

Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary



All Persons Trail

FOR ALL SENSES, ALL PEOPLE

May - October



Mass Audubon
Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts

The audio tour is available year-round at www.massaudubon.org where you can download it to a personal audio player. The audio tour is also available on audio players that you can borrow during office hours.

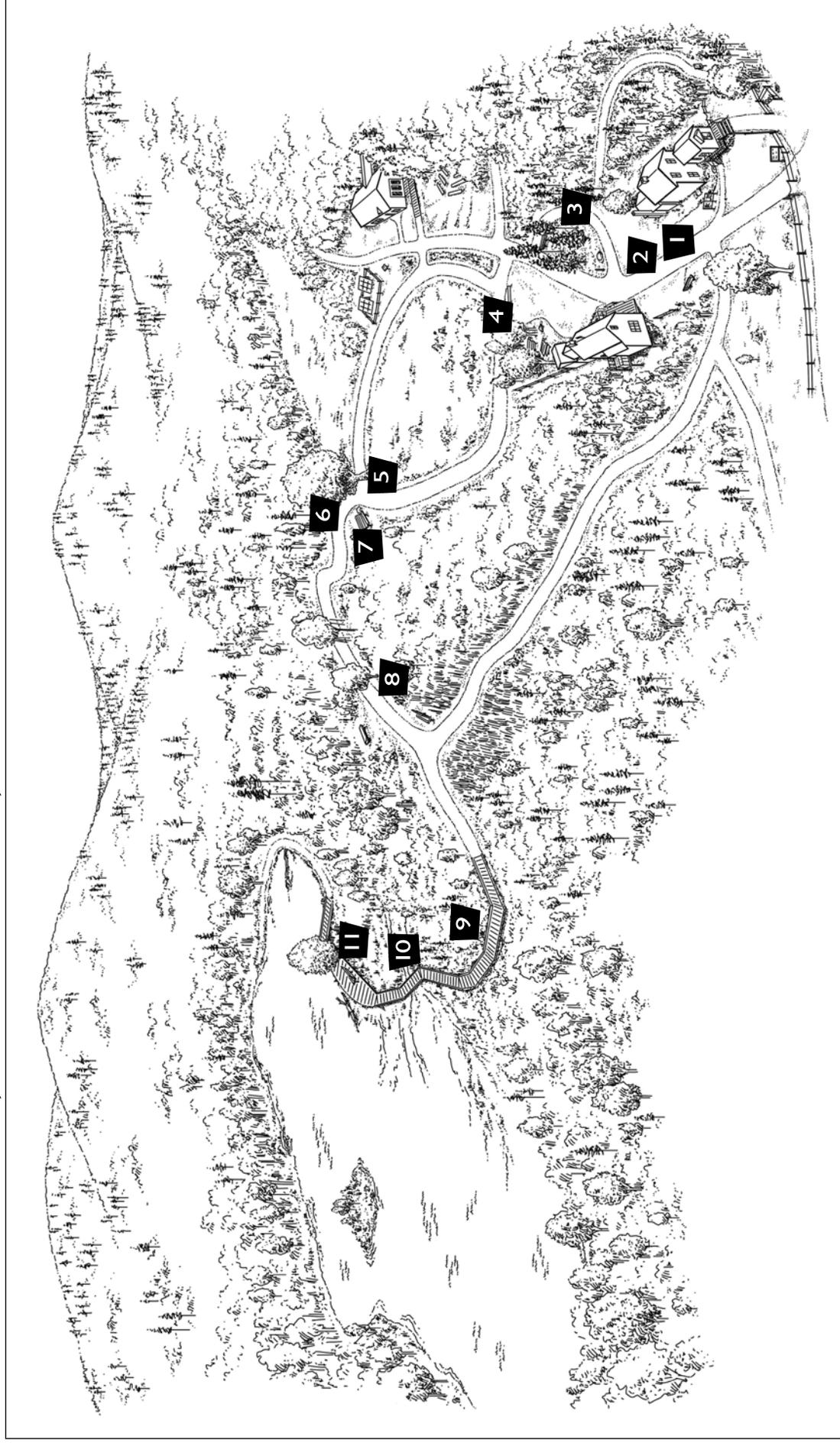


Welcome to Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. This All Persons Trail is here for your enjoyment. Please take only pictures and leave only footprints. Enjoy your walk today and return to experience the trail in different seasons.

If you need assistance or additional information, please call 413-637-0320 during office hours. In case of emergencies, call 911.

