

Wild Guide to The Last Green Valley

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor is blessed with a rich diversity of natural areas that are well worth exploring. As you visit these areas, include a copy of the Wild Guide in your backpack. The brochure was written to provide basic information about a few plants and animals that may be encountered during hikes along trails in the region and to help beginners who are making their first trip into one of the habitats described. This guide will also be useful to school age children interested in exploring nature. Please keep in mind that many animal species are nocturnal, active at night, so while the animal itself might not be observable, watch closely for other signs, such as footprints or homes.

When visiting a location, more extensive descriptions of the specific plants and animals may be available. Specific visitors guides and species lists can usually be located at visitor centers and trailheads. We strongly encourage the use of these excellent materials as a supplement to the Wild Guide. And of course, a variety of Field Guides are available at local bookstores and libraries to gain additional information about the plant or animal of interest.

We offer these suggestions for your Wild Guide exploration:

Tell a responsible person the destination and estimated time of return for all trips.

Wear footwear that provides proper support for hiking.

Dress in clothing that protects against deer ticks, other insects and the weather. Include rain gear in your daypack.

Carry water and supplemental snacks.

Locate and use a trail map for the area.

Move slowly, calmly and quietly when walking or hiking to view wildlife.

Identify plants in their natural locations. Do not pick plants for specimens. Take time to draw or write about what you see. Remember to take only pictures, leave only footprints. Caution should be used during hunting season. Wear orange. Some areas should be avoided. For information contact Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division, 860-424-3011 or Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, 617-626-1591.

ANIMALS IN THE QUINEBAUG-SHETUCKET HERITAGE CORRIDOR

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

At one time, the white-tailed deer became nearly extinct due to clearing of the land and loss of habitat. Recently they have flourished as a result of reforestation. Now living in forest edges, thickets, fields and suburban areas, the white-tailed deer is one of the more common mammals in the area. Quietly taking a walk in deer habitat may provide the opportunity to see deer when they are feeding at dawn and dusk. This big game animal is widely distributed and deer hunting has significant economic impact statewide. The average adult female weighs about 120 pounds; males are larger weighing up to 150 pounds or more. Coloration changes with the season; summer coats are reddish-brown and winter coats are grayish-brown. Most people identify a white-tailed deer by the white underside “flag” of its tail as it bounds away in alarm. Young deer (fawns), up to six months old, are identified by the white spots all over their coats. White-tailed deer are good swimmers, strong jumpers and agile runners, reaching speeds of up to 35 miles per hour.

Eastern Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

The eastern coyote is not native to New England but migrated east and occupied the former habitat of the gray wolf. It was first reported in Connecticut during the late 1950s and has now become an important part of the ecosystem. The fur of a coyote is usually a grizzled-gray color with cream colored or white undersides. The best identifying features are the black V-shaped shoulder harness along with a bushy black tipped tail. Primarily nocturnal, coyotes are also observed at dawn or dusk and live in a variety of locations. Fertile river valleys and agricultural lands are its prime habitat but the coyote is considered an “edge” species because it is sometimes observed in fields that are interspersed with thickets and marshlands. Coyotes have adjusted to both rural and suburban areas. More commonly seen in recent years, the distinctive call of the coyote is often heard, especially with its mate on quiet nights during howling seasons in January, February, September and October. In the winter coyotes will howl to find their life mates and in the fall female coyotes will howl to call their young.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

Red and gray fox are important predators of prey species such as mice and rabbits. Most often seen in the evenings, a

female fox with young may hunt for food in the late afternoons. The gray fox is a grizzled-gray color, with reddish brown on the sides of the neck, back of ears, underside of chest, back of legs, and under surface of tail and feet. The upper part of the tail is black. The gray fox prefers dense southern hardwood or mixed forests including thickets and swampy areas. More commonly found in northern latitudes, the red fox has an orange-red coat with black feet; a white tipped tail and white underside. Both fox species have elongated snouts, pointed ears and long bushy tails carried horizontally. They are small members of the dog family and weigh an average of 10 to 11 pounds.

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Once very common throughout the region, populations of raccoon have declined in numbers due to the spread of rabies. Raccoons have dexterous paws, making them excellent climbers. The raccoon adapted well to a wide range of habitats but is most often seen in mature woodlands, along streams, near ponds and beside marshes. From these habitats, the raccoon finds a variety of food sources including frogs, crayfish, bird eggs, acorns and wild berries. Due to its adaptability to man-made changes in their habitat, the raccoon also lives in close association with human developments. They have short pointed ears, long pointed snouts and grayish-brown fur covering the body. The most identifiable features are the black mask around the eyes and black rings around the long, bushy tail. Seen in the evenings, during the spring and summer months, raccoons will den-up for the coldest months of the year. They are not true hibernators. During warm spells in the winter healthy raccoons will come out of their dens to search for food.

Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

Usually spending daylight hours sleeping in underground burrows along field borders, in stone walls or under buildings, the nocturnal skunk is occasionally seen during the day. The skunk is a member of the Mustelidae family that includes mink, fisher, weasel, and otter. All mustelids produce a strong-smelling scent, but skunk are the only ones that can spray as a defense. The name *Mephitis mephitis* translates as “bad odor.” The skunk is mild tempered by nature and will only spray if provoked. As a warning before spraying, the skunk will usually stamp their front feet and arch their tail over their back. If this behavior is observed, back away carefully and quickly! Distinct markings on a skunk include a narrow white stripe up the middle of the forehead with a broad white area on the top of the head and neck that usually divides into two stripes along the back over fluffy black fur. It weighs between six and 14 pounds, about the size of a house cat. With short legs the skunk appears to waddle when it walks.

Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*); New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*)

Two species of cottontail rabbit are found in the area and are normally active throughout the year. These two species, Eastern and New England, are almost identical in appearance, except for slight variations in color. They live in similar habitats that include farmlands with open fields, areas with dense, high grass or wood thickets, fencerows, and forest edges. A somewhat stocky animal, the cottontail rabbit has large hind feet, long ears and a short fluffy tail resembling a cotton ball. It has coarse hair that ranges in color from reddish-brown to black or grayish brown. The under parts of the rabbit are white. Normally moving slowly in short hops the rabbit will respond when frightened by jumping at speeds up to 18 miles per hour for short distances or freeze until danger has passed. The cottontail rabbit is an important food for animals such as hawks and coyotes. As a defense, the rabbit will forage at night and spend the day hiding in dense brush from predators.

Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)

With an average weight of only one to three ounces, the eastern chipmunk has the ability to move quickly and is often seen scurrying along the many rock walls in New England. These rock walls are a vital habitat and the chipmunk will use the numerous burrows and holes in the walls to create their homes. Coloration of a chipmunk varies from muted yellow-gray with dark tan stripes to brownish gray with black stripes. The sides are generally orange-brown with the belly a grayish-white. The call is distinctive and recognized as a series of high-pitched chirping notes. Acorns, seeds, fruits, berries and grasses are the chipmunk’s main food. These small mammals are vulnerable to predators since they are an important link in the food chain for larger mammals and hawks.

Tree Squirrel

There are actually four species of tree squirrels found throughout the Heritage Corridor. These species, *Gray (Sciurus carolinensis)*, *Red (Tamiasciurus hudsonicus)*, *Southern flying (Glaucomys volans)* and *Northern flying (Glaucomys sabrinus)* all have a keen sense of sight, smell and hearing. They are alert, nervous and wary, especially when on the ground. All are tree dwelling rodents that are agile climbers and jumpers. The gray squirrel prefers upland hardwood forests and buries its winter supply of food at random. The red squirrel is less sociable, highly territorial, prefers mixed hardwood conifer forests and stores its winter supply of food in large underground caches. The two species of flying squirrel are strictly nocturnal so they are rarely seen but are well adapted for nightlife. Both species of flying squirrels have large eyes for night vision and loose folds of skin between the front and hind legs that allow for gliding through the air. A flat tail helps the flying squirrel navigate from tree to tree. Sometimes, when hiking at night people have been “rained” upon by the peelings of acorns dropped by flying squirrels. There have been reports of flying squirrels living in

bird boxes and feeding at birdfeeders. All species of squirrels are active year round.

Bats

As the only mammal capable of actual flight, many bats use a technique called echolocation for navigation. There are seven species of bats in Connecticut and the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) is the most common along with the big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*). These bats are nocturnal and some live in caves, hollow trees or attics of old houses as large colonies. Others are solitary, living among the leaves and under the bark of trees. Their body sizes ranges from three to six inches and bats have a wingspan of eight to 16 inches. The bone structure in bat wings is similar to, but smaller than, human arms and hands. The finger bones are extended and connected to leathery elastic skin that grows from the sides of the body. Thumbs are free from the wing membrane and have claws for gripping. As one of the major predators of night flying insects, the bat can eat 600 mosquitoes an hour which makes them beneficial for controlling pests that bother people.

