

STONY BROOK

Wildlife Sanctuary



A Sensory Trail

FOR ALL SEASONS,
ALL SENSES, ALL PEOPLE



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feel

warm breezes as they pass through the trees
moss covering a shaded stump
bark of the birch and cedar trees



see

vibrant colors of the monarch butterfly
abundant wildflowers in the field
dragonflies gliding by



hear

songs of the bluebirds
water spilling over the dam
gentle swaying of the red oak



smell

leaves on a cool, rainy day
aroma of the eastern white pine
fragrant white flowers of the sweet pepperbush

Welcome to Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary and Bristol Blake State Reservation. This Sensory Trail is here for your enjoyment. Please take only pictures and leave only footprints. Enjoy your walk today and return to experience the diverse nature of our site in different seasons.

If you were here in the eighteenth century, you would hear the buzz of the sawmill operated by the Blake family. Today, we hear the sounds of nature – birds singing, frogs calling, insects buzzing, the water flowing over the spillway, a breeze over the marsh. This wildlife sanctuary is made up of more than 250 acres of permanently protected woodlands, wetlands, and fields. The wetlands that wind throughout this sanctuary are part of the Charles River Watershed.

This self-guided nature trail was originally envisioned by members of the Stony Brook Sanctuary Committee to replace a former “trail for the blind” that was once here. The goal of the Sanctuary Committee was to create a trail that would invite everyone to experience the very special nature of Stony Brook.

The post and rope trail, with a guide rope on the right side, leads down a gentle slope for 300 feet before leveling off and traversing a fifteen-foot bridge. At this point, the guide rope switches to your left as you head out to the marsh and pond. The trail then continues through a pine forest, travels over a wetland boardwalk, and ends at a deck overlooking Teal Marsh and Kingfisher Pond. The total trail length down and back is 2000 feet. There are no stairs or side slopes along the Sensory Trail. There is an estimated maximum slope of eight and a half percent over a distance of approximately 50 feet.

Round fishing floats on the rope indicate eleven stops along the trail. Square floats indicate the locations of benches placed on the opposite side of the trail. The boardwalk and walking path continue beyond the end of the Sensory Trail to another deck and onto an island. Although travel along the section of trail past the end of the Sensory Trail is more difficult, you are welcome to extend your experience if you wish to do so.



2 Stone Wall

Smooth and rough, stone upon stone, this wall was built in the early nineteenth century by Enoch Blake to discourage his cows from wandering into his fields. Back then the hum of the mill, a plough turning the soil in the field, and livestock grazing would have been common sounds. Present-day sounds might include the high-pitched “chip” call of a chipmunk or the song of a house wren. Today, stonewalls provide shelter for many kinds of animals at Stony Brook and throughout New England.

3 Gray Birch

The smooth, papery bark of gray birch branches can be felt on both sides of the sign. Like the red cedar, gray birches thrive in sun. The seeds of all the birches in New England are winged, which helps these trees to colonize recently cleared areas. As birches age they are replaced by more shade-tolerant oaks and maples.

4 Eastern Red Cedar

Farming ceased and the property was sold upon Solomon Blake's death in 1825. Without continuous grazing, eastern red cedar quickly established itself along the stonewall and began to spread into the adjacent fields. Each cedar along the path marks the place where a seed was dropped by an animal visiting the wall. Today, many birds, squirrels, chipmunks and other animals take advantage of the cover provided by the cedars growing along the wall.

5 Field and Bird Boxes

Periodic mowing now maintains the old fields on either side of the stone-walled path. Wildflowers and grasses attract insects, the favorite food of birds that eat their meals on the wing. Bird boxes in the fields provide opportunities for cavity-nesting birds to raise their young. Bluebirds, tree swallows and house wrens may be observed in the fields as they raise their families during spring and summer. All three species compete to nest in the boxes.

6 Red Oak and Cherry

Feel the differences in the bark of the two trees on either side of the trail. The textured, vertical grooved bark of the large red oak serves the same protective function as the rough, flaky bark of the black cherry on your left. The acorns of the oak and fruit of the cherry make these trees important sources of food for wildlife.

