



## Swamp Life Trail

Trail length 0.7 mile  
Blue trail blazes

### Bridge

Walk down the road to the small bridge that crosses the Toms River. The bridge is about 8 miles downstream of the river's headwaters, its point of origin. From the bridge the river continues about 20 miles east and empties into the Barnegat Bay. Near the bridge you will find buttonbush, which sports numerous round clusters of tiny white, nectar-laden blooms that attract pollinating insects in July and August. Joe-pye-weed with its large, domed, pinkish purple flower clusters and cardinal flower, which has bright scarlet flowers, both bloom from mid- to late-summer. Cardinal flower is a favored nectar source for ruby-throated hummingbirds.

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife stock trout in this area. Because the river has a forested buffer, the water remains cool enough for these cold-water fish even during the hot days of summer. The vegetation along the river also helps to filter out debris and pollutants during heavy rain and flooding.

### Beginning of River Trail

Turn right at the end of the bridge and follow the trail along the river. You will see many blowdowns and snags as you follow the river downstream. Most of these trees are older red maples and black gums. They have weak root systems because of the erosion along the banks. Upriver, construction of homes, paved driveways, roads, and other buildings have replaced forested areas. As a result, the runoff now floods more frequently and intensely, eroding the soil along the banks. When the river overflows its banks, the swamp provides a place to temporarily hold some of the excess water, helping to lessen downstream flooding.

### Beaver Benches

When you get to the area with the wooden benches you will see several black gum trees on the bank at the water's edge. These trees are missing bark near their bases. Beaver have chewed away the tough outer bark to gain access to the green, nutritious cambium layer just below it. Beaver will eat twigs, leaves, and cambium, but they don't consume the outer bark or the wood itself.

### Wood Duck Nestbox

The wooden structure in the black gum tree on the edge of the river is a wood duck nestbox. Wood ducks are very colorful birds that traditionally nest in natural tree cavities and perch on tree branches. Because their numbers have dropped in recent decades and because they will readily nest in manmade boxes, the New Jersey Forest Service has provided nestboxes to help restore their population.

### Poison Ivy Tree

About 50 yards further down the trail on the left side there is a fairly mature poison ivy vine growing up a large red maple tree with three trunks. Poison ivy is usually identified by its clusters of three leaves. Although it is a deciduous plant and loses its leaves in the fall, during late winter to early spring it is still possible to identify older vines by looking for the many fine root-like structures growing from the thick vine. People who are allergic to poison ivy can get the itchy rash from touching any part of the plant during any time of year. The expression, "Don't be a dope and touch the hairy rope" is used to alert people to the dangers of the plant at this time of year.

### Swamp Entrance

The trail makes a sharp bend to the left as it heads into the swamp. Before making this turn look at the river. You will see two large logs on the bottom of the stream bed. They are placed to force the water through a relatively small opening. As a result, the water moves rapidly in this area and is turbulent enough to scour out a hole in the river bottom. The water here is cooler, more oxygenated and provides a good place for trout to hunt. Insects and smaller fish have a difficult time navigating in the roiled waters and the trout take advantage of this situation.

### Corduroy Road

Proceed down the trail to the interior of the swamp and you will encounter a "corduroy road" of wood slabs that were cut on our sawmill. Slabs in this low, wet area makes a drier walk for visitors and helps keep people from trampling the plant life. The water table in this area is very close to the surface so trees growing here lack deep tap roots. Trees rely on numerous shallow lateral roots to supply them with water, nutrients, and oxygen. The downside to this system is that when these trees get older and larger they are prone to topple over. You will see several downed trees with their upturned root systems as well as various grasses and ferns.

### Irrigation Pond

This spring-fed pond was once a part of a large cranberry bog. Currently, the New Jersey State Tree Nursery uses the pond's water to irrigate its tree seedlings. The wooden building at the end of the pond houses the pump that sends the water out into the nursery's fields. Tiptoe on the trail along the swamp's edge and you may spot some basking painted turtles, bullfrogs or green frogs. Plants growing on the swamp side of this section of the trail include wild grapes, gray birches, greenbrier, and sweet pepperbush. On the pond side there are cattails, waterlilies, spatterdock, and pond shield.

