9. Christmas Decorations

Along the older wooded section of the trail find some evergreens traditionally used for Christmas decorations, perhaps by people who once lived on this land. Look for:

American Holly (female trees may have red berries)
Christmas Fern with rows of little stockings on its fronds.

10. Bob White's Berry

Covering much of the trail and the woods nearby is a creeping evergreen called Partridge Berry. Its twin leaves are green all year and twin white flowers in the spring together form a single red berry in the fall and winter. Who all might feast on these delicious looking berries? Apparently no one eats these, not even our resident partridge, the Bobwhite, who you might hear whistle his name, "Bob White!" nearby. ("Bob" is the lower -pitched, quieter note; "White" is the higher, louder note.)

11. Toad Comforter

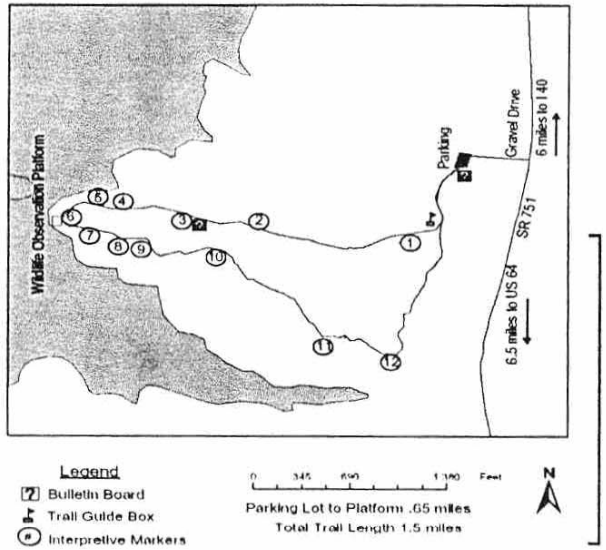
Along a creek bed find a soft bed of moss, thick enough to even keep a toad comfortable as he waits for passing insects attracted to the dampness of the little creek. When winter cold comes the toad may burrow down beneath the blanket of moist moss to keep from freezing or drying. How does a toad's skin differ from yours?

Moss helps to keep the water from running off the land too fast by soaking it up like a sponge when it rains and letting it out slowly during dry times.

12. Tree Communities

How many living things can you find signs of on a single oak or beech tree? The older hardwood trees of a mature forest are homes for a diversity of animals, plants, and other organisms. Check the bark for insects, lichen, and moss. Who is eating the leaves? What made the holes in the tree and who lives in some of them? Who makes a nest in the branches of the tree? Don't forget to check the ground over the roots. You may find around the base of the beech tree 6 to 18 inch stalks of white and magenta flowered Beechdrops, with no green leaves; or the dried remains of this plant parasitic on beech roots. Near the base of other mature trees you may even find one of the many kinds of orchids which grow only in association with a root fungus special to each tree species.

Indian Creek Wildlife Observation Trail



Developed for New Hope Audubon Society, Box 2693, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 by Anne Reeder and Jim Keighton, in memory of Dr. Carl Bucheister, nature education mentor and former President of the National Audubon Society.

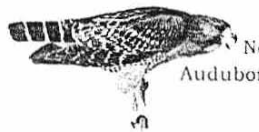
TRAIL GUIDE

Wildlife Observation Site
Jordan Lake, North Carolina

In 1982, the New Hope Creek, flowing nearby, was flooded to create the existing Jordan Lake reservoir. Prior to this, the land on this site was farmed for corn and tobacco, and a family resided in a nearby farmhouse. Some of this land along the New Hope Creek and its tributaries remained in woods. Now only parts of this earlier landscape are detectable. Different habitats have emerged: open lake where river bank forests prevailed, young loblolly woodland in place of fields, more mature upland forest where pines once grew. Eagle, osprey and cormorant nest where prothonotary warbler and wild turkey once called home. Large woodpeckers and white-breasted nuthatches feed where pine warblers and brown-headed nuthatches once were more active members of the community.

What past and present communities of life can you identify as you walk this trail? Some of the following points of interest may help focus your attention on the changing web of life to which we are all linked. Each spot is labeled with a numbered post corresponding to the list that follows.

