

Brewster's Woods All Persons Trail Self-Guided Tour



This interpretive tour typically takes 45 minutes to one hour.

We invite you to use this printed booklet to enjoy the trail tour.

Please call or email for information on trail conditions and to find out what items and materials are available: 781-259-2200 or brewsterswoods@massaudubon.org.

Funding for the Fisher Trail was made possible through generous gifts from individual donors and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council through the National Park Service (CFDA: 15.962 - National Wild and Scenic Rivers System).



“For, lo, the winter is past, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of the birds is come.”

–Inscription on William Brewster’s gravestone at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge MA

Brewster’s Woods Wildlife Sanctuary

Brewster's Woods Wildlife Sanctuary is a 130-acre property along the banks of the Concord River. This historic site was formerly part of the country homestead of William Brewster (1851-1919), an early leader in American ornithology and curator at Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology—and the first President of Mass Audubon.

In 1891, William Brewster purchased the 300-acre October Farm in Concord as a respite from his city life in Cambridge. Here he embarked on extensive field work taking full advantage of the forest, meadows, and abundant wetlands on the banks of the Concord River. After his passing in 1919, Brewster’s land was divided and sold to different owners. His obituary, written by Henry Wetherbee Henshaw for the birders’ journal *The Auk*, noted how much his Concord estate meant to him. In fact, he worried that “all the interest in his Concord place was destined to lapse when he was through with it.” It also noted that he often “discussed its availability for a duck or game breeding place, or for a bird refuge.”

Decades later, Concord resident Charlene Engelhard began piecing together as much of October Farm as she could and reestablished trails through the riverfront portion of the land. Meanwhile, nearby neighbor Nancy Beeuwkes shared Engelhard's vision for returning to Brewster's roots; she and her husband, Reinier, were living next door in the very home in which Brewster once lived. When the time came for Engelhard to sell her 131-acre property in 2018, Nancy saw the opportunity to protect the land forever. Wanting everyone to experience the beauty of Brewster's landscape, she approached Mass Audubon with the most generous offer in the organization’s history: Nancy purchased the Engelhard land and donated it to Mass Audubon, protecting the property from residential development and ensuring that Brewster’s dream of conserving the land would be possible more than 100 years after his death.



Brewster's Woods has two miles of trails to explore, with easy to rugged terrain that leads through the shade of mature woodlands into open fields and along the edges of the Concord River floodplain. We invite you to explore on your own. One favorite route we recommend is our accessible All Persons Trail which follows the Fisher Trail.



Welcome

Fisher Trail

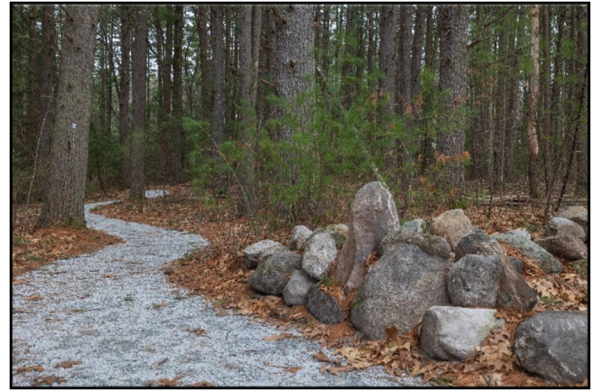
Length: 0.6 miles from parking lot to the Concord River; 1.2 miles round-trip

The Fisher Trail is an accessible All Persons Trail with a firm and stable surface of crushed stone. Other than times when it is covered in snow, the route of the trail is very distinct from the other dirt paths that branch off, making it easy to navigate from end to end without any fear of getting lost. The grade of the first 0.4 mile of trail is at 5% or less, with the exception of four short sections (50-65' in length each) where slopes are up to 8%. The remaining 0.2 mile of trail between the meadow and the river has steeper rolling terrain, where grades are consistently between 5-9%. Seating areas along the trail are marked on the map. Five points of special interest are located along the trail.

The trail begins at the main parking area. A small stretch of boardwalk allows passage across a small intermittent stream, which can be quite full in times of rain and almost dry otherwise. The trail wanders through mixed forest before reaching the edge of a meadow.

Stone Walls

Look for the remnants of old stone walls as you pass through the woods. This part of Concord, as in most of New England, was largely cleared for farming during colonial times and would have looked very different. The stone walls that remain mark the boundaries of former pastures and crop fields. As farmers cleared the rocky New England soil, they piled the many excavated boulders in convenient rows around the edges, forming the walls whose crevices now provide habitat for small mammals, insects, mosses, and lichens.



The trail crosses a service driveway; please be alert for vehicle traffic.

Meadow

After traveling through the forest, you will enter a former horse pasture (historically known as “Green’s Field”) which is being restored as a meadow for bird and pollinator habitat. The orchard grass that horses used to graze on will be replanted over time with native grasses, wildflowers, and small shrubs that will serve as better habitat and food sources for native wildlife. As its name “Bluebird Field” suggests, Eastern Bluebirds are often present, along with a variety of songbirds, Pileated Woodpeckers, soaring hawks, and owls. A distinctive row of sugar maple trees surrounds the northern edge of the meadow, planted as gifts to previous owner Charlene Engelhard from her staff over the years that she was in residence.



