



Station 13

The Ruffed Grouse

The Ruffed Grouse, occasionally referred to as "partridge", is abundant along the trail, since all the habitats it needs to flourish are there. It needs islands of conifers where it can hide and stands of mixed-age poplars to feed on. Its best defence is its camouflage (blending in with the background). The young soon learn to freeze on sensing danger.

Station 14

The realm of the Poison Sumac

The Poison Sumac (Poison Dogwood or Poison Elderberry) is probably the only small tree that you really must recognize. Its toxic sap is even more noxious than Poison Ivy. The plant is toxic from the tips of its leaves to the ends of its roots. Poison Sumac should never be burnt, since the smoke carries the active agent and can cause severe poisoning.

It can be recognized by its alternate compound leaves with 7 to 13 smooth-edged (non-serrated) leaflets. It has smooth, pale grey bark. The flowers are small, yellowish and clustered. The fruit are whitish green and generally remain on the tree through the winter. Its open marshland habitat is difficult of access.

Station 15

Rare plants

The varied habitats along the Trail are home to nine plant species that are rare in Quebec. The Poison Sumac is one of them. The Wildlife Area's location in the extreme southwest corner of the province is one reason for this diversity (over 540 species). This is one of the reasons why we want you to stay on the mar-

ked trail and why it is strictly forbidden to pick plants here.

Station 16

Biodiversity

The patch of woodland you are exploring is highly diversified. Its biodiversity is of great significance for two main reasons. The first is that biological diversity makes the area less vulnerable to catastrophes such as epidemics and natural disasters; some of the individuals and species found may be more resistant and thus reduce the impact of a catastrophe. The second is that many medicinal and food products derive from plants. These may turn out to be essential to the future of the planet's growing population.

Station 17

Why are there islands of woodland in the marsh?

The mounds which form wooded islands in the marsh, including the one you are standing on, were formed during the last ice age. They are moraines, or glacial till. The ice age began some 110,000 years ago and ended 10,000 years ago. You will find some pretty impressive boulders in this till.

Station 18

Ecotones

An ecotone is simply a transitional zone between two or more environments or plant stands. You are now in the ecotone between the maple-hickory stand and an abandoned field. Ecotones are generally richer (more diverse), since they contain plants from both adjoining environments.

Station 19

Butternut

The Butternut is a shade-intolerant species. It does not live much more than 80 years. Its compound leaves consist of leaflets 30 to 80 cm long. It produces delicious nuts, which can be used in the same way as walnuts, though they are not easy to extract; sometimes you have to take a hammer to the shell. When tapped, the tree yields a delicious syrup.

Station 20

Hawthorns

Hawthorns are a diverse collection of species. According to the literature, there are anywhere from 150 to 1,500 species worldwide. It is very hard to distinguish among them with certainty because there are many cases of hybridization. The genus is undergoing rapid evolution, probably because deforestation is allowing them to colonize newly opened habitats. They can be readily identified by their thorns. There are hawthorns all around you. How many species are found here? Your guess is as good as ours.

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LAC SAINT-FRANÇOIS

Maple-hickory trail Pisetski Section

An exploratory trail to acquaint you with the Wildlife Area's biodiversity

Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area

It is strictly forbidden to pick plants in the Wildlife Area



Length: 3.7 km
Approximate duration: 2 hours

2000

Friends of the Lac Saint-François
National Wildlife Area





Station 1

The richness of dryland environments

On the maple-hickory trail, you will see how rich the drylands of the Lake St François National Wildlife Area are. There are close to 50 tree and shrub species. Over 115 bird species have been seen, and 55 of them breed here. There are also 20 mammal species. I forgot to mention the most abundant creatures: mosquitoes and horse-flies. Good luck. Keep your eyes and ears open.

Station 2

An abandoned field

This abandoned field is just one of many environments you will encounter on your walk. This is the only one of its kind in the Wildlife Area. The vegetation is constantly changing as trees gradually take over. A century from now, it will be forest.