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

Active throughout the year and most often nocturnal, the beaver is the largest rodent in the U.S. Adult beavers can range in weight from 30 to 65 pounds. With webbed feet and a paddle-shaped, scaled tail the beaver is uniquely suited to its habitat: anywhere there is a year-round source of water such as streams, lakes, and other wetland areas. Unparalleled at construction, the beaver uses trees and limbs to build lodges and dams. The tail of the beaver is its most distinguishing feature. The tail is slapped on water as a signaling device to warn other beavers, is used as a prop when standing and a rudder when swimming. During the winter, beavers will feed on bark and twigs of trees and supplement their diet in the summer with aquatic vegetation. Beavers usually take only one mate for life.

River Otter (*Lutea candensis*)

Usually found in or near water, the river otter is well adapted for aquatic life. The ears and nose close when swimming and the otter has short legs with webbed toes that contribute to its excellent swimming abilities. As the largest member of the mustelid family, the river otter generally weighs 15 to 25 pounds and is from three to four feet long. Males are larger than the females. River otters have long slender bodies with prominent whiskers and nose pad. The upper body parts are dark brown with undersides that are gray to brown. Otters are completely covered with fur. A fun characteristic of the river otter is its tendency to exhibit play behavior. Their playfulness includes wrestling, chasing, diving and sliding, although sliding is more commonly a mode of winter travel.

Painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*)

A small reptile, the painted turtle species has an average size of four to six inches in length. Often observed basking in the sun on rocks and logs in rivers, lakes, vernal pools (see description in wetlands habitat), and ponds, painted turtles are wary and slip into the water quickly when disturbed. Webbed feet facilitate both swimming and walking. The upper shell is generally dark olive, brown or black with red markings and the underside is yellow. Unlike other turtles, the painted turtle will shed the outer layer of the shell in mid to late summer, revealing a brightly colored shell underneath. The neck, legs and tail are striped with red or yellow. Between May and July, females lay two to five clutches of four to 23 eggs in nests dug along roadsides and in cultivated fields. Hatchlings dig their way out in the fall of the same year. Painted turtles hibernate at the bottom of ponds for the winter.

Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra s.serpentina*)

The largest freshwater turtle in Connecticut, snapping turtles have been found nearly 18 inches in length and weighing more than 40 pounds. The color looks greenish gray or dark green due to algae growth on the shell (carapace). Since the underside (plastron) is smaller than the carapace, the snapping turtle cannot protect itself by drawing into its shell. Rarely seen on land, snapping turtles usually inhabit shallow lakes and streams with lots of plants. When in water, the snapping turtle is shy of humans and will swim away quietly; however, on land a snapping turtle should be left alone because if threatened or cornered they can be dangerous! It will come on land in late June or early July to dig a nest and lay eggs. The snapping turtle has a keen sense of smell and primarily eats fish, amphibians, and other water creatures.

Northern spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*)

In the spring, this frog is more likely to be heard than seen but it is one of the most familiar frogs in the east due to its distinctive mating call of “pee-eep-pee-eep.” The chorus is one of the first signs of spring. A good climber, it uses its sticky toe pads to climb small shrubs or swampland vegetation and other vertical surfaces in its habitat. It prefers moist wooded areas near temporary or flooded ponds, lakes, streams, swamps and vernal pools. It is one of the smaller frogs, averaging one to two inches. The color varies from light to dark brown or gray and there is a shallow x shape pattern on the back of the head and a characteristic cross-shape pattern on the back.

Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*)

Sometimes known as the American Bullfrog, these amphibians prefer the edges of water bodies that contain vegetation.

Amphibians means “having two lives,” referring to their tadpole stage (living underwater and breathing with gills) and their adult stage (living on land and breathing with lungs). Most often seen in lakes, rivers, creeks, ponds and marshes, it uses the plants in these water bodies as cover. It is one of the most aquatic frogs since it takes a tadpole up to three years to develop. As an adult, it continues to stay close to the water. Frogs are cold blooded and rely on the temperature of surrounding areas to regulate body temperature. The bullfrog absorbs oxygen and water through the skin, which is why it is able to stay in water for long periods of time. Bullfrogs can be observed day and night. They will sun themselves along the banks of water, plunging to safety at the first sign of trouble. Male bullfrogs can grow up to eight inches from nose to rear; females are generally smaller. The males are renowned for their loud, low bellowing croak, “jug-o-rum.” Their coloration varies from bright green to a muddy brownish green and occasionally black. They have fully webbed feet with strong muscled hind legs making the bullfrog a good jumper and strong swimmer. Bullfrogs will eat just about anything available including other frogs and small fish.

Spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*)

Primarily living in moist, deciduous or mixed forest soils, spotted salamanders move to vernal pools and areas of water in the early spring for breeding. Rising air temperatures, high humidity provided by rain or snowmelt, and warmer soil temperatures trigger salamander movement to pools to begin mating. Eggs are deposited in masses attached to twigs in the water. After one to four months, the young hatch and develop into adult salamanders. They then leave the pool and return to the forest for three years before reaching sexual maturity. The spotted salamander is variable in coloring but generally is black or olive-brown with striking yellow or orange spots on the head, back and legs.

American robin (*Turdus migratorius*) (Connecticut State Bird)

This bird, a member of the thrush family, is seen in abundance in the spring when warmer weather brings earthworms close to the surface especially when ground is broken for planting. The male robin is olive gray with a black head, its chin and throat are white with black streaks and the most distinguishing feature is the reddish-orange underside. The female is grayer. American robins are usually nine to 11 inches in size. It builds nests of mud in sheltered locations, coarse grass and reeds and lays eggs that are “robin’s egg blue.” The robin’s preferred habitat is generally trees in forests and open areas.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Commonly observed soaring at high altitudes, the red-tailed hawk is one of the most common Buteos (hawks with broad wings and wide tails that fly in wide circles). An adult red-tailed hawk has large broad wings, a dark brown back, and light chest. Its most prominent feature is the tail with a rusty orange-red that flashes in the sunlight on the underside. An important predator, the red-tailed hawk will dive for prey such as small rodents, snakes and grasshoppers. Using sticks and twigs, a nest is built in the crotch of large trees with a commanding view of the territory. The nest will be lined with inner bark strips, evergreen sprigs, and green leaves that are renewed periodically as the young grow. Females often return to the previous nesting area to raise young each year. The red-tailed hawk is generally 19 — 25 inches tall and *Field Guide to Eastern Birds* by Roger Tory Peterson indicates the voice or call is a squeal, keeer-r-r, slurring downward.

Red-Shoulder Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)

A species of special concern, the red-shoulder hawk has declined primarily due to habitat loss. This hawk has an ample tail, broad wings and a rusty breast. The tail has distinctive bands. There are broad red patches on each wing in the “shoulder” region, thus the name red-shouldered hawk. This patch is difficult to identify when the hawk is in flight. Red-shouldered hawks will soar, flap, swoop and dive while calling over its territory. Most commonly seen in woodlands, either perched or soaring above trees, red-shoulder hawks forage for birds and small mammals of the forest. As a medium sized hawk it is generally 17 to 24 inches tall. Red-shouldered hawks build similar nests to the red-tailed hawk.

Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Eliminated from Connecticut by the early 1800s due to habitat loss and subsistence hunting, the turkey was successfully reintroduced to its native range in the 1980s. Primarily found in mature forests, turkeys rely heavily on the fruits from trees such as oak, hickory and beech for feeding. They are sometimes observed foraging in agricultural fields that border forestlands and may range over several square miles in one day. Male “toms” are darkly colored. They have heads that are brightly colored with iridescent feathers and bright red wattles that can be up to 12 inches long. A hair-like beard hangs from its chest. The female “hen” is lighter in color and lacks the beard and bright coloration of the male. Turkeys are most often seen during the early mornings and early evenings. They are an important game bird.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Living on earth for close to 14 million years, the majestic great blue heron species is one of the tallest birds. It stands four feet, has a wingspan of six to seven feet and weighs five to eight pounds. Wary of humans, this bird usually is

observed as a solitary bird and prefers to build its nest in trees that are inaccessible such as in wetlands. To hunt, the great blue heron will stand motionless in shallow water, wait for fish and frogs, and then strike at prey with its dagger-like bill. The great blue heron appears gray-blue, except for a cinnamon colored and white neck, a white head and two white plume feathers. The best opportunity to see these birds is when they are feeding, both in the evening and during the day, but they are also commonly seen flying overhead during spring and fall migration.

Red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

One of the first birds to migrate north, the red-winged blackbird can be a joy to hear when it returns in the spring. The call is a rich musical "o-ka-lee." It inhabits marshes, swamps, and meadows. The male is black with bright red shoulder patches, tipped with yellow. The female and young birds have dusky brown streaks. The red-winged blackbird nests in the tall water plants.

