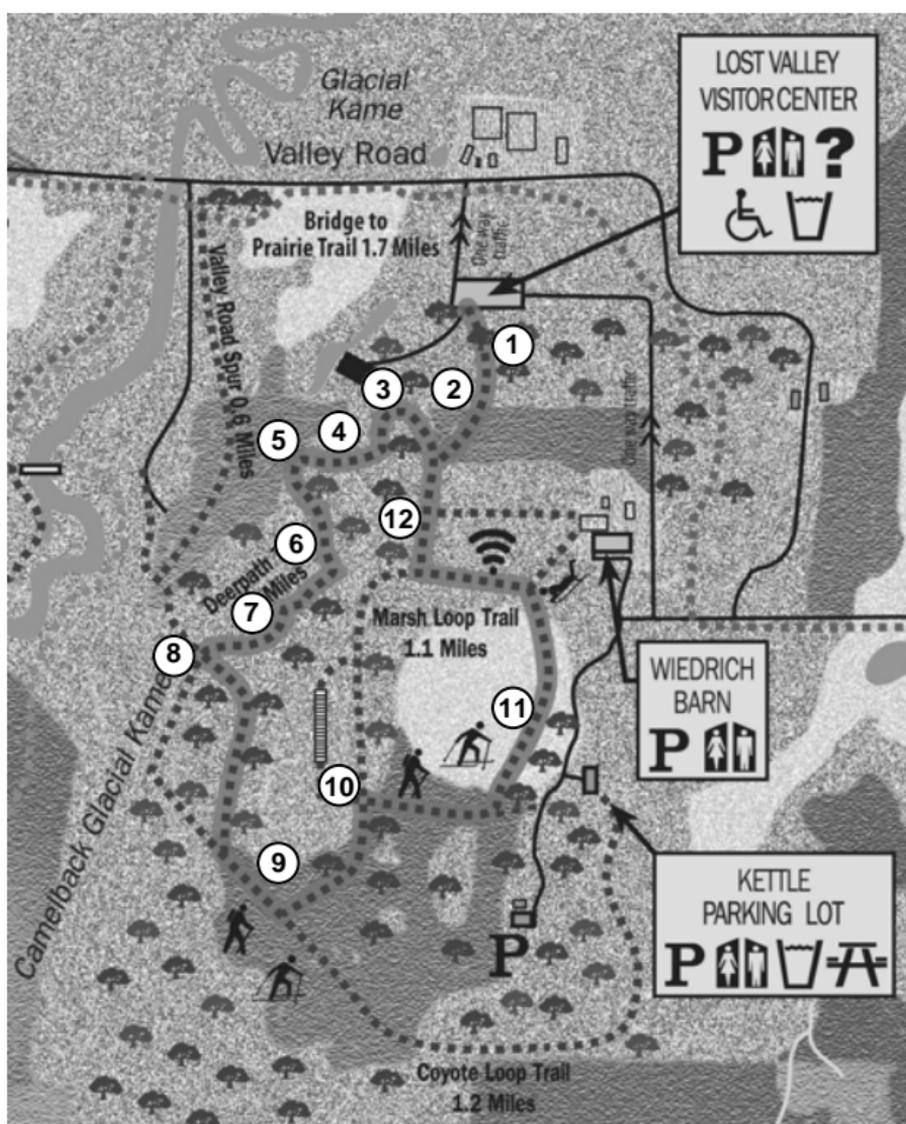


Glacial Park Interpretive Trail: Wildlife



A publication of the
McHenry County
Conservation District
www.MCCDistrict.org





Please follow these trail rules:

- Stay on designated trails.
- Respect all plants and wildlife.
- Leave all natural items where you found them.
- Pets must be kept on a leash.
- Pick up after your pet.
- Use the trash cans and recycling bins at the trail heads and picnic areas.
- Be courteous to fellow park users.



To see bears, mountain lions, elk, wolves, and bobcats here would be an awesome sight. In fact, you may have been able to see all of these animals in McHenry County had you been here 200 years ago. Unfortunately, they are now considered extirpated, no longer found here. A combination of over-hunting and habitat loss drove them away. We do still have the opportunity to see deer, opossum, bluebirds, turtles, and coyotes, among many others. By educating yourself, and educating others, you can increase your understanding and appreciation for these animals and hopefully, that way, they will continue to thrive in McHenry County.

The Edge



You are now walking along a specific type of wildlife habitat known as the edge. This junction of both woodland and grassland offers exactly what some animals need. One such animal is the eastern bluebird. The bluebird nests in tree cavities, or hollowed out areas of mature trees. But rather than choose cavities in the interior of the woods, bluebirds prefer to be at the tree line with wide open areas in which to hunt for insects. Based on their preference for this specific combination of two habitats, bluebirds have been particularly susceptible to habitat loss and in the 1980s were on the Audubon Society's blue list for species in trouble. Thanks to land preservation and restoration efforts, decreased use of pesticides, and nesting box programs, bluebirds are again a common sight in our area.



