

The Amazon Flooded Marsh

Whitewater várzea,
side channels of the
seasonal Amazon flood,
receive the nutritious silt
of distant Andean outwash.

The equatorial sun,
hot on our backs,
powers a solar factory
of *Echinochloa* grasses.
Rooted twenty feet below us
in the flooded marsh,
they bob in our wake,
spiky heads alive
with feathered seed eaters.
Horned screamers,
black wings spread,
alight and disappear
in the floating grass mats.

Sunlight also powers
graceful rice plants
and blue-flowered
water hyacinth.
The fabled giant water lily
Victoria amazonica
spreads its six foot
solar collector leaves,
pumps air
to oxygen-starved roots
twenty feet below
in the rich Amazonian mud.