All Persons Trail

FOR ALL SENSES, ALL SEASONS, ALL PEOPLE



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1 Introduction and Welcome

Welcome to the All Persons Trail at Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. This is the audio tour for May-October. We invite you to experience this accessible trail using all your senses. At our office, you can pick up trail information including a guide in printed or Braille format, and a printed or tactile trail map. We have adaptive items available for loan, including hands-free binoculars (on a tripod), audio players, a large print version of the “Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Birds,” and a walking cane with a small seat.

Fully accessible restrooms are located at the Education Center, about 500 feet down the trail. These restrooms are seasonally available; please inquire at office.

We invite you to experience our tactile exploration station before or after your trail visit. Inquire at the office for more information.

The trail is surfaced with fine crushed stone and is approximately 1,700 feet in length. While the trail does meet ADA guidelines for grade and surfacing, you may find portions of the trail to be steep or strenuous. As with all outdoor trails, please watch your step, since surfaces may be wet or slippery at times depending on recent weather conditions.

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2 Hummingbird Garden

To your right is Pleasant Valley’s Hummingbird Garden. We invite you to use the seating nearby as you learn about this garden. An introductory sign panel is located nearby, and the same information is included in this audio tour and in all formats of the printed booklets.

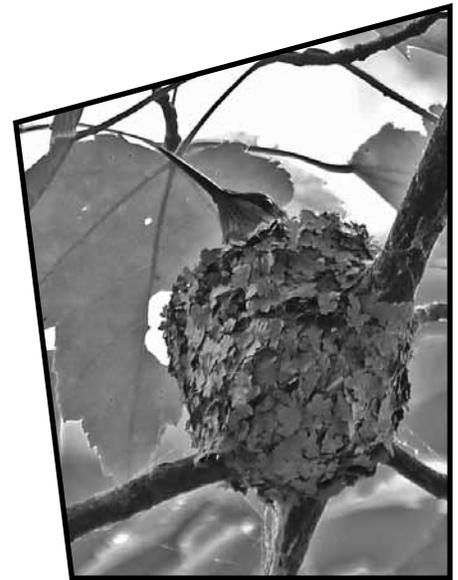
This garden is approximately 15 by 20 feet in size. It contains both native and non-native plants.

In May of each year, tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbirds return to the Northeast from their wintering grounds in the tropics. Some fly all the way across the Gulf of Mexico—a perilous 500-mile, non-stop journey! Their wings beat at an incredible 80 times per second as they hover in front of flowers and sugar water feeders. The nectar from flowers supplies them with carbohydrates. A



large part of their diet however is insects, which provide the protein they require.

We have planted a number of tubular ornamental flowers that are well-suited to visits by these tiny birds. They move from flower to flower, using their long tongues to drink up the sweet nectar. They'll give the flower enough time to replenish its nectar supply and then return for more throughout the day. As they do this, they transfer pollen from one plant to another, benefitting both plant and bird. They may be tiny, but hummingbirds are very territorial when it comes to protecting their nectar sources, attacking and chasing away any intruders, large or small—especially other hummingbirds. Females build nests the size of half a walnut shell and lay two pea-sized eggs. They gather fuzz from the stalks of cinnamon ferns to line its inside, and use spider's silk to help anchor the nest to a branch. Nests are very hard to find because the bird decorates their exterior with bits of lichen, making it look just like a bump on a branch. In so many ways, hummingbirds are amazing creatures.



3 Hemlock Grove

Most of these trees are Eastern or Canadian Hemlock. Hemlocks are recognized by their short, flat, deep green needles that are whitish beneath. In contrast, the needles of spruces are prickly sharp, while those of pine are long and thin. Feel the flat, glossy needles of one of the hemlocks along the left side of the trail. The waxy covering helps the tree keep in its moisture. Hold it to your nose. What does it smell like? Does it feel cooler or warmer under these trees than out in the open? Hemlocks create a dense shade and acidic soil due to the acid in their decaying needles. Not many species of plants can grow in such situations.

Evergreens of course don't drop all their needles in fall like leafy deciduous trees drop leaves. Deciduous trees lose their leaves to conserve moisture during the cold, dry winter season. Years ago hemlocks were harvested for their inner bark which contains a lot of tannic acid or tannin. As the name hints at, tannin was used to tan leather. These days, leather is tanned by means of chemicals rather than tannin from hemlock trees.



A current threat to hemlock trees in New England is a tiny Asian insect called Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Adelgids suck the sap from hemlocks in such large numbers that they eventually weaken the tree and it usually dies within several years. Some parts of Southern New England have already lost large numbers of their hemlocks to this invasive pest. These insects live in little, white cottony clumps at the bases of the needles, and are easiest to see from below.

