

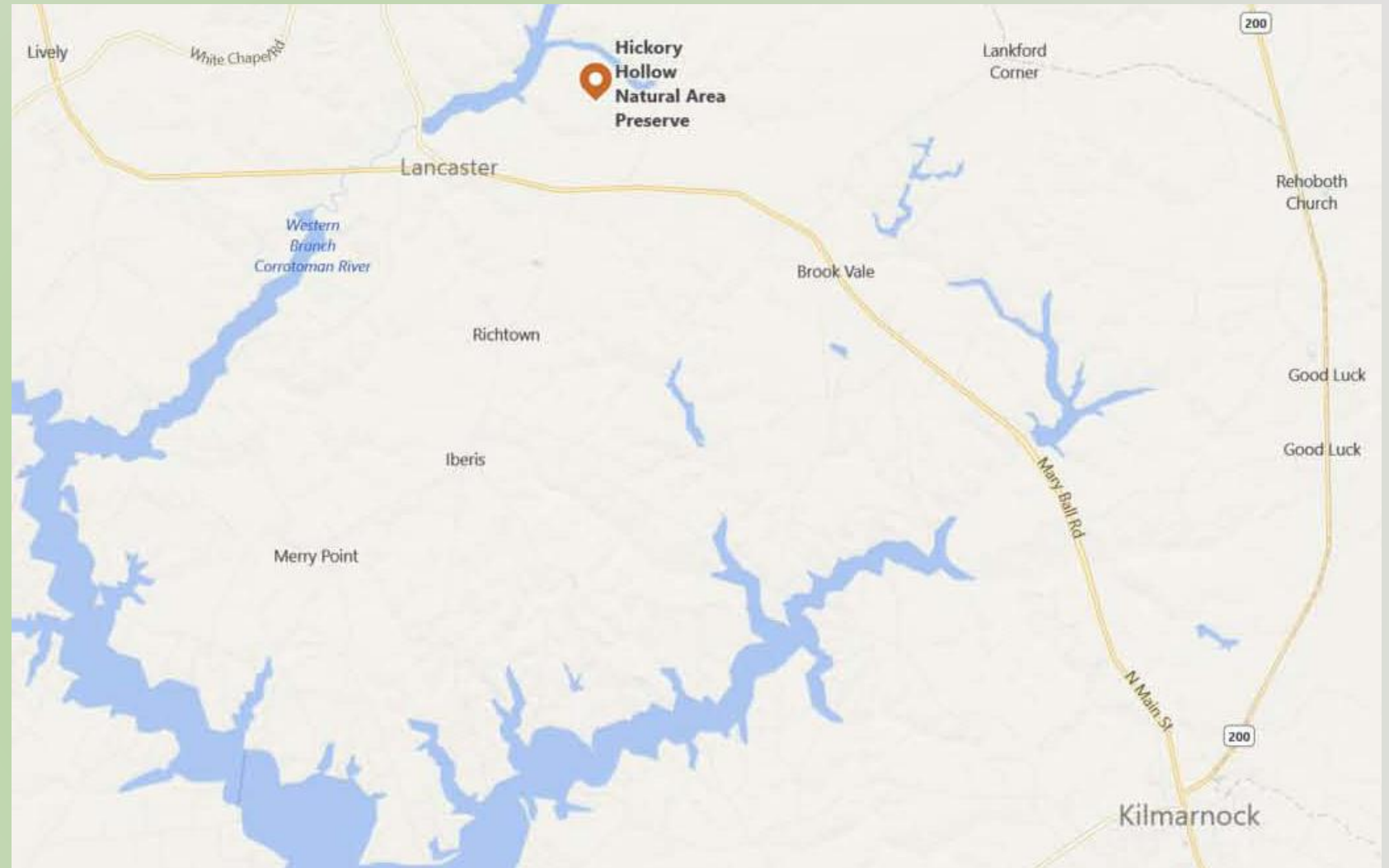
WELCOME
Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve
Virtual New Year's Day Walk
To View Skunk Cabbage

For a number of years, the Northern Neck Chapters of the Virginia Native Plant Society (founder of the walk), Audubon Society and Virginia Master Naturalists have cosponsored a New Year's Day walk to look at Skunk Cabbage at Cabin Swamp in Hickory Hollow. This year due to COVID-19, we have prepared this virtual walk which you may enjoy here or print out the map and take the walk yourself or with friends and family.

Hickory Hollow is one of 65 Virginia Natural Area Preserves established to protect some of the most significant natural environments in the State.