As you walk through the park, look for man-made nesting boxes placed in strategic areas. You will see boxes made for screech owls, bats, wood ducks, and bluebirds. Can you tell which is which?

Wildlife in the Trees



You are now in an oak-hickory savanna. This woodland provides a great habitat for many animals. Many types of berries, nuts and seeds are available for animals. The trees also provide protection from weather and predators.

Even dead trees provide excellent habitat and a hollow log or standing snag provides the proper housing for animals like squirrels, woodpeckers, raccoons, and opossums. Look for perfectly round holes made by woodpeckers, or larger ones created by a fallen branch. Look too for the nests made by squirrels in the tops of the trees. They look like large balls of wadded, dried leaves. Birds will make different kinds of nests, depending on the species and on what is available. Look for smaller nests made of grasses, sticks, mud, animal hair, lichen, or string. Remember to leave them alone, even if they are empty. This is the animals' habitat and we are just visitors hiking through it.



As you continue to your next stop, see if you can find a small brown snake with a red belly (in the summer). This is a woodland snake called a red-bellied snake.



This area is perfect habitat for the screech owl. The nighttime call of this 8 inch tall bird sounds like a whinny of a horse. It might not look or sound very fierce but with its excellent sense of hearing and its silent flight it can be

deadly to small rodents in the dark of the night. Owls have small fringes on their primary feathers, like a serrated edge, that helps to deaden the sound of the flapping wings. In addition, their large faces funnel sound toward their off-set ears. Asymmetrical ear openings allow the sound to reach the openings at different times and thus let the owl determine from where the sound is coming. In addition to their excellent hearing, owls also have excellent vision. Even on the darkest nights their large eyes search for any movement on the ground below. The screech owl and the larger great horned owl are the two most common owls in McHenry County. Together they make the nighttime a dangerous time for small prey in Glacial Park.



On your way to trail marker five, look for owls roosting up in the trees, where they sleep during the day.

White-tailed Deer



White-tailed deer often visit the savanna to graze on the grasses in the summer and to browse on the twigs in the winter. Because deer don't have upper incisors, the twigs are ripped off instead of cut cleanly. Deer browse appears torn instead of cut. The

fall is the mating season for deer, also known as the "rut." In early fall, the bucks, male deer, rub the velvet fuzz off of their antlers. They will continue to rub their antlers on trees during the rut to mark their territory. You may sometimes see a tree trunk scarred by this rubbing. Soon after the rut the antlers are shed to conserve energy for the winter. By gnawing on the shed antlers, many small rodents and other mammals obtain needed calcium. The deer grow new antlers in the spring, starting the cycle again.



On the way to trail marker six, try to find signs of deer such as rubbings on trees, shrubs that have been browsed upon, deer trails, scat, or maybe even a shed antler.

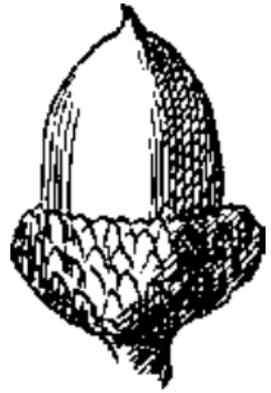
You are now in a small prairie. Native prairies are one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. They have hundreds of types of flowers and grasses, but that is nothing compared to the countless number of insects that may be living on those plants. It is not uncommon to find 25 different species of insects or spiders on one goldenrod plant. They can co-exist because each insect species has its own special niche, or role, in the ecosystem. Only large, flying insects are strong enough to pull the pollen sacs of butterfly milkweed to another flower, while only pollen gatherers will visit the flowers of St. John's Wort as it secretes no nectar. Honeybees are especially fond of flowers in the coreopsis family, and beekeepers are especially fond of coreopsis honey. The importance of all insects cannot be overstated. Insects provide a food source to birds and other insectivores, while they themselves are feeding on plants or other insects and inadvertently pollinating flowers.



On your way to the next trail marker, take a close look at a plant. Look at every detail and count every different kind of insect. You might be amazed at how much life is around you.

Tree Planters

The trees of the savanna offer many nuts for resident squirrels. Fox squirrels and gray squirrels can be found throughout McHenry County. They can be seen all year around but are particularly active in the fall when they are frantically stockpiling nuts to eat throughout the winter. With their superb sense of smell they can usually recover 90% of the nuts that they bury. The other 10% then may eventually grow into trees as big as the ones around you now. Oak and hickory species continue to grow in this area due to the squirrel's activity. Both types of trees produce thousands of nuts each fall with only a fraction successfully germinating and growing into new trees. Most will be eaten by animals. It is not



only squirrels that owe their lives to nut-producing trees. Many other animals eat acorns and hickory nuts including turkeys, blue jays, nuthatches, woodpeckers, mice, deer, and opossums.



Signpost number eight is at the base of the big hill near the bench. On the way, look for young oaks or hickories that may have been planted by squirrels in years past.