Station 3

A porcupine den

You are looking at a basswood tree. The heart-shaped leaves are characteristic. When it ages, it often becomes hollow, allowing porcupines to take up residence. This will be signalled by the droppings of this spiny creature (30,000 quills), which uses the tree as a winter home. In winter, in fact, it is a homebody, rarely wandering more than 100 metres from its lair. This rodent eats bark and nuts in winter and varies its diet with leaves, buds, shoots, dandelions, violets and many other plants in summer.

Station 4

The Prickly Ash

The bush that you see with the spiny grey or brown bark is a Prickly Ash, sometimes known

as a "toothache tree". The twigs emit a lemon-like scent when snapped. The plant forms vast, impenetrable thickets because it propagates by means of root suckers. The fruit and the bark of the twigs seem to have an effect on the circulation and on chronic rheumatism. The fruit was once used to relieve toothache, hence its other name.

Station 5

An old tree

This sugar maple is several hundred years old, but we cannot tell its exact age because the heartwood has completely disappeared. It was probably struck by lightning, which burnt out the centre. The role of the heartwood is to provide support. The most important part of the living tree is the first few centimetres under the bark.

Station 6

Cottontails

We are in the preferred habitat of the Cottontail Rabbit. Rabbits differ from hares in that their legs and ears are shorter, and unlike hares, their coat does not change colour in winter. Rabbits are not rodents but belong to the family *Leporidae*. What distinguishes them from rodents is the presence of a second pair of smaller incisors directly behind the main upper incisors. You may notice paths that cross the trail; rabbits establish regular pathways.

Station 7

Dogwood

This splendid thicket consists largely of Gray Dogwood. This species can be distinguished by its clustered white fruit with red stems. The Red Osier Dogwood, whose bark is red, provides browsing for the White-tailed Deer. A bush of this species can be seen a little further off.

Station 8

Birds

The Piasetski Trail is good for watching birds of open and partly open habitats. The best months for birdwatching are May and June, but one has to be up early to catch a glimpse of some of the less abundant species. Among regular denizens are the Yellow Warbler, a small, all-yellow bird with a pointed beak, and the Song Sparrow, similar in appearance to the House Sparrow but with a streaked breast. Catbirds and the Cardinals are also found.

Station 9

White-tailed Deer

The White-tailed Deer is common in this part of the Wildlife Area. You must be very quiet if you want to catch a view of it. It has sensitive hearing and also a remarkable sense of smell. This cervid can run at 65 km per hour and jump a length of 9 metres (30 feet) and to a height of 2.7 metres (nearly 9 feet). It generally needs to consume 5% of its body weight per day. In this part of the Wildlife Area, it feeds throughout the winter on the cedar stands on the west and east sides of the trail.

Station 10

Bitternut Hickory and Ash

The Bitternut Hickory and the Ash look very much alike. Both have compound leaves, but in the hickory they alternate, while in the ash they are paired. The bark of the ash is more ridged. Their fruits are completely different; the hickory produces bitter tasting nuts, and the ash sprouts samaras. Both trees have hard wood prized for making sports equipment and other articles.

Station 11

Decomposition

Here you see rotting logs. It takes team work to decompose organic matter, whether animal or vegetable. One team, consisting mainly of earthworms, insects and other arthropods, breaks down the structure. The second team comprises micro-organisms (bacteria) or multicelled plants (fungi). These render the mineral elements accessible to plant life. The cycle recommence.

Station 12

Succession

This clearing will eventually become part of the forest behind you. We call this phenomenon "succession". The clearing will be invaded by shrubs and trees. Both abiotic (climate, topography, drainage, etc) and biotic factors (plants and animals) propel the forest toward a state of balance called "climax". Climax is a stable plant community in balance with a given environment. In southern Quebec, maple-hickory (Sugar Maple and Bitternut Hickory) and beech stands seem to represent dryland climax.

Something to Think About

Nature evolved for millions of years to attain the present state of species diversity (biodiversity) equilibrium. In the event of a catastrophic perturbation, the animal and plant successions will again evolved toward this equilibrium.