4 Old Field and Bees

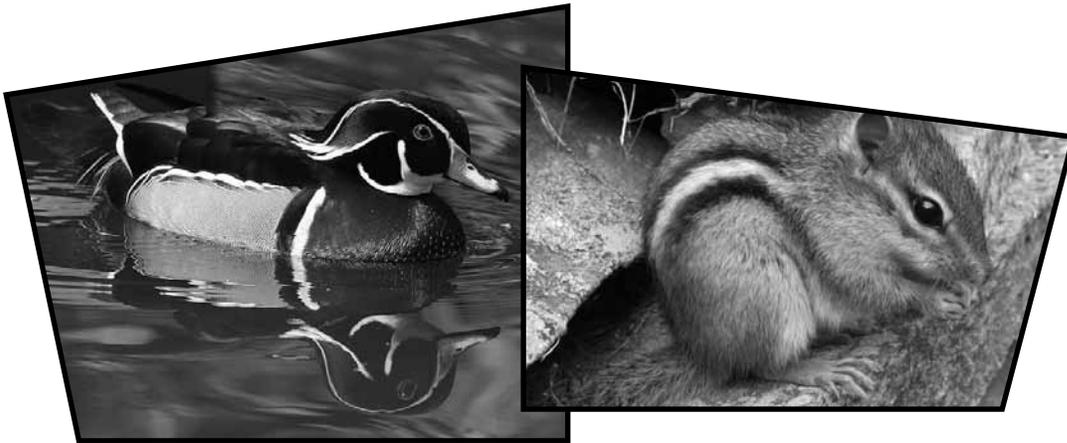
When flowers and shrubs bloom spring through fall, this is a wonderful place to find insects. The biological diversity is mind-boggling. Among the most noticeable are dragonflies and butterflies. Both tend to be colorful and very active during sunny, warm periods. Also active in a field like this are bees—both cold-adapted native bumble bees (there are about ten different species in Berkshire County), and Honeybees—originally introduced from Europe. Neither is aggressive, but will sting to protect themselves—so do not try to pick one up. In mid and late summer this field may host so many bees that their buzzing fills the air with sound.

Bees are master pollinators and we rely on them for this important service. As they move about from plant to plant, bees collect nectar in special baskets on their hind legs as well as drinking nectar. Some bees may have yellow or orange pollen sacs attached to their hind legs. As they forage, they cross-pollinate flowers that produce the seeds responsible for the next generation. Interestingly, some bees cheat the system by biting into the base of certain flowers and lapping up the nectar without transferring pollen.

Insects, such as bees, also provide food for larger creatures like birds, which feed them to their fast-growing nestlings in late spring and early summer. At that time, the nest boxes in these fields house Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds. The swallows raise one brood each year, while bluebirds usually have two broods. In order to maintain a variety of plant communities and associated wildlife on the sanctuary, we mow this field once every year in fall to keep woody plants from taking over. If we didn't, the field would eventually become a forest.

5 English Oak

On your right, stands a large, spreading tree, with multiple trunks. This is an English Oak, a species not native to North America. The common oak on the sanctuary is Northern Red Oak, but the two species are related. Both produce bitter acorns, with a high acid content, but many species of local wildlife include acorns in their diets—Wild Turkey, White-tailed Deer, Wood Duck, Blue Jay, Gray Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk, and Black Bear, to name a few. During some years, oaks produce a bounty of acorns and during other years, hardly any at all. The acorn crop and that of other so-called “mast” trees, has a great impact on the populations of many animals.



6 Schist Rock Outcrop

This somewhat rectangular rocky outcrop that edges the trail on the right is made of schist.

Schist is a very common rock type in the Berkshires. It's metamorphic which means it was originally a sedimentary rock that was altered under intense pressure and heat far beneath the earth's surface. One of schist's main ingredients is mica which often gives it a sparkling quality when freshly broken. Bend down to feel the rock's rough texture. Sometimes it can feel slick or maybe even greasy.

The ridge to the northwest, behind you as you face the rock, Lenox Mountain, is composed mostly of schist. Lenox Mountain is an outlying part of the Taconic Range, a row of hills that forms the border between

Massachusetts and New York. These hills are all that remain of a once mighty mountain range formed 400 million years ago when what is now the continent of Africa bumped into the North American continent, pushing up mountains that towered 20,000 feet high. Erosion over the eons has reduced their height to a very modest 2,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level.

