swamps.htm)