As you look up these glacial kames, imagine a bright moon-lit night filled with the sounds of a small

family of coyotes sitting on top howling. Few evenings go by in Glacial Park where coyotes are not yipping or howling. Researchers have found there to be eleven different vocalizations that these canines can make. Yips, howls, and barks are the most common. They use these vocalizations to establish territory and to communicate with others over distances.

Coyotes are highly adaptable and the effects of urban sprawl have not pushed them out of our developed areas. You may see them by your house; they find meals in garbage cans or pet food bowls left out. Simply scare them away -- they are not out to hurt you. If nothing at your house is left out to attract them, they tend to live in natural areas such as Glacial Park, where they have everything they need to survive.



You may choose to skip the steep route by walking the flat trail between the trees and the kames. It meets up with the other trail at the far base of the hill. Or you can walk up over the kames. Up on top, scan the landscape for wildlife in their native habitats.

9

Natural Insect Control

Facing the trail post, look for a man made box attached to the tree at the far right end of the line of trees. This box



has been provided for bats. There are around 1,000 different species of bats throughout the world. That makes up a quarter of the total number of mammal species in the world! About 400 of those 1,000 species are endangered. Myths are partly to blame. A great majority of the myths about bats are unfounded. They are not blind, nor are they rodents. They are also excellent fliers, and there is virtually no threat of them getting stuck in your hair. There is no relationship between bats and mythical vampires, and while a very small percentage of bats carry rabies, you are unlikely to get bitten by a bat. Especially if you do not approach a bat that seems to be sick or injured. The facts are that some can eat up to 600 insects in an hour, and are major contributors to our comfort in the summer. Many more species of bats are advantageous to farmers by greatly reducing agricultural pests.



On your way to the next trail marker, take note of the large mounds in the wetland to the left of the trail. Do you know which animal constructed these homes? The answer can be found at stop 11.

A bog is a very unique ecosystem that few typical wildlife species call home. For more information about this kettle bog, please see the trail brochures on “Plant Communities” and “Geology”, or read the interpretive sign at the head of the boardwalk.



The savanna surrounding the bog is a great place to spot two very bold bird species. These birds are the black-capped chickadee and the white-breasted nuthatch. The chickadee call is a buzzing rendition of its own name, saying “*chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee*”, or it can be heard

singing its high-pitched whistle of “*cheese-burg-er*”.



The nuthatch often can be seen hopping headfirst down the

trunk of a tree. It uses its long sharp bill to glean small insects off the bark of the tree. The nuthatch has a call of a repeated nasal high-pitched bark. Both of these birds are common and are frequent visitors to backyard birdfeeders.



On the way to the next trail marker, also look for robins (in the summer), goldfinches, and cardinals. After visiting the bog boardwalk, walk back up to the benches and head downhill to the trail directly across from you. Do not turn left on the Deerpath Trail.

The marsh in front of you provides excellent habitat for many animals. Muskrats, herons, egrets, geese, ducks, and many amphibians can be found here.



Muskrats make homes called lodges. You saw some large ones earlier at stop 9. You might mistake these lodges for those made by beavers. But beavers prefer to make their lodges out of sticks and logs in an area where the water is deeper. Muskrats, on the other hand, make their lodges out of cattails, which is also what they eat. They are much smaller than beavers and have a rat-like tail instead of the flat tail that beavers have.

Muskrats are active all winter; they will spend the colder months under the ice eating roots and even parts of their lodge. They push up mounds of vegetation through holes in the ice (called push-ups) for breathing holes. That way they do not need to swim back to their lodge every time they need to take a breath.



As you are walking along the edge of the marsh look for the v-shaped wake of a muskrat swimming amongst the cattails. In the winter, look for the push-ups.

All around you is grassland. You may see a thirteen-lined ground squirrel scurrying through the grass. This rodent is a close



relative of the prairie dog, which is found in the shortgrass prairies in the West. The ground squirrel, however, is smaller and has stripes running from its head to its tail. Look out across the grass. If you see a bird with a black breast and a white and yellow back you are seeing a bobolink. This unique bird has what is called reverse counter shading. Many animals have a lighter underside to blend in with the sky and a dark upper side to blend in with the ground;



this camouflage is called counter shading. The bobolink has this reversed so that the male can be more noticeable to the female for his mating display.



During the summer look for eastern bluebirds or tree swallows flying above the grasses looking for insects to eat. Both use the nest boxes you see, but bluebirds have orange on their chests, while tree swallows are solid white underneath.

Conclusion

Look around you. You are in the middle of more than 3,000 acres that has been set aside to protect the natural areas of McHenry County. The various animals that you have learned about and shared this space with may not be in this area if it hadn't been for conservation efforts of the McHenry County Conservation District, other organizations with similar goals, and citizens like you. Since 1971 the Conservation District has been striving to preserve and restore the land that plant and animal species need to survive. Just by coming out to this site and learning about the natural world around you, you have contributed to these conservation efforts. Please continue to learn about and respect the nature of McHenry County and that of the world.

Thank you for hiking the Glacial Park interpretive trail. We hope you have enjoyed your visit. You may keep this brochure for future reference, but if you do not want it, please replace it in the box so that others may use it.



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