Owned by Lancaster County from 1877 to 2000, it was the County Poor Farm for the homeless and destitute until 1905.

In 1971, a Nature Trail was established and maintained by locals until July 12, 2000 when 254 acres were purchased from the County by the Northern Neck Chapter of the National Audubon Society. It was dedicated as an open-to-public Virginia Natural Area Preserve, owned by Audubon and managed by the Virginia Dept. of Conservation and Recreation.



Located on Regina Road (VA 604), off Route 3 just east of Lancaster. Preserve sign on Rt. 3. It is open from dawn to dusk with parking available.

Birds You May See or Hear

Residents

- American Crow
- Carolina Chickadee
- Downy Woodpecker
- Northern Cardinal
- Pine Warbler
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Chipping Sparrow
- Tufted Titmouse
- Barred Owl
- Wild Turkey

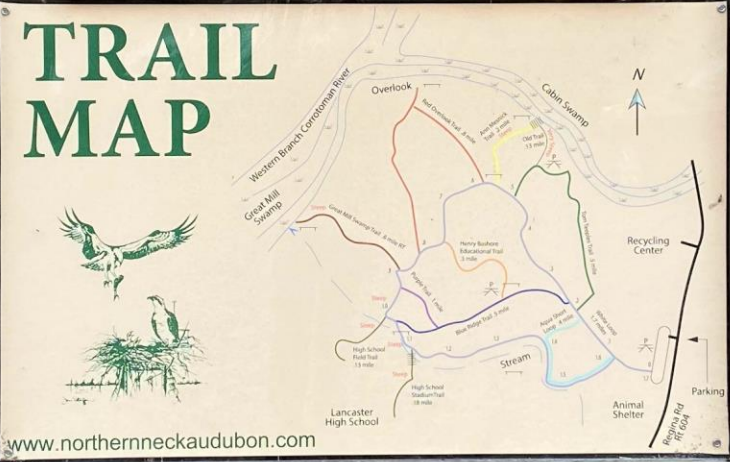
Migratory

- Oven Bird
- Scarlet Tanager
- Northern Parula
- Hooded Warbler
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Red-eyed Vireo

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In addition to the CDC guidelines, please do not allow proper disposal of your mask for the safety of volunteers and staff.

HICKORY HOLLOW NATURE TRAIL

TRAIL MAP



www.northernneckaudubon.com

Animals of Hickory Hollow

Mammals

- Eastern Chipmunk
- Skunk
- White-tailed Deer
- Virginia Opossum
- Gray Fox
- Common Raccoon

Amphibians & Reptiles

- Snake
- Salamander
- Eastern Box Turtle
- Spring Peeper

Insects & Spiders & Beetles

- Yug Beetle
- Water Spider
- Tick
- Butterfly & Moth
- Dragon Fly

THE WALK TO SEE SKUNK CABBAGE

Skunk Cabbage is our earliest blooming plant in Virginia and a most unusual one in many ways which you will discover later in this program.

The lands of Hickory Hollow drain into the Western Branch of the Corrotoman River and are bounded on the east and west sides by creeks with one draining down to Cabin Swamp where the Skunk Cabbage can be found. Several rare plant communities are found in Hickory Hollow including one of the very few globally rare natural communities known as a Coastal Plain Seepage Swamp. The swamp lies at the bottom of several ravines that have cut down into marine seashell deposits that were formed millions of years ago when the Coastal Plain was covered by the ocean.

The dissolving of the shell deposits has changed the soil and water chemistry of this small swamp area (22 acres) creating a habitat found in few other places on earth. This globally rare plant community contains plants that are unusual or rare in Virginia, yet it supports a high level of biological diversity.