7 Red Maple

Red maple sports beautiful red flowers in early spring and brilliant yellow to scarlet leaves in fall. Bark characteristics of red maple are some of the most variable of any of the New England trees, ranging from very smooth to extremely rough to the touch. Bark texture is somewhat dependent on age but often varies from tree to tree. Feel the trunks of the labeled red maples as you proceed down the path to compare the variability in bark textures. This tree is also known as swamp maple because it often grows on the border of freshwater marshes or hummocks in bogs.

8 Spillway

Listen to the water gently spilling over the dam into Stony Brook Pond from Teal Marsh. The thousands of tiny green plants scattered like confetti on the surface of the pond are duckweed, the smallest flowering plants, and an important food source for waterfowl. On sunny days, the first spillway is a good place to spot painted turtles who bask on rocks in the middle of the pond. Turtles sun themselves to dry out leeches attached to their bodies, to build up vitamin D for stronger shells, and to warm themselves on cool days. As winter approaches, painted turtles bury themselves in the mud on the bottom of the pond.

9 The Knoll

As the glaciers melted away they deposited rocks, boulders and other debris across the landscape. Those deposits formed the knoll on this island. The excavation in the side of this knoll indicates it was quarried in the past. Today the knoll is covered with pines and oaks that provide habitat for squirrels and chipmunks.



10 Eastern White Pine

This 5-needle pine is the most common and largest evergreen tree in New England. It was not unusual for early colonists to find trees growing in excess of 150' tall. The White pine's impressive size was complemented by its importance in our early history. The massive trees were used to make masts for sailing ships. At one point, the King of England decreed ownership of all white pines larger than 24" for His Majesty's Royal Navy. White pine was emblemized on the first flag of the Revolutionary Forces. Although the largest White Pines are long gone, the tree's contribution to the New England landscape has not diminished. Today white pines support animals that eat the seeds and take shelter in the evergreen boughs and trunks.

11 Wetland Plants

This boardwalk cuts through a thicket of shrubs and trees adapted to a wet environment. Sweet pepperbush, a thin, smooth-barked shrub, is aptly named for its fragrant summer-time spikes of white flowers. Along with the neighboring highbush blueberry, it is a common wetland shrub. In winter, sweet pepperbush has many small seedpods that look like tiny peppercorns. Winterberry is another common plant that thrives in this community. Like other members of the holly family, only females produce berries.

12 Ponds and Marshes

Listen to the many birds among the branches in this watery habitat. In summer, observe the noisy eastern catbirds and red-winged blackbirds eating the abundant blueberries from the plants that tower overhead.

The boxes in the marsh provide alternative nesting cavities for wood ducks that normally nest in tree hollows. A predator guard fits over the opening to discourage muskrats and raccoons from grabbing eggs. During the day, wood ducks feed close to the edge of the marsh near the thick shrub cover. Painted turtles and sunfish are often observed swimming near the surface of the pond on bright, warm days. Listen carefully for the sounds some fish make as they sip insects from the water's surface. The pond shallows are home to snapping turtles that may live for 50 or more years, grow shells up to 20 inches long and weigh up to 60 pounds. These giants of the wetlands spend most of their time on the murky bottom and will snap only to defend themselves when threatened. Like painted turtles, female snappers only leave the water to lay eggs in late spring.

All of the wild animals are capable of finding their own food. Please do not offer food to any wildlife during your visit to Stony Brook.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary and Bristol Blake State Reservation today. Please return to enjoy the nature of our Sensory Trail as it changes with the seasons. If you have any questions or comments about our trail, or your experience at our Sanctuary, please stop by the nature center or call 508-528-3140.

Thank you.

Stony Brook Wildlife Sanctuary

108 North Street, Norfolk, MA 02056
Phone: 508-528-3140
E-mail: stonybrook@massaudubon.org
www.massaudubon.org

Hours

Nature Center

May - October
Tuesday - Friday, 10am-4pm,
Weekends, 10am-4pm

July - August Only
Also open Monday 10am-5pm

Trails

Open every day, dawn to dusk

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