NATURAL COMMUNITIES

NATURAL communities are recurring assemblages of plants and animals found in particular physical environments. New Hampshire has a fascinating and complex variety of them, from tidal marshes to alpine meadows, riverbanks to mountain forests, and streams to tundras. Each type of natural community has a unique set of environmental conditions that support certain species adapted to those conditions. Communities in turn often cluster together on the landscape in similar settings to form larger-scale natural community systems. The NH Natural Heritage Bureau surveys and maintains a comprehensive database of the state's exemplary natural communities and systems, as well as all of the rare and endangered plants and animals.

Since natural communities are assembles of multiple species of plants and animals, protecting a community provides protection for many individual species. Therefore, if we protect an adequate number of viable examples of each type, we can protect the majority of New Hampshire's species. This is sometimes referred to as the "core-filter" approach to biodiversity conservation.

Pondicherry harbors numerous natural communities and systems, including bog, fen, marsh, swamp, and forest types. The poor level fen / bog system at the margins of both Cherry and Little Cherry Ponds is considered exemplary, and the surrounding upland supports one of the southermost stands of extensive lowland spruce - fir forest in the state.

DIRECTIONS

From the junction of Rte. 3 and Rte. 115 in Twin Mountain, go 4.3 miles east on Rte. 115. Turn left (west) on Airport Rd and go about 1.5 miles to a small parking lot on the right.

From Rte. 2 in Jefferson, go 5.4 miles southwest on Rte. 115. Turn right (west) on Airport Rd and go about 1.5 miles to a small parking lot on the right.

From the junction of Rte. 3 and Rte. 116 in Whitefield, go 1.6 miles northwest on Rte. 3. Take a left (east) on Colby Rd and go 1.5 miles to Hazen Rd. Go right (east) past Airport Marsh and the airport for 1.6 miles to trail parking on left just beyond the Biomass Power Plant.

This brochure was created by the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau as part of a series designed to educate the public about the state's special plants and natural communities. More site guides and profiles are available on the Visiting New Hampshire's Biodiversity program page at: http://www.nhnaturalheritage.org.

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woodland path with 600 feet of bog bridges (use care — the boards are slippery when wet) takes you through a regenerating white spruce - fir forest. The area was logged in 1935-1937 and then re-planted with white spruce and balsam fir. By 2000, the stand is comprised of both snags and live aspen, paper birch, red maple, balsam fir and some large red spruce (Picea rubens and mariana) trees. Plants on the forest floor include rodgersia and carex, and here there is often a mixed show of Canada mayflower (Mimanastrum canadense), pink lady's slipper (Cypripedium acaule), painted trillium (Trillium undulatum), wake robin, rattlehead (Coptis trifolia), and many types of mosses, including the beautiful looking staircase moss (Hylocomium splendens). The forest is perfect habitat for snowshoe hare, which browses on the shrubby vegetation (look for patches of their orange urine on the snow in winter). A chorus of birds such as golden-crowned kinglets and parula warblers can be heard here in May and June.

Arrive at a junction and follow the path to the left (marked with an arrow). Twinflower (Linetes borealis) can be seen along this trail. Be sure to look for a very short spur trail “loop” through the middle of several glacial erratic boulders to the right of the main trail.

Go straight ahead at the second trail junction. After crossing a stream on a small bridge, larch (Larix laricina) becomes abundant and creeping snowberry (Gaultheria hispidula) and peat mosses (the genus Sphagnum) carpet the ground. This is a small zone of black spruce - larch forest. The boardwalk then curves left through leatherleaf, bog rosemary (Andromeda polifolia), sheep laurel (Kalmia angustifolia), and rhodora. The bright pink rhodora blooms are especially spectacular here in May.

The boardwalk ends at a viewing platform on an abandoned beaver lodge by the edge of Little Cherry Pond. There is a 2-person bench here. Nice views of Garfield Ridge and the Orono Valley Range appear over the lowland spruce - fir forest on the far side of this pond. This could make a perfect sunset spot, as long as you bring flashlights! The water level is fairly constant in this pond (maximum depth 3 ft). Near it’s edges, this river is emergent marsh - aquatic bed and, in somewhat deeper water, an aquatic bed community, support yellow pondlily (Nuphar variegatum), pickerelweed, bladderworts (Utricularia sp.), and pondweeds (Potamogeton spp.).

The post-glacial ice sheet left a large thin layer of dwarf shrub bog and leatherleaf - black spruce bog, together comprised of an exemplary poor level fen / bog system, occur around the shore of Little Cherry Pond. These two natural communities are similar, offshore are several floating islands of peat moss and shrubs. These wandering bog mats occasionally get caught on submerged rocks for periods of time. Beavers have built a lodge on one of the mats, and loons can also be found nesting on them sometimes. This is a magnificent view from here on the western slopes of the Pemetic Range above the pond.

The Little Cherry Pond Trail begins ½ mile northeast of Waunbek Junction on the west side of Cherry Pond. This is another hotspot for birding. White pine trees on the west side of the pond support a great blue heron colony. You may spy an osprey sitting on a snag. Palm warblers, black-banded woodpeckers, spruce grouse and maroon warblers nest here. Boreal chickadees and grey jays are sometimes seen. It is one of the southernmost points for nesting ring-necked ducks. Wood ducks, hooded mergansers, and American black duck may all be seen. Other animals you might see here include moose, black bear, otter, beavers, coyotes, dragonflies, and butterflies.

Heading back towards Cherry Pond, take the other leg of the trail by going left at the junction. Pitcher plants appear in the black spruce flats that you will soon cross on bog bridges. Much "primitve" flora abounds including Sphagnum moss, lichens, and liverworts. A little further on, the low-growing trailing arbutus (Epigaea repens) blooms from April to May. Other frequent groundcover in this area includes partridgeberry, dewdrop (Rubus dalibarbus), and snowberry. Note porcupine-girdling on some of the larch trunks here.

Soon you cross more bog bridges and arrive back at the first trail junction. You have now closed the Little Cherry Pond loop. Continue straight ahead and follow the trail back to the railroad tracks at Cherry Pond. Cross the railroad tracks and continue for 100 feet until you come to the Rampart Path (described below).

Before returning, hike left on the Rampart Path, a short out and back trail along the north shore of Cherry Pond. Along the way there are several spectacular views of the pond and the mountains beyond. The spongy peat mat is wet and mostly untrampled, but its outer edge floats in the open water. The mat itself is composed primarily of Sphagnum moss, but other plants present include leatherleaf, rhodod, Labrador tea, alder, and black spruce. Landward, it grades into a swampy forest of maple and larch, with some black spruce, over a bed of wintergreen (Gaultheria procumbens).