

The Hussong Memorial Trail Guide

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In Memory of Mrs. Clara Hussong
1902 - 1978

In Memoriam Mrs. Clara Hussong 1902 – 1978

The Hussong Memorial Trail

This trail is dedicated to Mrs. Clara Hussong, well known ornithologist, conservationist and nature writer. She was one of the founders of the Green Bay Bird Club and was first president. She was a member of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and an honorary member of the Northeastern Wisconsin Audubon Chapter. She was a country school teacher and later taught at the Vocational School in Green Bay.

Her nature column ran for 41 years in the "Green Bay Press Gazette". She also wrote for the "Appleton Post-Crescent". Her articles also appeared in "Nature", "Better Homes and Gardens", "The Spirit", and the "Passenger Pigeon". She wrote two children's nature books put out by Golden Guide entitled "Nature Walks" and "Birds".

Later, she became an expert photographer, worked with the Brown County Library System, and filled a variety of posts with local and national nature groups and clubs. At one time she was a member of 17 organizations, both professional and social.

By Edwin D.
Cleary

This unique trail winds $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile through some of the Sanctuary's most scenic areas. It begins in a lowland forest where spring and early summer flowers can be found in abundance. This is one of the best birding areas in spring for warblers. From here, a boardwalk will lead out through a swamp and into a small cattail marsh, where a variety of wildlife including teal, muskrats, and various other birds and animals can be observed.

Provided for your convenience at the end of the marsh is a shorter loop to the left which reduces the length of the trail to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. The trail to the right will lead you to an observation mound where the entire marsh can be observed. Onward, the trail follows the edge of a large field, where many different species of birds and other wildlife can be observed. From there the trail heads across former Sanctuary Road, to another board walk, and then up to a field where the trail intersects with the Woodchuck Trail.

The Area in which the trail follows is not only popular for hiking and wildlife observation, but is used extensively by area schools for outdoor education. The Hussong Trail is open year round for your enjoyment with cross-country skiing in the winter months.

Between 2008 and 2009, Ian Mosbrucker, a boy scout from troop 1172 renovated the Hussong Trail by creating this trail guide, putting out the numbered posts, and creating the main entrance sign. All lumber used in this project was donated by STOCK lumber, and the main entrance sign was designed and created by Quick Signs Inc.

13. Because of the high, thick hedgerow close to the field, red-tailed hawks are highly attracted to this area, this is because they can sit perched on top of a tree and keep a keen lookout for small animals below in the open field. The red-tailed hawk is easily identified by its reddish brown tail and dark belly band. These hawks hunt small animals like squirrels, chipmunks, small birds, and also big animals like skunks, pheasants, and rabbits.



Another frequent visitor to this field is the American kestrel or sparrow hawk. Being the smallest of the falcons (not much larger than a robin) it feeds primarily on insects. It spends much of its time perched on trees, posts, or wires watching for mice, insects, and small birds. This very colorful bird often hovers before catching its prey. The kestrel prefers to nest in hollow trees or specially constructed nest boxes. It raises a family of 1 to 5, which it spends most of the summer and fall with.

You are now entering the Woodchuck Trail. The shortest route to the Nature Center is to your left. The right trail takes you to a high ridge overlooking a swamp. Watch for kestrels nesting here. The field in front of you is a prime place for viewing the exciting mating ceremony of the woodcock. We hoped you enjoyed your journey through the Hussong Memorial Trail, please join us again.

1. This area is intensely used by wildlife during the winter months for shelter and food. It is also home to a variety of spring flowers some of which are endangered and rare. This immediate area was once used as a tree nursery, and if you look closely you may notice that some trees are still growing in a row. Also notice the amount of mosses and fungi in this area. As you soon will see, you are nearing a low-lying wetland, which makes the air in this area moist and perfect for these types of plants. You may be now thinking, “Why do I care about a bunch of moss and fungi?” Well if you didn’t know, moss and fungi help to decompose organic and inorganic matter, which is excellent for this areas ecosystem. Mosses also help to prevent soil erosion.



2. The forest floor is a place of great beauty in the early spring months. During this time many plants and flowers which have remained dormant for the past months burst forth with their showings of colors. Many of these are of great importance to the surrounding wildlife. A few of the more common ones have been listed for your convenience...

May-apple: The umbrella shaped leaves bear a yellow apple-like fruit when ripe from a small flower. Although the green fruit is toxic it is edible when the berry is ripe and yellow in color. The root is often in the shape of a person.