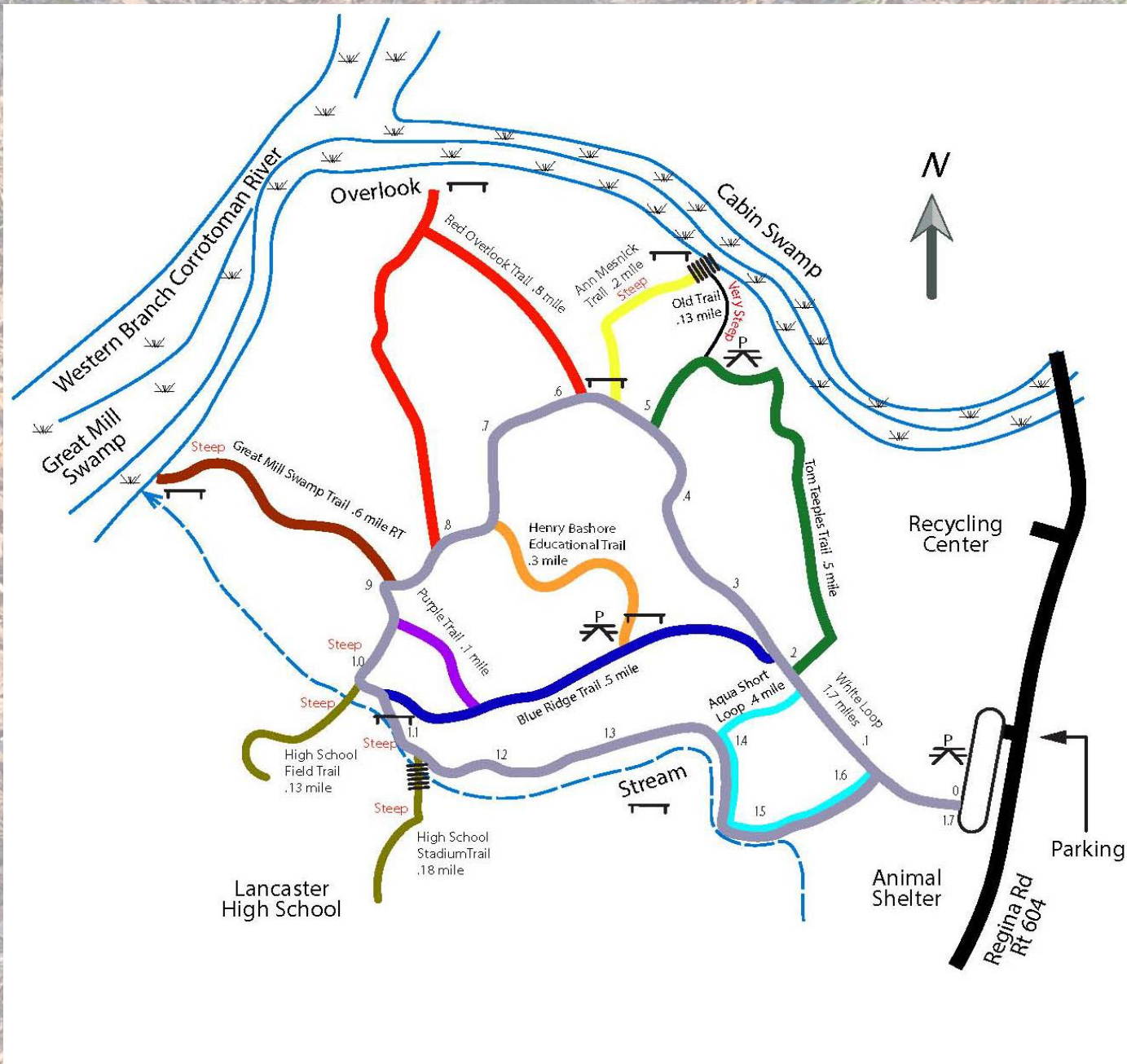
The elevation of Hickory Hollow ranges from about 80 feet down to about 10 feet with a few trails following these ravines including the one down to Cabin Swamp and the Skunk Cabbage.

CAUTION: The walk to Cabin Swamp is about a 1.5-mile walk. A portion of the Anne Messick Trail is downhill (and back up) a somewhat narrow, steep trail along a ravine, so we caution all to be aware and wear sturdy shoes or boots. That portion is less than one tenth of a mile one way.

Bring a mask in case you encounter others on the trail. Please leave no trace and stay on the trail and Boardwalk.

Hickory Hollow Trail Map

As you can see on the map, there are many trails through Hickory Hollow, all of which are marked with painted marks (blazes) on trees or posts. Trail colors correspond to colors on this map with the exception of the Grey colored trail on this map; it is actually marked as the White Trail in the Preserve.



