

An aerial photograph of a nature preserve, showing a winding path, several ponds, and a mix of green and brown vegetation. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing the title and subtitle text.

Bath Nature Preserve

Self-guided Nature Trail

**A product of:
The University of Akron
& Bath Township**

Instructions

Welcome to Bath Nature Preserve! This booklet contains a series of short paragraphs that correspond to the numbered trail markers along the Nature Trail route. There is a map at the end of this booklet that designates where each of the educational markers are located. Feel free to try a different route or a subset of the entire route. The following directions should help you find your way if you wish to visit the educational markers in the same order as they occur here. Enjoy!

- From the visitors parking lot, start out on the North Fork Trail (the equestrian trail breaks off to the right as you face the trailhead). Soon, you should see Marker 1 to your right overlooking Round Pond.
- From Marker 1, stay left to find the Creekside Trail that will quickly branch off to the right. Markers 2-4 are along this stretch of the Creekside Trail before it turns away from the North Fork of Yellow Creek where you will find Marker 5.
- From Marker 5, take a slight left onto the North Fork Trail again and then follow the South Woods Trail (to the right) to Marker 6.
- From Marker 6, follow the Creekside Trail which becomes Hillside Trail after crossing back over the North Fork Trail and you will find Marker 7 adjacent to the Creek.
- From Marker 7, Creekside Trail ends at a T-junction with the North Fork Trail. Take the North Fork Trail right and up the switchback path to Marker 8.
- From Marker 8, continue on the North Fork Trail by Markers 9 and 10 as you make a return trip to the visitor parking area.

The Creekside Trail is unpaved along the North Fork of Yellow Creek and moderately strenuous through South Woods and upon becoming the Hillside Trail. The North Fork Trail is paved with a light grade over its length.

The Nature Trail = 2.7 miles \approx 1 hour walking at a moderate pace.

Ponds support a diverse community of plants and animals. Beetles, water bugs, and free-floating plants, such as duckweed, can be seen on the surface of the water. Ponds are also home to microscopic plants (phytoplankton) and animals (zooplankton), bacteria, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. Over a dozen species of amphibians—frogs, toads, and salamanders—live and breed at the Bath Nature Preserve. You are very likely to see (and hear!) green frogs and bullfrogs as you explore the ponds of the Preserve. Listen for the banjo-like call of the green frog or the foghorn-like moan of the bullfrog. If you take a moment to be still and observe, the world of the pond ecosystem will come alive. ~Jen Purrenhage



Bluebirds on the Rebound

#2

Until the early 1900's, Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) flourished in the open fields and meadows of Northeast Ohio. However, they were nearly driven to extinction in the late 1930's due to habitat destruction, competition with other cavity nesting birds, and a few blustering winter storms. Many wondered if the bluebirds they've come to know and love would ever get a chance to recover. Thanks to the dedication of many hard-working and passionate birders and researchers, multiple bluebird nest-boxes, like the ones you see before you, were installed to provide sufficient homes for the songbirds to live and reproduce. Currently, Eastern Bluebird populations are increasing dramatically, including some right here in Northeast Ohio. So, watch carefully at the nest-boxes for your chance to finally see the majestic Eastern Bluebird families up close and personal. ~Kristin Napper



Do you see any fish in there? Maybe you see one darting around, or maybe you don't-but there are actually about a dozen species of fish (hundreds of individuals) living in this stream. I'll



I bet you think they are all little brown minnow-looking things. Well, that's true for some of the fish in there (common shiner), but others are brilliant yellow, red and green (rainbow darter), still others have a blood-red stripe during mating season (red-sided dace), and there is even one with distinct "W's" on its side (Johnny darter). Not all of them are little either – we have caught creek chubs up to a foot long in this stream (bigger fish are in the deeper pools). Why can't you see them? In this type of environment, most of the predators on fish will be birds, and it pays to blend in from above. UA Biology offers 'fish walks' on occasion, where we catch some of these fish, let you see them, then return them to the stream. Sign up and you will see the fish that call this stream home. ~Richard Londraville.