Trout Lily: Also called Adder's tongue, this early spring flower is often recognized by its brown mottled leaves. It also has one leaf that is shaped like a snake's tongue. Both the yellow and white flowers are found commonly along the trail.



Wood Violet: This common resident of the forest is also the state flower of Wisconsin. There are several species of violets and both the yellow and the blue can be found here. Both the seeds and the leaves are eaten by wildlife.

Marsh Bellflower: Often called Bluebells, this plant has a thin stem with linear leaves and bright, small blue flowers. They grow between eight and 24 inches tall.



Bloodroot: It gets its name from the red juice that runs from it when a root is broken, and because of that, this plant is commonly used as a natural dye. The pale, lobed leaf embraces the stalk bearing anywhere from 8-10 petals on a white flower.

12. In the spring, summer, and even fall it is still easy to see the evidence of animal life trying to survive throughout the winter months. Often at the bases of young trees and shrubs, patches of bark are missing. Areas closest to the ground have usually been nibbled by mice and voles that make their tunnels safely beneath the snow going from one plant to another. Marks left by their small teeth can often be observed.

The cottontail rabbit also feeds on tender bark. Because it feeds on the surface of the snow, there usually is an area of undisturbed trunk beneath the area that was gnawed. During severe winters, both shrubs and trees can be so harshly gnawed that they die, as their life supporting vessels are cut off, and in the spring the leaves can no longer receive the nutrients that they need.

11. Cottontail rabbits, along with white-tail deer browse the lower branches of trees and shrubs. While deer are able to reach higher than rabbits to browse, signs of their activity are also distinguished by the ragged tipped branches they leave behind. Deer lack the large incisors like those of the rabbit and must chew the branches to remove them. Rabbits on the other hand simply snip the branch leaving a clean cut edge.



Shrubs and certain trees like basswood are adapted to various degrees of browsing. Most simply sprout more branches. The white cedar is one of the favorite foods of deer, and often almost all of the lower branches are chewed off. The point at which the deer can no longer feed on the branches is called the “browse line”. These browse lines can be observed in many parts of the Sanctuary. If you look carefully you should be able to spot many browse lines along the trail.

Spring Beauty: The bulbs of this small plant were often roasted and eaten by Natives and early settlers. Note the pair of smooth linear leaves midway up the stem. Petals are white or pink with dark pink veins.

3. The area which you have just now entered is known as a swamp. The swamp is a wetland a lot like the marsh, which you will get to see further on. The difference between the swamp and a marsh is that the swamp does not contain cattails and other grasses, while a marsh does. Another difference is that the swamp contains many trees, which keep the swamp cool and also provide shelter for animals, while a marsh contains little if any trees.

One of the animals that find the wooded swamp a perfect habitat is the wood duck, which is also North America’s most colorful duck. Appropriately named, the wood duck nests in cavities of trees, some as high as 50 feet. These cavities are sometimes hard to come by, so to attract the wood duck, we have put up nest boxes which can be located on either side of the trail.

During the summer sometimes this swamp can contain little or no water, however, in the spring the water can get up to 1 ft high. Something you might notice is the stacks of logs along the boardwalk; this is not because we forgot to pick them up, but because the logs provide great shelter for many different animals.

4. As you move your way through the swamp you may begin to notice that there are a lot less trees and a lot more grasses and cattails, this is because you are now entering the marsh. The marsh is a very important part of this areas ecosystem and it shelters many aquatic animals including muskrats, geese, fish, turtles, and ducks.

This marsh is located on the edge of an old abandoned landfill. It was formed after several roads were built which acted as dikes trapping water behind them. Soon afterwards, cattails established themselves in these areas of standing water.

Cattails, with their tuberous roots, can live in water up to 3 feet deep. Cattails can also grow out of the water, though most of the time they are out competed by other plants such as Phragmites, which is an invasive species found many places throughout the Wildlife Sanctuary,. The cattail is also used by a large variety of birds for food and nesting. As for humans, the tubers, (If picked at the right time) can be roasted and eaten or ground into flour and used for baking (please do not pick the Sanctuary's cattails). The leaves of the cattail can be used as basket weaving material, and the fuzz can be used as extra insulation in a jacket or boot when needed. The cattail all around is an incredibly important part of this ecosystem.

