

Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary



All Persons Trail

FOR ALL SENSES, ALL PEOPLE

Late October - Early April

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.

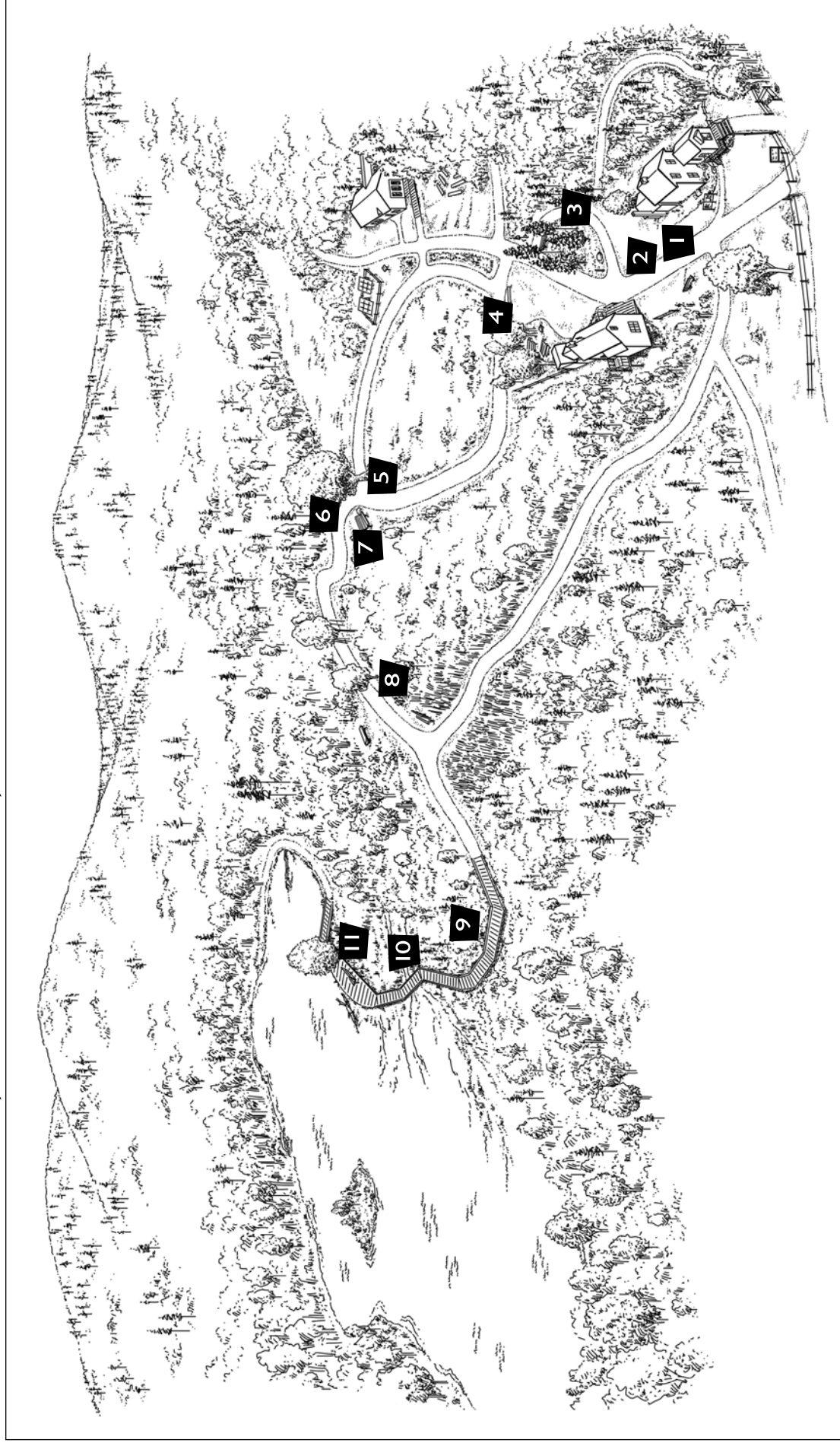


Welcome to Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. This All Persons Trail is here for your enjoyment. Please take only pictures and leave only footprints. Enjoy your walk today and return to experience the trail in different seasons.