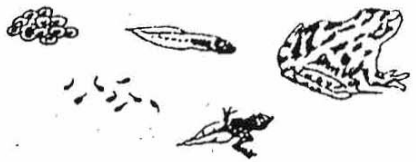
Please leave plants, rocks, and wildlife undisturbed so others may enjoy them, too. And help us use up less of these resources by returning this brochure to the box at the end of the trail. Thank you and enjoy!



New Hope Audubon Society

1. Froggy Goes a Courtin'

Temporary puddles along the road make safe breeding grounds for chorus frogs, american toads and salamander species, some of which lay their eggs in the first full moon after a January rain. Free of predatory fish, the ponds harbor their eggs which quickly hatch into tadpoles or salamander larvae and rapidly develop into land-mobile adults before the puddles dry up. What non-predatory dangers could threaten the growing amphibians of temporary ponds?



2. Once Upon a Farm

The farmhouse which once stood surrounded by wide open corn and tobacco fields now is nearly lost in the pine woods and honeysuckle. All but two roadside fields have returned to woodland. The area in which you are standing was a field only twenty years ago. To encourage deer, dove, and quail, the other two fields are kept from naturally succeeding to woods by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. Can you find the nearby apple tree planted by this farm family and still struggling along as the yard of the house returns to woods?

3. Who's Been Here?

All that remains of the tobacco curing barn that stood on this site are the rusting burners that once heated the barn. The logs that made up the walls of the barn have rotted away and the acres of fields that surrounded the old barnyard have grown up with trees. This land that once produced crops is now wildlife habitat. Can you see signs of who lives here now?

4. High, High Water!

Look up! See the painted band on the tree? That band represents the high water level on April 15, 2003. The lake reached an elevation of 233.81 feet mean sea level (ft msl). The normal pool elevation of Jordan Lake is 216 ft msl. The record water level was the result of consistent record amounts of rainfall over the preceding-month and is about 6 inches higher than the previous record set in 1996 during Hurricane Fran. The lake is actually designed to go even higher, the top of the spillway, the dam is 240 feet msl (6.19 feet higher than the record). At normal pool the lake surface is about 13,900 acres and at the top of the flood pool (240 ft msl) the surface area would be 31,800 acres, more than double.

5. Down By the River Birch

Find trees with peeling paper bark. The paper birch of the south grows in the wet river bottoms and moist slopes, often with sycamores, southern sugar maples, hackberries and paw paw. However, river birch are sometimes found in drier sites, too. Home for wildlife as diverse as wild turkey and zebra swallowtail butterflies, these bottomlands have been largely lost to big reservoirs like Jordan Lake. Listen to the variety of bird life you can still hear in this little sample of what once lay for miles along the banks of the now flooded New Hope Creek. How many different birds can you hear?

6. At the Water's Edge

Where the land meets the water, a rich diversity of plants and animals live. Besides the bald eagle, osprey and other bird species, you may also see along the water's edge harmless water snakes, raccoon, beaver or even bobcat (if you come at twilight). Look for migrating monarch butterflies following the shore line south in the fall.

Both osprey and eagle build their huge nests nearby: the osprey usually in dead trees surrounded by water and even boating activity, the eagle in isolated live trees on nearby land free of human activity. Which of these fish eaters' nests can you spot from the observation platform?

7. Over Hill, Over Dale

As you walk this pine-covered part of the trail, note the repeated rolling pattern of the ground. What made these hills and valleys in the middle of a pine woods? This was once a tobacco-furrowed field and is now beginning to return to the forest of a still earlier time - an example of ecological succession.

8. Cutting Tree for Wildlife

Land managers use timber thinnings (cutting selected trees) and prescribed fire as tools when managing forests for wildlife. Thinning the forest reduces the number of trees in an area, similar to loss of trees in an ice storm or hurricane, allowing more sunlight to reach the forest floor, which promotes the growth of ground cover and understory trees. These multiple layers of habitat lead to increased diversity of animals and plants in the area. Prescribed fire provides benefits similar to natural fire opening up the understory to sunlight, reducing dangerous amounts of combustible dead materials on the forest floor, and speeding up the return of nutrients to the soil by breaking down dead plant material. Can you tell if this area has been burned or thinned?