### Bat Boxes

Near the end of the dike is a tree with two bat boxes. Loose-fitting bark on red maples in this swamp area serve as natural daytime bat roosting areas. Bat populations are declining so the bat boxes provide additional roosting areas. Bats use their radar to hunt night-flying insects such as mosquitoes and moths. To learn more, read the interpretive sign on the left side of the trail at the end of the pond.

### Wildlife Observation Blind

If you are silent for awhile, a bird such as a Great Blue Heron or Wood Duck may fly into view. Red-bellied turtles like to climb onto a basking log. Throughout the seasons, notice the changing foliage of the trees. The next time you visit the Swamp Life Trail do the hike in reverse. Quietly approach the blind and you may observe wildlife more easily in and around the pond. *Can you spot any of the plants or wildlife that are on the other side of this brochure?* This wildlife observation blind was created by Eagle Scout Christopher Lentini of Boy Scout Troop 82.

### Atlantic White Cedar Restoration

At this location, the Forest Service created a forest management demonstration project in 1996. A one-acre plot of hardwood swamp was converted to a cedar swamp. Trees here are from four different seed sources: High Point State Park, Belleplaine State Forest, Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, and Craven County, N.C. The solar-powered electric fence was installed to prevent deer browse when the seedlings were first planted. To learn more, read the interpretive sign on the left side of the trail. There is a small loop trail inside the cedar grove.

### Make your way back to the Interpretive Center

As you get to the end of the electric fence, take a sharp right and exit onto the dirt road. Follow the road to the left and it will lead you to an intersection by the metal gate. At that intersection turn left again and follow the dirt road toward the bridge and up the hill toward the Interpretive Center.

### Watershed Investigations Kiosk

After you cross the bridge, you will see a borrow pit on the right side of the trail. Sandy, gravelly soil from this area was used to build up the section of road where it went through the swamp. This area serves as our Watershed Investigations station. Read the messages on the kiosk to learn more about the river and the trout stocking program that the Division of Fish and Wildlife runs here.

### Uplands

As you continue up the hill to return to the Interpretive Center, compare the vegetation in this area to the swamp. The porous soil in this upland area drains very rapidly and even in times of heavy rains the soils don't retain water because it runs downhill to the river and the swamp. These drier soil conditions favor deep-rooted tree species like oaks and pines and the understory consists mainly of black huckleberries and lowbush blueberry. The lush ferns, mosses, and other moisture-loving plants cannot tolerate these upland conditions.

**Congratulations!**  
You have completed the Swamp Life Trail.

Are you ready?  
Let's begin!

### The Interpretive Center

Stand near the staff parking lot sign located on the east side of the Interpretive Center. Face south, toward the Don Connor Boulevard entrance, and note that most of the trees in this upland area are pines and oaks.

Look in the opposite direction along the dirt road and see how it slopes downhill. At the bottom of the hill notice that the trees here are mostly red maples and black gums.



# FOLIAGE

WHAT I LEARNED AT THE FOREST RESOURCE EDUCATION CENTER TODAY...

Handwriting practice lines with three circles at the end of each line for dot markers.

Beaver  
Muskrat  
Red Fox  
Raccoon

Eastern Cottontail  
Eastern Chipmunk  
Woodchuck  
Gray Squirrel

Opossum  
Big Brown Bat  
Silver-Haired Bat  
Red Bat

# MAMMALS



Ring-necked Snake  
Eastern Garter Snake  
Northern Water Snake



Common Snapping Turtle  
Eastern Painted Turtle  
Red-Bellied Turtle

# REPTILES



Eastern Spadefoot Toad  
Wood Frog  
Fowler's Toad



Northern Spring Peeper  
Southern Leopard Frog  
Green Frog  
Bull Frog

# AMPHIBIANS



Red-Bellied Woodpecker  
American Kestrel  
Red-Tailed Hawk  
White-Breasted Nuthatch  
Carolina Chickadee  
Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher  
Cooper's Hawk  
Wood Thrush  
Gray Catbird  
Great Blue Heron



Wood Duck  
Tree Swallow  
Red-Winged Blackbird  
Common Yellowthroat  
House Wren  
Eastern Kingbird  
Dark-Eyed Junco  
Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker

AS WELL AS...  
Canada Goose  
Eastern Blue Bird  
American Robin  
American Crow

Mockingbird  
Northern Cardinal  
Ruby-Throated Hummingbird  
Mallard

## Wildlife of the Pond and Swamp Trail



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# Swamp Life Trail

A Self-Guided Trail to Discover the Forest