Some of that erosion was brought about by the actions of lichens and mosses, which over a very long time help to break down rock into grains that make up the mineral portion of soil. Slowly run your hand over various parts of the top of the schist outcrop. Mats of emerald green moss have colonized the stone. Mosses are non-flowering plants that reproduce using spores. Also clinging very tightly to this rock are lichens. Lichens are a blend of fungus, which provides structure, and a primitive plant—an alga—that uses the power of the sun to create food in the form of sugars—a process known as photosynthesis. The fungus depends on the food manufactured by the alga. The lichen is light greenish gray in color and feels like wet felt.

7 American Beech and Clones

The large tree on your left with the pale gray bark is an American Beech—a characteristic northern hardwood forest tree, and another important wildlife food producer. The buds of beech are long and sharp-pointed. The edges of its leaves have teeth. Near the main trunk are five thin, straight beech shoots spaced about a foot apart, giving them the look and feel of jail bars. These are shoots or clones of the main tree. Beech is a prolific sprouter. Run your hand up and down their slim trunks to feel the tight, smooth bark. Beech trees, like oak, produce edible nuts relished by wildlife, especially black bears. Bears will climb beech trees in fall to reach the sweet nuts. The nuts are encased in prickly brown husks about the size of a nickel. Bears have a need to put on extra fat then in order to get ready for their long period of fasting during the winter months when they are asleep in their dens.

The wood of beech is hard and durable and has been used for making wooden barrels. Beech trees also keep their leaves longer into the fall and early winter than do other deciduous trees. The papery, tan-colored leaves often flutter in the winter breeze.

8 Small White Pine

About 80 feet down the trail on the left grows a small White Pine. Run your fingers over the needles, which are in bundles of five, thin, and soft. Smell the foliage. Pine resin has a very spicy and distinctive aroma. White Pine is our most abundant evergreen tree in this region. It's a fast growing tree that often is among the first species to colonize an open field after the soil is no longer tilled. White Pine seeds are produced in cones and have small wings that allow them to be carried on the wind quite far from their parent tree. But the seeds must find an open sunny spot to germinate and grow. The nutritious seeds are an important food crop for many birds and mammals. Note that this small tree is at the woodland edge where it receives a fair amount of sunlight. On warm days, the spicy aroma of the pine resin in the dry needles may be quite noticeable.

Did you know that you can age a pine by counting the number of branch whorls? As the tree grows, it produces a set of branches, like the spokes of a wagon wheel, for each year of its life, after the first year. So a tree with six layers of branches is seven years old. White pine is a popular lumber tree and it is heavily used for construction.

The tallest tree on this sanctuary—also a White Pine—grows along Yokun Brook, not far from here, and is fully 141 feet tall. It is in fact believed to be the tallest tree on any Mass Audubon property. During Colonial times, by law, the tallest, straightest pines were the property of the Crown. They were used as ship masts and so were very important to the British Navy and merchant ships alike.

When you get to the bench, you have two options. You can end your Sensory Trail experience here if you bear left and proceed down Honeysuckle Lane, leading you back to the office and parking area.

To continue on the trail, bear right and you'll soon reach the beginning of the Pike's Pond boardwalk. The boardwalk is 4-5 feet wide. There is no railing, but there is a safety lip on both sides. Please be aware that the boardwalk surface may be slippery in certain seasonal conditions.

9 Vines

As you approach the Pike's Pond boardwalk, listen for the whooshing sound made by the wind as it passes through the pine's needles. On still days, all may be quiet save for the calls of birds such as chickadees. Mature pines rise to the left of the boardwalk, which by the way is made from recycled plastic lumber. Be sure to stay on the boardwalk as Poison Ivy grows to the left of it. This is one of the few places where you'll find Poison Ivy at Pleasant Valley. Apparently almost everyone is allergic to it at some time in their lives and all parts of the plant contain the oil that causes the itchy rash. If you do happen to come in contact with it, wash the affected area with warm water and soap to remove the oil as soon as possible.



Poison Ivy has many growth forms. In summer and fall, recognize it by its clusters of three leaflets, each usually with a few large teeth. But it can be a vine, a shrub, or a small leafy plant on the forest floor. Vines attach themselves to trunks and branches by means of tendrils, giving the poison Ivy vine a "hairy" appearance, unlike other species of harmless vine. On the plus side, many animals can eat the foliage without harmful effect. And the whitish berries are a favorite food of thrushes and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

In contrast, the thick, dark brown vine right of the boardwalk with the scaly bark is Wild Grape. The bark is thin and flaky. Grapevines use the tree for support but do not damage it. And the fruits are a tasty treat for many birds and mammals including big, red-crested Pileated Woodpeckers, which are year-round residents. Feel the rough bark of the White Pine tree that supports the grapevine to the right of the boardwalk.