10. Erected along segments of this trail are nest boxes designed to attract bluebirds. In past years, the eastern bluebird populations have been declining due to a combination of pesticides, weather and changes in agricultural practices. In addition, starlings and English sparrows (two species not native) compete with the bluebird for the small amounts of nest sites and boxes.

In an effort to reduce competition and provide additional nesting cavities for the bluebird, a special nest box was designed by Vince Bauldry, a local bird enthusiast. This nest box has an open top and thus discourages sparrows and starlings who prefer dark cavities. The bluebird, which normally nests in the open top of a post or crotch of trees, is not bothered by the open top.



The eastern bluebird is a valuable bird to have around the home and garden as it eats many destructive insects. Nest boxes should be placed at least 500 feet apart and should also face an open area. Don't be surprised if tree swallows or house wrens show up, as they use these boxes too.

9. This field is a unique grassland and plays a vital role in the management of the Sanctuary as well as the wildlife refuge. It is here amongst the dry grasses that many birds nest in the spring. The eastern wild turkey, pheasants, and songbirds feed on the seeds produced by the plants. Mice thrive in the grass and provide a constant food source for the hawks, owls, and fox. The bluebird and swallow need the openness of the field.

While the field appears to be a place of peace and solitude, there is actually a constant battle going on between the animals, the battle of survival. This struggle takes place not only with the inhabitants of the grasses, but also with the field itself.



5. The channel you are about to go over provides shelter for many aquatic creatures such as turtles, frogs, insects, and fish.

Turtles are unique from all other reptiles because they have shells. Not having teeth, their sharp edged beaks tear at their food. Turtles have powerful jaws and can give dangerous bites, like the common snapper found around here. Three other turtles (all harmless) can be found at the Sanctuary; the eastern painted, blanding's, and the common musk turtle. Turtles lay eggs on dry land, burying them in sand, loose dirt, or decaying vegetation. The eggs have tough, leathery shells. After hatching, the baby turtles are on their own, and must get to water as quickly as possible. All of the turtles found in the Wildlife Sanctuary spend almost all of their time underwater, but they must come up to breathe air and sun themselves. During the winter months, turtles bury themselves in mud and hibernate.



Frogs are one of the most intriguing animals found at the sanctuary, and there are several species of frogs throughout it. Some of which include green, pickerel, spring peeper, mink, chorus, and bull frogs. Frogs are amphibians having moist skin and living in or near water. They have incredibly powerful hind legs for swimming and jumping, and their quick, sticky tongues are excellent for catching flies. They are very beneficial to the area because they eat a lot of mosquitoes, spiders and other pesky insects.

6. At this point you can make a choice of the short cut to the left, which goes directly to the Sanctuary Road. Or you could go to the right, to an observation mound overlooking the marsh, and then a walk through the field.

Birders won't want to miss the hike, for you might see: song sparrows, phoebes, yellowthroat warblers, Virginia and sora rails, yellow-headed blackbird, 5 species of swallows, wood ducks, blue-winged and green-winged teal, turkey, savannah sparrows, bluebirds, cat bird, wood thrush, house wren, mourning warbler, indigo bunting, green heron, black crowned night herons, kingbirds and many others.



7. This segment of the trail will lead you through a hedgerow. This hedgerow is so important not only because it provides shelter for numerous species of animals, but it also provides food for them. In addition, hedgerows also act as wind breaks, by stopping soil erosion and providing shelter to less hardy plants. Often they indicate where old fence lines use to be (this you will be able to notice upon exiting the hedgerow into the field). Take your time and look carefully through the hedge, there are signs of wildlife everywhere.



8. As you begin to enter the field notice how the vegetation in this area responds to disturbances through a series of successional stages. The first group of plants that will invade a recently disturbed area are called the “pioneer invaders”. They include a variety of herbs, shrubs, and trees whose seeds germinate best on sites recently burned, mowed, sprayed, or logged. These events knock back vegetation exposing the soil to direct sunlight, creating conditions favorable to the pioneer invaders. Because these plants can reproduce from root shoots and seeds, they can dominate a site for long periods of time.

The larger shrubs seem to represent the second successional stage, and trees the third. As pioneer invaders continue to dominate a site they create rich organic soil, which favors the growth of the larger shrubs and trees. Eventually the pioneer invaders die off as they become more and more shaded by the canopy of the trees. In the absence of another disturbance, the vegetation will most likely follow this sequence of succession from grassland to forest.