Praying Mantis

Chinese Mantid (*Tenadera aridifolia*)

(Connecticut State insect)

There are two species of insects from the Mantidae family found in northern regions; both are introduced species. The most commonly found in this region is the Chinese Mantid. A large insect, over one inch but also ranging in size from two to six inches, the "Praying" Mantis receives its name from its distinctive appearance. At rest, the mantis' front forelegs are held together in a posture resembling prayer or deep thought. But this posture is deceptive. The praying mantis is a predator and will usually lie in wait for their prey with its front legs upraised. These front legs are equipped with rows of sharp spikes that the mantis uses to hold its prey. All praying mantis adults die in the fall, but first the adult female mantis will mate and then consume the males. She lays eggs in a light brown frothy mass and the following spring, hundreds of young mantis will hatch from the egg case as fully formed smaller versions of the adults minus the wings.

Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)

While most insects hibernate, the monarch butterfly makes a remarkable journey in the fall by migrating from the U.S. and Canada to the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico. The trip can be up to distances of 2,000 miles south or more. However, in the spring monarch butterflies do not make the complete round trip. Instead, when warmer weather returns adult monarch's fly north and breed along the way. They pass the job of further travel north to their offspring. This brilliantly patterned black and orange butterfly undergoes four distinct stages of change (metamorphoses) in its lifetime. The first stage, an egg, is translucent green. The second stage, larval, becomes a black, yellow and white caterpillar that is completely dependent on the milkweed plant for survival. During the third stage, the pupa becomes a brilliant green chrysalis with a gold band near the silk point of attachment to the leaf or branch. Finally, at the fourth stage, the monarch emerges as an adult butterfly. The entire process takes about a month. Adults feed on nectar and sap to build up fat stores prior to migration. Today, there is a large threat to the monarch's wintering grounds due to habitat destruction and logging.

QUINEBAUG-SHETUCKET HERITAGE CORRIDOR HABITATS

All plants and animals require special homes or habitats to survive. Habitats provide food, water, shelter and space so that a species can eat, rest and reproduce. Each species has special features to allow them to maximize use of their habitat. In the Wild Guide the habitats have been categorized in terms of physical features so that beginning reference points can be identified. Habitats are mixtures and transitions from one type of environment to another. Sub-habitats exist within larger areas, thus providing homes for a wide array of species.

FORESTS

At one time, forests that now dominate the Heritage Corridor were cleared as the early settlers moved to the area. With changing land use forests reestablished themselves and now provide food and shelter for wildlife and plant species.

There is a critical interdependency between forests, plants and animals. Trees supply nuts and seeds for animals like turkeys, squirrels, deer and many bird species. In return, the nuts and seeds transported by the animals, or buried for later retrieval, sprout to become seedlings that regenerate the forest. Salamanders, frogs, chipmunks and mice thrive on the forest floor. In turn, they become prey to larger predators. Dead trees that remain standing as “snags” and downed logs provide cavity “homes” and food for many wildlife species. Important tree species described in the Wild Guide include the hardwood forest species of white oak and sugar maples and softwood species like the eastern white pine. Some locations to visit include: any of the Connecticut State Forests, Lester B. Williams Memorial Forest, Albert E. Moss Forest.

WETLANDS

The State of Connecticut defines inland wetlands as land consisting of any soil type that is poorly drained. These areas include bogs, freshwater marshes, vernal pools, swamps, lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. Each area has variations in features due to soil type, topography, climate, hydrology, water chemistry, vegetation, and other factors.

Wetlands support many species and have great ecological benefits. They provide an abundance of food, water and shelter for a large diversity of species including plants, insects, reptiles, birds, fish and mammals. Many of the species described in the Wild Guide require wetlands for survival.

Bogs are unusual wetlands that require special understanding. Bogs are formed by floating mats of sphagnum moss that acidify the water, causing decomposition to slow down. As the moss grows, it forms a thick mat with the lower layers turning to peat. Bogs support a variety of plants, some very rare, that are adapted to the lack of oxygen, water temperatures and acidic conditions in the habitat. Bogs do not often support large varieties of wildlife and tend to be located in remote, isolated areas. Deer, beaver, otter, raccoons, bats and other animals are driven to bogs for water and other needs as development increases in surrounding areas and reduces the available habitat for these mammals. Some locations to visit include: Pachaug State Forest (Heron Bog, Griswold).

Freshwater marshes are wet areas with a distinct lack of trees in which the water levels rise in the rainy season and drop or disappear during dry periods. Dominated by floating leaf plants such as lilies and other aquatic plants, a marsh is most often formed in depressions along the fringes of lakes or slow-flowing streams and rivers. Big brown bats, eastern cottontails, painted turtles, spring peepers, red-winged blackbirds and other wildlife all depend on marshes for food, water and shelter. Some locations to visit include: James L. Goodwin Forest, Pachaug State Forest.