Herbivores and Carnivores

#4

Although seldom seen, many mammals make their homes in the wet meadow. The meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) dines on seeds and plant matter. There are probably over a dozen voles within a few yards of you right now – you may be able to hear them if you are quiet. White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) may also eat and damage plants. If you look closely you may find signs they were here, in the form of deer beds, tracks, and scat. The short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*) eats insects, immobilizing its prey by secreting a low-grade poison in its bite. Its cousin, the masked shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) is also an insectivore. The least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) is the most secretive of the mammals found here, and is often attracted to herbivore scents. Stand quietly for a few moments and look and listen for signs of some of the mammals of the wet meadow. ~Erin Madson

Most of the plants near this Marker can only make seeds if they are visited by pollinators such as bees and butterflies. This is true of the crops that feed us too – two out of every three bites you eat are the direct result of pollination by insects and other animals. However these vital pollinators are in peril because of habitat destruction and overuse of insecticides. The nature preserve helps to maintain pollinator populations, so that during the warm months you can often see pollinators active here. How many different kinds of pollinator can you find?



~Randy Mitchell

It is easy to imagine how a living tree contributes to the ecosystem—but what good is a dead tree? In fact, after a tree dies it becomes an invaluable source of nutrients and refuge for other plants and animals. Insects tunnel into the soft wood. Fungi and bacteria facilitate decomposition. Woodpeckers drill into the wood in search of insects to eat. Other animals, like songbirds and squirrels, build nests and raise their young inside the cavities of dead trees. Seedlings use the nutrients from the decomposing tree to fuel their own growth. Eventually, the tree's wood becomes soft and powdery and mixes with the soil, and its nutrients enrich the environment. Take a minute to study the dead trees around you. Notice their stages of decomposition and look for signs of how they are being used by wildlife.



~Jen Purrenhage

All of us live in a watershed – the area of land that catches rain or snow that then drains to a common waterway, such as a stream, river, lake, and eventually into the ocean. You are standing in front of the North Fork Yellow Creek that is part of the Cuyahoga River watershed. The Cuyahoga River, in turn, drains into Lake Erie. Since

*“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.”
~Marcel Proust.*

watersheds connect land and water, the way we treat and protect the land we are standing on can affect the quality of water many miles from us. The next time you get some water from the tap, trace where it has been before reaching your glass. Where does it go when you pour it down the drain? In what ways do our lives change when we expand the boundaries of our home to include our watershed?

~Julie Nieset

Human Activity

#8

Natural history and human history are often intertwined. The Bath Nature Preserve wet meadow is a good example of this. In the 1930’s the Firestones altered the natural history of the land; draining it so that they could use it as a polo field during summer country outings. The drainage tile remains to this day.

Research efforts by the University of Akron are underway to determine the most effective process to be used to restore this land back to its natural condition.

Human activity once changed this land away from its natural state but current human activity will restore the land back to its natural condition; yet another example of the interplay between human and natural history. Can you find any other signs of human activity here? *~Larry Feinstein*



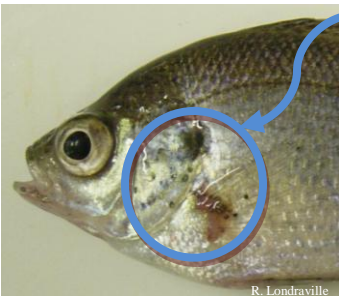
Not all of the plants in this wet meadow are native. Out of the 64 plant species found here so far, 19 are introduced. Some of these plants, such as the Common Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum* L.), are invasive, and overwhelm the native species. One secret to the thistle's success is that its germinated seedlings are aggressive competitors with native species, often dominating openings in habitat left by dead adult plants. However, many introduced plants can live peacefully with others, such as foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*). ~Erin Madson