Other vines you might encounter at Pleasant Valley and elsewhere include Oriental Bittersweet and Hardy Kiwi, both of which are invasive exotics that, unlike wild grape, do great damage to our forests.

10 Pike's Pond Boardwalk

Pike's Pond is a shallow body of water, built by humans, and covers about 4 acres.

In summer, listen for green frogs gulping their plucked banjo-like calls or shrieking and jumping at your approach. Bullfrogs claim their territories, attracting mates with their bass bellowing "jug-a-rum" calls. Beneath the surface, Brown Bullheads, Pumpkinseeds, and Common Shiners swim about. Three-inch long Bullfrog tadpoles and Red-spotted Newts are also on the lookout for a meal. Dragonflies and damselflies on gauzy wings patrol the shore. The pond teems with life.

A rock to the right of the boardwalk with carved lettering commemorates the construction of Pike's Pond in 1932. The project was funded by the Pike family in memory of their late husband and father, William Pike. The pond was created in order to provide the watery habitat needed by waterfowl. That same year, not far down the valley, Beavers were reintroduced. Both projects greatly changed the sanctuary.



II Pike's Pond Shore

Sit on one of the benches facing the pond and feel the warmth of the sun. You'll see a fallen planted Chinese Walnut, that's sometimes used as a basking site by Eastern Garter Snakes. Snakes don't create their own internal body heat and so must rely on getting it from their environment by sunbathing. But don't worry; these snakes are neither poisonous nor aggressive. During the warm months, Eastern Painted Turtles also crawl out onto logs and rocks in the pond and spend considerable time soaking up the sun for the same reason. In late spring, a pair of geese frequents the pond with their fuzzy yellow goslings.

This is also a great place to observe Beavers, especially at dawn and dusk, and sometimes even on cloudy days. Sometimes they have an active lodge made of sticks and mud on the small island out on the pond. Pleasant Valley was one of the first places where Beavers were reintroduced in Massachusetts. Back in 1932, three Beavers from New York's Adirondacks were brought here and released. Since then, their offspring have constructed a string of ponds up and down the valley that host a wide array of wildlife—from fish and frogs, to Great Blue Herons and River Otters.

It's easy to spend a lot of time at this spot, but the Sensory Trail ends here and the All Persons Trail continues for only a few more feet. Beyond that, it continues as Pike's Pond Trail and rounds the far side of the pond. When ready to return, retrace your steps to the intersection with the bench (the first one you'll reach). There, you can either turn right and follow Honeysuckle Lane back to the office and parking area—the quickest way back—or continue the way you came in on All Persons Trail. Please be aware that Honeysuckle Trail is a mowed grass trail that is tilted in some places and damp in others.



We hope you have enjoyed experiencing the Pleasant Valley Sensory Trail! You have visited just a small part of this 1,300 acre wildlife sanctuary, with 7 miles of trails where you can observe wildlife, enjoy the nature play area, picnic, attend adult, family, and group programs, or send your child to our day camp. Whether you continue or choose to end your exploration here, we want to thank you for taking the time to experience this trail. We hope you enjoyed learning more about the sanctuary, the plants and animals that live here, and their connections to people and to nature.

We would appreciate your feedback on how this trail worked for you. Please spend a few minutes answering some questions now or after you get home. To provide feedback now, you can talk with one of our staff or volunteers. To provide feedback at home, you can take home a questionnaire and return it at your convenience or visit us at massaudubon.org to complete the questionnaire online. If you borrowed any of our publications, binoculars, or adaptive equipment, please return these items to the office before you leave.

Thank you for visiting Mass Audubon's Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. Please come back again to experience this trail in another season. The trail is often snow and/or ice covered during the winter months (November through March). You may wish to call our office to inquire about trail conditions during those months.



THANK YOU

Dennis Donovan Family

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Office:

Tuesday – Friday, 9am – 4pm

Saturday, Sunday, & Monday holidays, 10am – 4pm

Mondays end of June – Columbus Day, 9am – 4pm

Trails:

When office is open, dawn to dusk

Mass Audubon works to protect the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Together with more than 100,000 members, we care for 35,000 acres of conservation land, provide school, camp, and other educational programs for 225,000 children and adults annually, and advocate for sound environmental policies at local, state, and federal levels. Founded in 1896 by two inspirational women who were committed to the protection of birds, Mass Audubon is now one of the largest and most prominent conservation organizations in New England. Today we are respected for our sound science, successful advocacy, and innovative approaches to connecting people and nature. Each year, our statewide network of wildlife sanctuaries welcomes nearly half a million visitors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds and serves as the base for our work. To support these important efforts, call 800-AUDUBON (800-283-8266) or visit www.massaudubon.org.