Vernal pools are small isolated contained basins that hold water on a temporary basis, most commonly during the winter and spring. They have no above ground outlet for water and are extremely important to the life cycle of many amphibians (such as the spotted salamander), as they are too shallow to support fish, a major predator of amphibian larvae. Some locations to visit include: James L. Goodwin Forest, Rock Spring Wildlife Refuge.

Swamps are shrubby or forested wetlands located on the edges of lakes and streams or in wet wooded areas. Water is often present in swamps year round to the benefit of wildlife such as spotted turtles, red-shouldered hawks, big brown bats, cottontail rabbits, deer, raccoons, skunk cabbage and a variety of shrubs. Some locations to visit include: Mohegan State Park, Franklin Swamp Wildlife Area, James L. Goodwin Forest.

Lakes are wetlands with water deep enough so that there are areas with no plants that are rooted in the bottom. Located in depressions created by natural processes or dammed river channels, lakes provide habitat for bullfrogs, snapping turtles, painted turtles, beaver, and river otter as well as a wide variety of fish and birds. All depend on lakes for their continued existence. Some locations to visit include: Quaddick State Park, Wauregan Reservoir State Park, West Thompson Lake Recreation Area.

Ponds are wetlands shallow enough to have plants rooted in the bottom all the way across. They are created by several forces including glaciers, human intervention and beaver activity. These changeable habitats support bullfrogs, northern spring peepers, eastern painted turtles, and beaver, and are rewarding areas to visit for wildlife viewing. Some locations to visit include: Trailwood, Hubbard Sanctuary, Hopeville Pond State Park.

River and stream habitats consist of three distinct zones: the bottom of the streambed, the flowing waters within the water, and the adjacent areas known as uplands along the stream or river area. These zones provide a variety of habitats for plants and animals depending on the location of habitation by the species. Rivers are complex, open systems that are always changing. Wildlife such as great blue herons, red-winged blackbirds, beaver, raccoons, river otters, white-tailed

deer, bullfrogs, painted turtles, and a large number of other species can often be observed along streams and rivers. Some locations to visit include: Bailey's Ravine at Ayer's Gap, Mashamoquet Brook State Park, Shelter Falls Park, Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery, Mansfield Hollow State Park.

OPEN AREAS

Areas that are generally open provide a variety of habitats for wildlife. These areas include meadows, agricultural fields, early succession shrub areas, roadsides, and abandoned orchards. Often between these areas and the habitats described previously there are transitional areas such as field-forest edges, rock walls and other features that also provide important habitat for many species. Red fox, raccoons, skunks, cottontails, chipmunks, many birds and plant species such as the milkweed are often found in open area habitats. Some locations to visit include: Connecticut Audubon — Bafflin Sanctuary, Hubbard Sanctuary, Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mashamoquet Brook State Park.

QUINEBAUG-SHETUCKET HERITAGE CORRIDOR PLANT LIFE

Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) • The white pine thrives in areas from sea level to higher elevations in sandy loam soils, and rocky ridges. It has distinctive soft blue-green to silver-green needles that grow in clusters of five bundles with each wrapped around the base with a papery-like sheath. The needles shed at the end of the second growing season. Brown cones have a fragrant gummy resin and form from flowers, with most cones taking two or three years to ripen. Birds such as chickadees eat the ripe seeds and rabbits eat the bark of young trees. Highly valued as the largest pine in colonial times, the white pines that grew over 24 inches in diameter were marked with the Kings crown and reserved for England to be used as ship masts. White pine is still a valuable timber tree and has been measured to reach heights of more than 75 feet at maturity.

Oak — White (*Quercus alba*) (Connecticut State Tree)

An extremely valuable and magnificent tree, the white oak can grow over 100 feet tall and about three feet or more in diameter, some living 350 to 400 years. Its shiny acorns are a favorite for deer, wild turkey, songbirds, squirrels and small mammals and a large tree can serve as home to many species. Each leaf of the white oak has seven to nine rounded lobes that are bright green on top and pale green on the underside. The bark is grayish-white to greenish brown and the crown of the oak tree is very large, making this an excellent shade tree. In autumn the white oak is one of the last species to lose its leaves which turn a variety of colors on the same tree, including red, gold, and, more rarely, yellow.

Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*)

The sugar maple, best known as the source for the production of maple syrup or sugar, has a dense round crown and is highly valued for its hard wood. The leaves are five lobed with deep notches between lobes that turn brilliant yellow and orange-red in the fall. Pendant tassel-like flowers bloom in late April or May and wing like seeds mature in the fall. The seeds are eaten by rose-breasted grosbeaks and the tree is used for nesting by birds such as the American goldfinch and cover for small mammals. The sugar maple grows 40 to 100 feet tall and its trunk can reach two to four feet in diameter.

Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) (Connecticut State flower)

The mountain laurel is a large shrub that reaches heights of 10 feet or taller, preferring acid soils. It grows in dense thickets mainly in higher elevations in close association with oaks, beech, sugar maple and white pine. Leaves are evergreen and leathery and the flowers are very showy clusters in pinks and whites. According to the *Peterson Field Guide on Eastern Trees* by George Petrides, when a bee lights on the flower, one or more stamens spring out of their pockets and slap the insect. Pollen is then carried to other blossoms. The leaves are poisonous to cattle, sheep, and deer and eaten only when better foods are lacking.

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)

The expressions "leaves of three, let it be" or "if hairy, be wary," could not be more true for this plant. Belonging to the cashew family, poison ivy is one of two plants that cause a characteristic allergic reaction in people (less common is poison sumac). Distinctive features of the poison ivy include a regular grouping of three leaflets in each leaf and a hairy vine that climbs tree trunks and shrubs or trails on the forest floor. The poison ivy has a lacquer-like resin in the sap that contains active substances that provokes a reaction in many people when contact occurs. It is not a good idea to handle this plant in any way. The fruit is a greenish-white berry that is an important food source for over 60 species of birds that are not sensitive to the resin.

Mushrooms (Fungi)

There are thousands of varieties of mushrooms that are found during the months between April and November. The life cycle of a mushroom is a complicated one. Spores germinate under special conditions, grow filaments underground in large mats and eventually produce the fruiting body or mushroom. The underground filaments, called mycelium mats, can cover huge areas sometimes up to several acres or more. With favorable weather conditions, fungi occur in each of the land habitats — lawns, meadows, bogs, and forests. To identify mushrooms, it is best to go on a hike with a mushroom expert and remember there are no general rules to identify an edible fungus from a poisonous one. Never eat fungus that has not been positively identified by an expert.

Lichens

Surviving in three basic forms, the hardy lichen grows in crust like, leaf like and stalked formations. Lichens are created by a complex chemical relationship between two organisms, fungus and algae. Fungus filaments surround and grow into the algae creating the lichen. Lichens can dry out completely when moisture is unavailable then absorb moisture and become soft again. They require a stable and well-lit growing surface, such as soil, rock and even the sides of trees but it is not a parasite on trees. It undergoes a process of absorbing certain nutrients from the growing surface and feeds itself through the algae cells. Lichens can survive severe cold and remain dormant for long periods of time without harm.

Pink Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*)

The pink lady's slipper is a highly specialized plant that only grows in habitats that have a particular fungus below acid soil. Even then very few plants bloom and even fewer successfully pollinate. Since reproduction is rare, picking lady's slipper blossoms can easily wipe out the plant in any one area. It takes a very long time to produce one flower. The bloom will produce up to 60,000 seeds and looks like a slipper. Its shape entices large bees to enter the flower, struggle through a tight chamber and squeeze out a small hole, becoming covered with pollen that is wiped off in the next slipper that it visits. The observer must not pick or attempt to transplant any species of lady's slipper.

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

Milkweed grows in dry soils of fields and roadsides and is often thought of as a common weed. However, this plant and several other species are extremely important to the larval stage of development in the monarch butterfly and one can often find the yellow, black and white caterpillar munching the leaves of this plant in the summer. Growing as a solitary, stout stem covered with fine hairs from June to September, the milkweed name comes from the thick, sticky, milky sap that oozes out of a cut or torn leaf. The plant grows up to six feet tall producing a large purplish-white flower that turns to a pod with large seeds inside. The seeds are attached to white hairs that are nearly two inches long that are easily spread by the wind in the fall.

Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*)

Blanketing moist woodlands, the trout lily usually blooms during trout season in April and May, one reason for its common name. Another is that the leaves of the trout lily resemble a trout with a mottled, spotted appearance. Bulbs grow deep in the ground and generate off shoots in abundance, but new flowers often take up to seven years to form. The solitary flowers are composed of six yellow petals that tend to look as though they are nodding when mature. These show a brown or reddish coating underneath.

Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

A true harbinger of spring, the skunk cabbage is often seen as early as March with its mottled purple, red, green or brown horn pushing up through the ice and snow. The horns are the flower of the skunk cabbage and it grows in abundance in moist areas. The common name refers to the resemblance of the young leaves to cabbage and the unpleasant odor emitted by the plant: the species name, foetidus, means "evil smelling." Both the smell and the reddish color of the plant help to attract carrion flies. As the plant grows, it produces heat, recorded to be 27 degrees F warmer than the outside air temperature. This heat helps protect the bud from cold weather and intensifies the smell thus attracting pollinators. After pollination, the leaves uncurl and grow to heights of two feet or more.