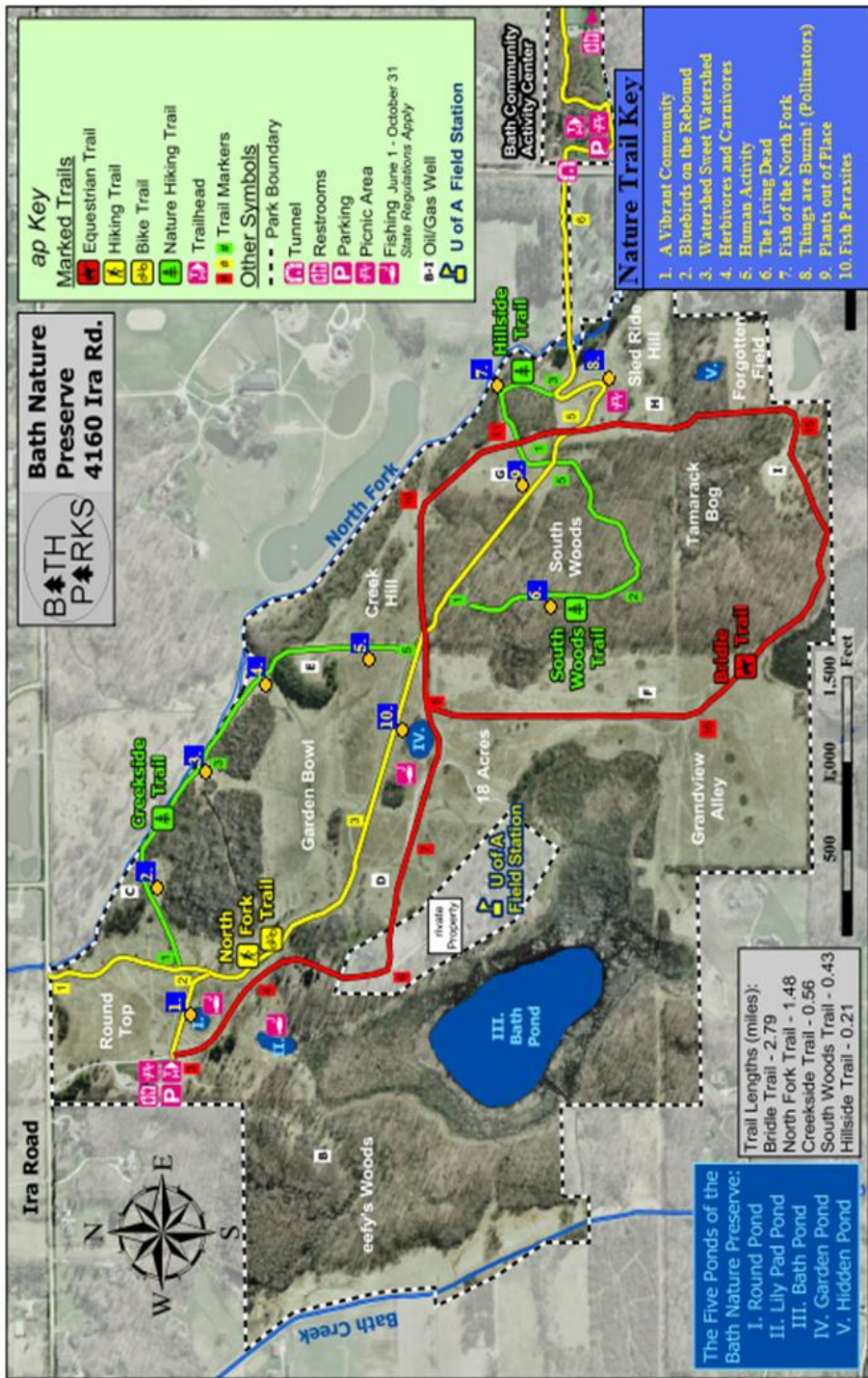


Fish Parasites

#10

When was the last time you went fishing and caught a bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)? Chances are you may have noticed little black spots on the fins and other areas of the fish; those spots are actually parasites, likely the black grub (*Uvulifer ambloplitis*). How do the fish get these parasites? They must be exposed to a swimming form of the parasite that develops in snails, leaves the snails and travels through the water column until it enters a bluegill and becomes the little black cyst that you can see on their fins. But the life cycle of the parasite does not end there. The bluegill must be eaten by a kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), and then the parasite will reproduce inside the gut of the kingfisher, and be excreted into the pond when the kingfisher comes to feed. The parasite then enters the snail where it multiplies, until it is ready to leave the snail to infect the bluegill. But not to worry—these parasites are not interested in humans. ~Sarah Lloyd Edmonds





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The University of Akron and Bath Township
thank you for your interest and support!

Contact Information

UA Field Station
Department of Biology
The University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325-3908
Phone: (330) 972-7155
FAX: (330) 972-8445

Martin Center for Field Studies and
Environmental Education

4240 Ira Rd.
Akron, OH 44333-1140
Phone: (330) 668-2919

Bath Township
3864 West Bath Road
Akron, Ohio 44333
Phone: 330-666-4007
Fax: 330-666-0305

<http://www.bathtownship.org/>

<http://www3.uakron.edu/biology/fieldstation/>

Photos Courtesy of:

Heath Garris

Mark Liu

Dr. Richard Londraville

