

# CHERRY HILL TOWNSHIP

## CROFT FARM NATURE TRAIL GUIDE

### INTRODUCTION.

This nature trail is designed to help visitors open the natural world. You will increase your understanding of nature and experience its wonder. Some words of caution before you start.

Please stay on the trail. The goal is to experience nature without harming it using a technique called “Leave No Trace.” In a phrase, “take only pictures, leave only footprints.” Carry out your trash, and maybe even someone else’s, making these woods better than you found it.

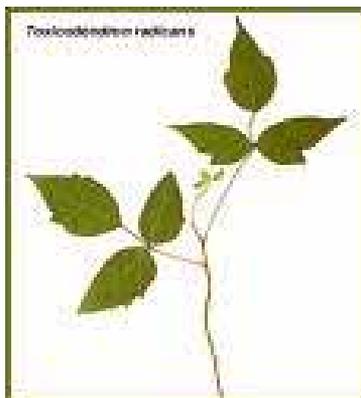
Observe and touch, but don’t pick flowers, harm vegetation, or hurt animals.

What is one plant you really don’t want to touch? [*Poison ivy.*]

What does it look like?

Can you spot some?

[*Many grow at the edge of woods*]



## **STOP 1. SOIL.**

What are some of the key things that determine what grows in a natural area? Soil is one of them. This stop will focus on the importance of soils in shaping what vegetation grows in a particular area.

Find some soil. What does it feel like? What color is it? This is a sandy loam soil that supports the growth of hardwood trees and plants that you see all around you.

Compare these soils and trees to the soils and vegetation closer to the New Jersey shore. Those sandy soils support pines and some oaks. It's why that area is called the Pinelands. Are there pine tree in these woods? [No] It's the soil that sets the stage for the vegetation.

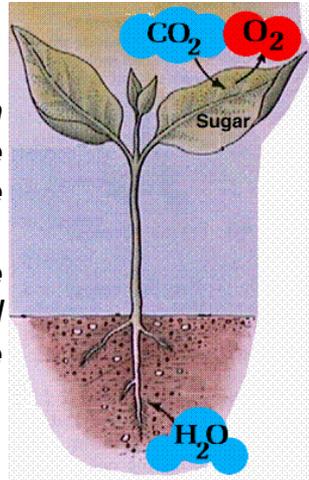
## **STOP 2. VEGETATION**

During colonial times, trees growing here were cut to open land for farming. When farming ended, natural vegetation returned. This process from bare soil to tall trees is called plant succession. You will see a number of stages along this trail. This trail stop shows the end stage of plant secession called the climax stage. If left undisturbed, land in the Cherry Hill area will support large hardwood trees like these.

\*Remember this when you get near the end of the trail.

### STOP 3. TREES

How many different trees can you spot? Feel the bark on various trees. Some are smooth like the American beech and some are rough and grooved like the oaks. Knowing the bark of a tree will help to identify it. What else can help to identify each tree? [Leaves, bud, tree shape, and twigs are some others]. How do trees help reduce global warming? [*They take in Carbon Dioxide, a greenhouse gas, from the air and make Oxygen*] What part of the tree does this? [*Leaves-the process is called photosynthesis. See the diagram to the right.*]



### STOP 4. HOW DO TREES AND PLANTS SUPPORT OTHER LIFE?

Some answers are:

- Branches support bird nests high above predators

- Cavities in trees provide homes for raccoon, opossum, flying squirrel, insects, and others.
- Food source. What do trees make that provides food for wildlife? [fruit, nuts, pollen, bark for beavers]
- Cover and concealment. Birds and animals hide in trees and other vegetation to avoid predators and weather extremes.

## STOP 5. WILDLIFE

As soils support trees and plants, vegetation supports wildlife. Animals serve as food for other animals. Can you think of any examples? [*Insects are food for small birds; hawks eat small birds. Foxes and owls eat mice.*]

The type of vegetation often determines the kind of wildlife that lives there. What kind of animals would you expect to live in this forest? [*Raccoon, opossum, rabbits, birds, deer, fox live here*] Would you expect to see Prairie dogs? [*No, they live in grasslands*]  
How about

Mountain goats?  
*No they live in high mountains*].

Look for wildlife signs.



## STOP 6. WETLANDS.

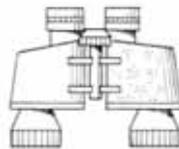
Look down the slope to your right. What do you see? [A lake]. Damming the south branch of the Cooper River created this wetland. A wetland is basically any land that's wet for most of the year. Wetlands are special places. Hardwood forests support certain kinds of wildlife, and wetlands support a different set of plants and associated wildlife. What kind of animals do you think live in this wetland? [Ducks, fish, turtles, frogs, insects, beavers] America has lost, and continues to lose its precious wetlands to development. It's important to save these unique and special places. The Cherry Hill Open Space Program focuses on obtaining wetland areas.

## STOP 7. BIRDS.

Be quiet to see if you can hear any birds calling. How many different calls can you hear? Each species has a different call. Why do birds sing? [Males tell other males of their species that a certain area is their territory, so stay out] See how many you can spot. Birding is one of America's most popular outdoor activities. A bird book, binoculars, and a little patience are all that's required. A backyard



birdfeeder brings birds closer for easy and fun observation.



## **STOP 8. DECOMPOSITION**

[*Note the decaying logs*] As vegetation grows, it must die. When it does, it decays or breaks down adding nutrients to the soil to promote new growth. This simply describes the growth, death, and decay cycle. As this log decays, it creates different wildlife habitat compared to when it was alive. Now insects eat the wood and continue the decomposition process. These insects are food for animals like birds and shrews. Cavities in dead logs create habitat. What do you think uses these cavities? [*Hives for bees, and shelter for animals like opossum and raccoon*].

## **STOP 9. HABITAT**

What is term used to describe home for wildlife? [*Habitat*]. You have seen a few different types of habitat on this nature walk. What are some? [*Trees, wetlands, decaying logs*]. Wildlife needs the same basic requirements as humans. What are these basic needs? [*Food, shelter, water, clothing*] Wildlife comes equipped with its own clothing, but needs food, water, and shelter. We have seen how soils, vegetation, and wildlife come together to make an area such

as these woods come alive. All parts of nature are needed and are connected to each other.

Everyone is responsible to help preserve nature. You can create, improve, or destroy habitat. What can you do to help nature and our environment?

## **STOP 10. BIODIVERSITY**

Why do you think the land here looks different from the part of the forest seen from Nature Trail Stops 1-8? [*This land is in an earlier plant succession stage.*] If left undisturbed it will look the rest of the woods after about 50 years.

Notice the grassy fields. These are for sports activities. Which area seems to have the larger amount of different plants and animals associated with them, the sports field or the wooded areas? [*Wooded area*] Why? [*Remember that habitat needs to have food, water, and shelter to support wildlife*] The grass provides little food, and no wildlife shelter.

Nature is complex. A broad variety of plants and animals are produced in a natural state. This high amount of variety in nature is termed biodiversity. Natural habitats are diverse. Are lawns and sports fields like this one diverse? Do they provide habitat? [*No*]

## **CONCLUSION: HOW YOU CAN HELP!!**

Everyone can help preserve, improve, or help prevent the loss of biodiversity and habitat. How can you help? *[Pick up trash, learn about nature, recycle, stay on trails, conserve energy, pick up litter, help in a conservation community service project, plant flowers for bees and butterflies, plant trees, support Open Space programs. Contact the Cherry Hill Environmental Committee for projects. 856-424-3203]*

You can make a difference. Just do it.



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