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Exploring The Cypress Swamp

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If you ever thought you would like to explore one of Delmarva's cypress swamps, now is an excellent time of year to do it. There is a lot to see as the spring foliage emerges with each warmer day. And most importantly, the biting bugs have not yet staked their claim on us, the intruders to their kingdom.

Soon a leafy canopy will block the sunlight like stained glass. The exotic little blue herons, cormorants, and Canada geese will be seen playing in the trees and along the water.

Adkins Mill Park in Powellville, Maryland happens to be on one of the roads I like to take on my way to church on Sundays. So, I have made it a regular stop. The mill pond is a popular fresh water fishing hole. Some time ago a 4-H club created a lovely little sitting garden just outside the woods. They planted perennial flowers and put up bird houses.

But the secluded boardwalk through the swamp is what is most special. It is one of my favorite places. Apparently it used to go further into the forest there. Now it ends with a simple single board across the end. The walkway seems to have been swallowed up by the mud. The cypress knees look like little brown ghosts who seem to have taken a stand against civilization trespassing in their sacred mystic bog. Very quietly they are dismantling the human incursion.

The swamp itself is fascinating this time of year. Water plants unfold, magically emerging from the algae and mud. Soon a native member of the lotus family, the spatterdock, will have blossoms that look like yellow door knobs on green sticks. Small lizards called skinks dart along the boardwalk. A large black snake suns himself on a wood duck box. If birds have tried to nest there he has probably already made a meal of their eggs.

It is almost impossible to catch a glimpse of the many frogs that live here but you can hear them all around. The turtles are equally shy. But I am able to get just close enough to get pictures. They too enjoy sunning themselves. They seem quite slovenly, content to spend their time wallowing in the muck. They don't seem to have any personal boundaries either. They can be seen climbing all over each other to catch a few rays. They are adorable in their complete disregard for propriety.

And the turtles, of course...

All the turtles are free

As turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be.

- Dr. Suess

The cypress swamp is truly a place of beauty and mystery. It is not a forgiving place. You wouldn't want to get lost there. It is one of the few places which really cannot be tamed or cultivated. Soon the mosquitoes will assert their authority and make it unbearable for human visitation no matter how lush and cool the greenery appears. With or without bug spray most people will want to wait to return till the first hard frost comes next fall. Who knows what those mysterious cypress knees will accomplish in the mean time?