

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS ABOUT PATUXENT
Airplane Landing at Patuxent
by Matthew C. Perry

Although Patuxent has never had an airplane landing strip, in 1938 a plane landed in what is now the Endangered Species Research area of the Central Tract. The pilot was Mr. John Ball, a Works Progress Administration supervisor, and he was accompanied by his wife. He landed his private plane on a grassy area to inspect progress of work being conducted in the area by government workers.

Mr. Holliday Obrecht, who was the Patuxent refuge biologist for many years, told me that the aircraft was a "Rearwin Sportster." It was built by Rearwin Aircraft and Engines of Kansas City, KS. It was a two-seat cabin monoplane built between 1935 and 1938. There were only about 330 built, so the aircraft would be quite valuable today. Back in the 1930's, most aircraft were tail draggers (2 main wheels in the front, with a steerable tailwheel). They were designed to utilize grass airfields as those were the most common of that era. The plane had relatively large main wheel tires, which was great for handling on unimproved air strips.

A photo taken by Dr. Leland Morley, the Superintendent of Patuxent Research Refuge, shows Mr. and Mrs. Ball shortly after landing and being greeted by Dr. Morley's two sons. One of Dr. Morley's sons became a veterinarian like his father and was well-known in the Laurel area for many years. The photo shows the historic Dr. Charles Duvall home in the background, which shortly after was destroyed and replaced with the much smaller home used by endangered species caretakers, including Robert Doyle at present.



Mr. and Mrs. John Ball arriving by plane at Patuxent and greeted by sons of Dr. Morley.

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