Follow the trail as it curves to the right along the south side of the meadow. The grassy areas are a nice spot to stop for a picnic or snack during your hike. In the distance to the right, you will see some of the buildings that are being used for Mass Audubon staff at this time (no visitor access). As part of the transition of Brewster’s Woods from a private residence enjoyed by few to a place for all, our plans include repurposing the main house as a museum and nature center to welcome visitors, allow space for scientists and scholars to collaborate, share the life of William Brewster and his role in the conservation movement, and showcase our world-class American bird art collection. The renovation of the residence will ensure that it is ADA-accessible and a model for climate-friendly buildings, along with serving as an inspirational home for the community, artists, and conservation experts to explore solutions to the biggest environmental challenges of our time.

Esker

The Fisher Trail reenters the woods on the east edge of the Bluebird Field and proceeds steadily downhill. Please note that this section of trail between the meadow and the river has steeper rolling terrain, where grades are consistently between 5-9%. Here one can observe a remnant from the last ice age, thousands of years ago, when a mile-thick layer of glacial ice covered this part of the Earth. Look to the right of the trail at the narrow ridge. This is an esker, a snaking trail of dirt and gravel that was left behind when ice water from a melting glacier flowed underneath it as it receded. Similar ridged formations can be found up and down this section of the Concord River.

Impoundment

After passing the turn offs to the Wood Duck Trail (to the right) and the Woodland Trail (to the left), the Fisher Trail then reaches a large riverside marsh. Known as an impoundment, this wetland was apparently created by Brewster to provide habitat for ducks and other water birds. Mallards, Wood Ducks, and Great Blue Herons are often seen. Native shrubs like pepperbush form thickets along the waterline that are also great hiding spots for birds and small mammals. As you walk along, look for wooden nesting boxes placed in the impoundment – these are for Wood Ducks, placed and monitored for decades along the Concord River and beyond by the US Fish and Wildlife service.



The trail crosses a short dam at the north end of the impoundment. Be sure to stop and look for wildlife when crossing the dam that separates the marsh on the right from the Concord River on the left. This transitional habitat between forest, wetland, and river is a place rich with wildlife. Look for birds flying above and resting in the marsh plants. On sunny days, turtles can often be seen basking on logs. Mass Audubon also participates in radio-tracking of Blanding's turtles, a threatened species in Massachusetts that is finding new habitat opportunities here at Brewster's Woods. Signs of beaver and muskrat are also frequently seen; look for their worn paths down to the water's edge.

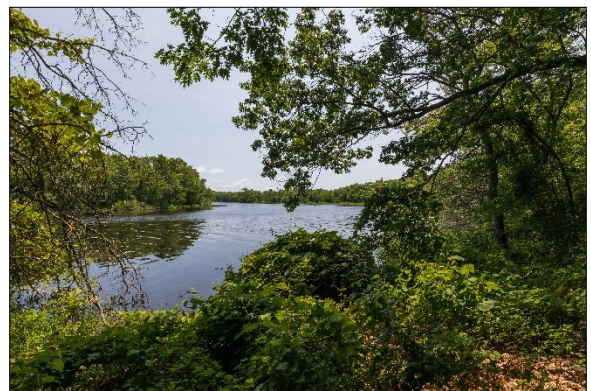


Brewster made extensive records of the wildlife that he saw on the property. His legacy of conservation was greatly influenced by his time in Concord, a period in which he purposefully chose to put down his rifle (the common means at the time for obtaining bird specimens for study) and pick up his binoculars. This time also aligned with his role as President of Mass Audubon from 1896 to 1913, working with founders Harriet Hemenway and Minna Hall to enact legislation prohibiting the taking of songbirds for ornamental purposes. Brewster, along with his field assistant Robert Gilbert, was also an accomplished landscape photographer. More than 2,000 of his glass plate negatives reside in Mass Audubon's collection.



Concord River

Continue straight past the retaining wall and you will find a small kayak landing that makes a great viewing spot on the banks of the Concord River. Look for an interesting scooped-out area on the hillside above you, Brewster's possible excavation site for soil to create the dam. Across the river lies Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge. Brewster's Woods is part of 2,000 acres of connected open space, providing protected habitat for a wide variety of wildlife including fox, fisher, bobcat, muskrat, and deer. The trees and plants growing in this area represent what is classified as Silver Maple Floodplain Forest, a rare and vulnerable type of habitat in Massachusetts.



The kayak landing marks the turn-around point on the Fisher Trail. Take this same trail back to reach the parking area.

Thank you for visiting this All Persons Trail.

We hope you enjoyed your visit and learned about this wildlife sanctuary. We hope you will return soon.

Please reach out to us at brewsterswoods@massaudubon.org with any questions or to share a photo from your visit.

We invite you to visit this trail in other seasons and to visit some of Mass Audubon's other All Persons Trails. For more information on our All Persons Trails, our commitment to accessibility, or to provide feedback about your visit to this trail, please visit massaudubon.org/accessibility.

Driving Directions

Address: Balls Hill Road, Concord MA

From Monument Street: Turn onto Balls Hill Road and proceed straight for approximately 0.25 miles. You will come to a set of three mailboxes on the left (#165/203/221). Turn left into this driveway and park in the small lot on the left by the welcome station. The entrance to the Fisher Trail is at the far end of the parking area.

Parking may be limited at times. As a courtesy to our conservation neighbors, please do not park in the October Farm Riverfront parking area unless you also plan to enjoy that property's trails during your visit.

Visit our website: massaudubon.org/brewsterswoods