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 late-October to early-April. 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 Bird Feeding Station

From late October until early April, a tubular feeder is stocked with sunflower seed, while mixed seed is spread on a rock and on the ground for birds that prefer to feed on the ground. A small wire cage containing a suet and seed block is hung from the wooden post that is fitted with a metal sleeve to prevent squirrels from reaching the feeder. Eastern Gray Squirrels, Red Squirrels, and Eastern Chipmunks all search for seeds under the feeder. Competition among these mammals sometimes results in quarrels. Listen for their chattering.

While there are usually plenty of natural food sources available for wild birds, severe weather such as heavy snow cover and ice storms can make some foods less available. Feeding stations like this also enable sanctuary visitors to observe birds from a fairly close distance. Among the birds to listen for and observe on the tubular feeder are Black-capped Chickadee, the Massachusetts state bird; Tufted Titmouse, a slightly bigger bird with a gray crest; and White-breasted Nuthatch, which usually hitches down tree trunks or posts head first. Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers are also fairly common feeder patrons. They prefer the suet, but also eat sunflower seed. They look and sound very similar, but the Hairy is considerably bigger than the Downy. Ground feeders

you're likely to find here include Mourning Dove, Dark-eyed Junco, and sometimes Northern Cardinal.

While birds are less vocal in winter than during their spring and summer breeding seasons, most make calls year-round that help to identify them. Listen for the “chick- a-dee-dee-dee” call of our state bird. Chickadees flock in winter and this call helps keep the flock together. In late winter, male chickadees begin to sing their whistled, territorial “fee-bee” song. Mourning doves make a whistling sound as they fly off at the approach of an intruder, but the sound is produced by air rushing past the wing feathers.

If you spend enough time near the feeder, you'll hear the comings and goings of quite a few species of birds. What bird vocalizations can you hear?



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 Succession

The old field on your right is a reminder that Pleasant Valley sanctuary was once almost completely treeless. Until around 1905, what is now a wildlife sanctuary, was a working farm with some 100 head of livestock—mostly sheep. The sheep clipped the grass, thereby keeping it short. Trees did not have a chance to grow under such constant grazing.

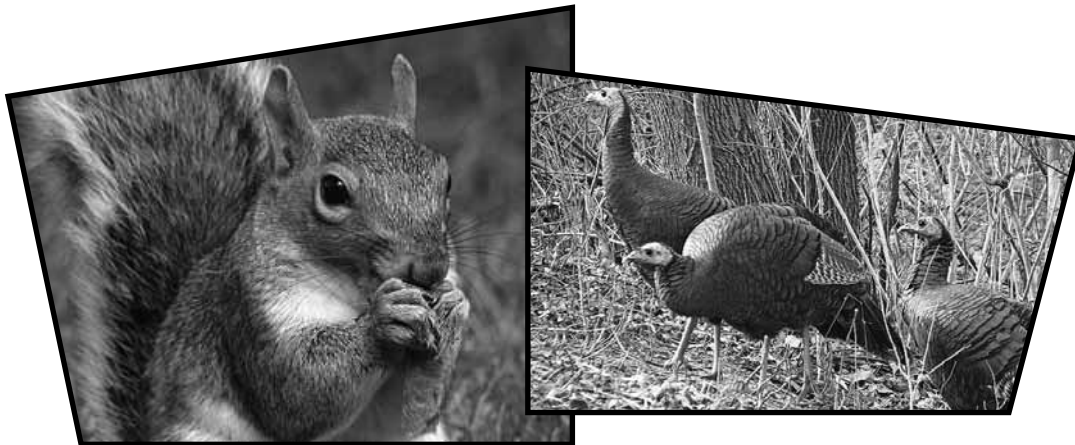
Stone walls snaking through today's woodlands are reminders that in a past century, our wooded hills were barren of trees. In fact, in 1840, Massachusetts was only 25% forested, a far cry from the 75% forest cover of today. Many New England farmers moved to the Midwest in the 1800s, which offered them far more fertile soils, and once grazing stopped, trees began to grow on what was once pasture land. Eventually a northern

hardwood forest community of American Beech, Sugar Maple, and Yellow Birch, replaced the grassland.