Jack - in - the Pulpit (*Arisaema atrorubens*)

A very familiar plant in spring, jack-in-the-pulpit has distinctive flowers that appear from April to June. The "pulpit" or hood covers the "jack," giving the plant its name. Leaves are divided into three asymmetrical leaflets and the plant grows one to three feet tall. Clusters of green berries appear in the spring and turn dark red in the fall. Wood thrushes and other birds relish these berries making it an important plant for wildlife. Turkeys dig the roots as a food source.

Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)

Inhabiting some of the harshest places, the columbine springs forth from rocky crags and steep hillsides. It prefers dappled shade of woodland clearings with dry open environments. The flowers of this plant are red and yellow and dangle downward with pointed flowers and five long spurs that bloom from late spring to summer. By blooming just in time, the columbine becomes an important food source for the ruby-throated hummingbird as it migrates. The plant grows one to three feet tall.

Some public areas for viewing animals, plants and habitats:

- A. Albert E. Moss Forest**, Rts. 195 and 275, Mansfield, CT, University of Connecticut
- B. Bailey's Ravine at Ayer's Gap**, Under the Mountain Road (off Rt. 207), Franklin, CT, Nature Conservancy
- C. Vaughan Ferguson, Jr. Conservancy**, Rt. 169, Brooklyn, CT, Wolf Den Land Trust
- D. Connecticut Audubon — Bafflin Sanctuary**, 220 Day Rd. (off Rt. 169), Pomfret, CT
- E. Dennis Farm**, Dennis Rd. (off Rt. 97), Pomfret, CT, Nature Conservancy
- F. James L. Goodwin State Forest**, Rt. 6, Hampton, CT, 455-9534
- G. Friedman Memorial Forest**, Bebbington Rd. (off Bicknell Rd. from Rt. 89), Ashford, CT, Joshua's Trust
- H. Hopeville Pond State Park**, Rt. 201, Griswold, CT
- I. Lester B. Williams Memorial Forest**, Herrick Rd., Brooklyn, CT, Eastern Connecticut Forest Landowners Association
- J. Mansfield Hollow State Park**, Bassetts Bridge Rd., Mansfield, CT
- K. Mashamoquet Brook State Park**, Rt. 44, Pomfret, CT, 928-6121
- L. Mohegan State Forest**, Rt. 97, Scotland, CT
- M. Moosup Valley State Park Trail**, River St. (off Rt. 14), Plainfield, CT
- N. Nathan Hale State Forest**, South St. (off Rt. 31), Coventry, CT
- O. Natchaug State Forest**, Rt. 198, Eastford, CT, 974-1562
- P. Old Furnace State Park**, Rt. 6 eastbound, Killingly, CT
- Q. Pachaug State Forest**, Rt. 49, Voluntown, CT, 376-4075
- R. Quaddick State Park**, East Putnam Rd. (off Rt. 44), Thompson, CT, 928-9200
- S. Shelter Falls Park**, Birch Rd. (off Rt. 44), Mansfield, CT, Mansfield Recreation Department
- T. Trailwood**, 93 Kenyon Rd. (off Rt. 97), Hampton, CT, Connecticut Audubon
- U. Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery**, Cady Lane (off Rt. 14), Plainfield, CT
- V. West Thompson Lake Recreation Area**, Rt. 12, Thompson, CT, 923-2982 U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers
- W. Brimfield State Forest**, off Rt. 20, Brimfield, MA
- X. Wells State Park**, Rt. 49, Sturbridge, MA
- Y. Capen Hill Nature Sanctuary**, off Rt. 20, Charlton, MA
- Z. East Brimfield Lake Recreation Area**, off Rt. 20, Sturbridge, MA
- AA. Westville Lake Recreation Area**, Rt. 131, Sturbridge, MA
- BB. Buffimville Lake Recreation Area**, off Rt. 12, Oxford, MA
- CC. Bigelow Hollow State Park**, Rt. 171, Union, CT

Some organizations to contact for more information, guided walks and hikes in the Corridor:

- Connecticut Audubon/Pomfret Farms** — birdwalks(860) 928-4041
- Goodwin Conservation Center**, Hampton(860) 455-9534
- Mansfield Parks Advisory**.....(860) 429-3321
- Trail Wood**, Hampton.....(860) 455-0759
- Joshua's Trust**, *Joshua's Tract Walk Book*(860) 429-9023
- Walking Weekend, QSHC**.....(860) 963-7226