

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Olentangy Olga helps honor World Wetlands Day

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Move over Punxsutawney Phil, here comes Olentangy Olga.

Olentangy Olga, a muskrat that lives in Ohio State's Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, was the belle of the ball Saturday morning at the park's first World Wetlands Day celebration.

Wetland Research Park Director William Mitsch said he came up with the idea of honoring Olentangy Olga to celebrate World Wetlands Day as an alternative to Groundhog Day, because both holidays fall on Feb. 2. Mitsch said he is dissatisfied with the amount of awareness for World Wetlands Day in the U.S. "I celebrated last year in Botswana, Africa," he said. "The entire Botswana press covered it. I go back to the U.S., and they don't even have a clue."

Unfortunately, Olga was in a shy mood and guests of the park did not get a chance to see her Saturday morning.

According to the park's Web site, the swamp is located on an approximately 30-acre site on West Dodridge Street, with two pumps bringing continuously flowing water in from the Olentangy River. The water then flows back into the river by the natural force of gravity. Wetlands are shrinking in size and number across the country, and Ohio alone has lost 90 percent of its wetlands, according to the Web site.

OSU President E. Gordon Gee was also on hand to celebrate World Wetlands Day. Gee fondly reminisced about walking through the swamp in his "hip waders" when the park opened 15 years ago. Gee said he understands the importance of wetlands and said "the research we are doing here brings me great pride."

Matt Ripley, a freshman in environmental science and zoology and also the park's site manager, said all the animals who live there came to the park on their own, and none of them are kept in cages.

"It's a good sign when a muskrat decides to live here, it shows the environment is stable enough to support a large animal like that," Ripley said. For those interested in learning about wetlands, the Wetland Research Park offers a number of short courses open to any OSU student. Information about these courses can be



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Ohio State president Gordon Gee helps unveil a picture of the muskrat, Olentangy Olga, OSU's version of Punxsutawney Phil at the Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park Saturday morning to commemorate Groundhog Day and World Wetlands Day.

found at swamp.osu.edu.

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