Today, these fields require annual mowing in late fall to keep them from reverting to forest. Since most of the sanctuary is forested, we choose to keep at least a few acres in fields so as to increase biological diversity. Many species of mammals, birds, insects, and other creatures require such an early successional stage, as it is called, for at least a part of their life cycles. For instance, Meadow Voles or Field Mice eat the grass and make runway systems through the grass thatch. They provide food for predators such as foxes, Coyote, and Red-tailed Hawk. From late March through April, male American Woodcocks display in this field at dusk, giving their buzzy “peent” calls.

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 may not look like an artificial pond but it is. It was constructed using a steam shovel in 1932 in order to create the proper habitat for waterfowl and other water-loving creatures. The water is held back by an earthen dam that you will soon walk on. The pond was funded by the relatives of Mr. William Pike, commemorated by this memorial stone.

In winter, its surface gleams white with snow on top of the ice that mostly keeps its Beaver inhabitants in their lodges during that season. When the pond is not frozen over, Beavers leave their lodges at dusk on their nightly patrols. These big rodents—North America's largest at up to 70 pounds, make repairs to their dams and lodges—as well as feed on succulent vegetation when it's available. During winter, beavers dine on the

inner bark of the branches they have stored under the ice. This winter larder is called a food cache. Beavers are curious beasts and one may approach more closely for a better look. If you startle them, you may hear the resounding splash made by their flat tail striking the surface of the water—a warning to their kin that danger lurks. Beavers live in family groups that consist of the two parents, the offspring from one year ago, and the young of the current year, called kits. When male Beavers reach their second birthday, it's time for them to leave their parents' home in search of their own territories.

In early spring, the pond comes alive with the ringing sleigh bell-like chorus of courting male Spring Peepers—tiny tree frogs that defy detection except by their outsized calls. The sound can be almost deafening at close range.



II Pike's Pond Shore

On mild, sunny days in the afternoon, the sun's rays are warm on your face as you sit on one of the south-facing benches. To your right, Lenox Mountain ridge is not that far away. On sunny days in late winter, listen for the “fee-bee” spring songs of chickadees.

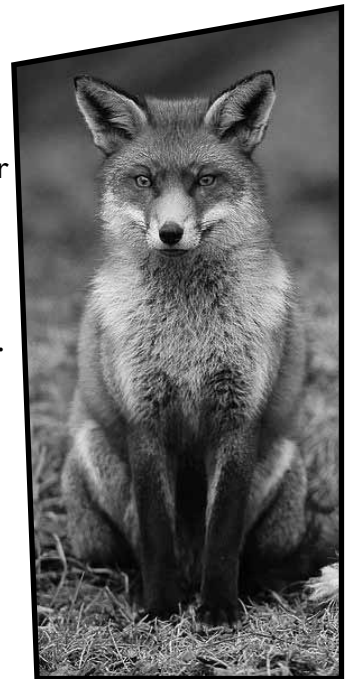
Listen carefully. Do you hear flowing water to the right? That's the sound of water flowing through a “beaver deceiver” pipe that was installed in the pond near the outlet in order to keep the water level at a desired height. The resulting water depth is adequate both for the Beavers and for safeguarding the integrity of the earthen dam and trail.

When a dusting of snow coats the pond's icy surface, the tracks of night-roaming mammals may be seen. Sometimes they leave other signs of their presence such as scat—droppings, on the boardwalk or deck. Red and Gray Foxes, Coyotes, Raccoons, Eastern Cottontails, and Red and Gray Squirrels all leave traces of their evening rambles on the snow. But be sure to stay safe by not going out on the ice yourself. There are always spots not totally frozen, and not visible beneath the snow.

In early spring, Canada Geese sometimes nest on the small island out in the pond. Canada Geese once nested only in Canada, but now nest much farther south. Refuge establishment and feeding programs have played a role in that, as well as release of goose stock for hunting. They also winter farther north than they used to and that in part is probably due to climate change. Geese are wary of potential danger and so you may hear them honking loudly at your approach.

It's easy to spend a lot of time here, but the audio tour ends here and the All Persons Trail continues for only a few more feet. Beyond that, it continues as Pikes 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, which is the quickest way back, or continue all the way around back 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 All Persons 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 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 www.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

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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 center 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.