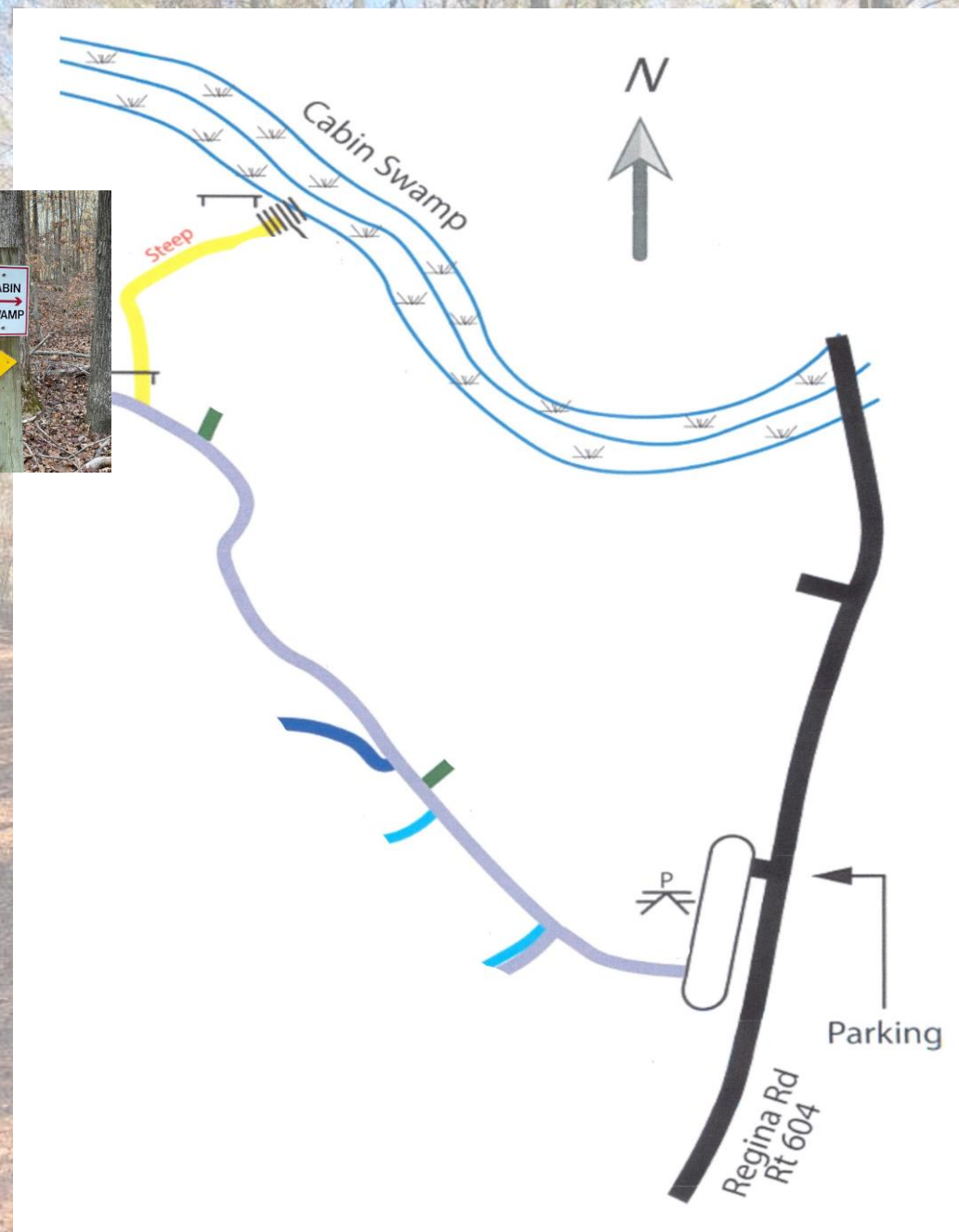
Post Blaze



Tree Blaze

Hickory Hollow Cabin Swamp Trail Map

- Head down the White trail (gray on map) which is a loop trail around the preserve
- Pass the Aqua Trail twice, it is also a loop trail
- Pass the Green and Blue Trails and the Green again as it too is a loop Trail
- When you reach the Yellow Trail, also called the Anne Messick Trail, this takes you to Cabin Swamp
- When you reach a Boardwalk, you have reached the Swamp and the home to Skunk Cabbage
- Footnote: Ann Messick was an amateur naturalist and founder of the Northern Neck Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society





Left Picture: Along your journey, you will see this trail marker and map. We often get asked what CCT stands for.

Under a long-standing agreement with Lancaster High School, their Cross-Country Team (CCT) uses the Preserve for both training and races, and this helps to keep runners on the correct trail. We trust it always works.

Right Pictures: Also, along your journey, you may notice a series of numbered posts and a series of informative plaques.

These correspond to a brochure the Audubon Chapter issued years ago, and many are out of date due to the life and death of the forest. The Chapter is in the process of updating these early in 2021. Stay tuned.



Cabin Swamp – A Rare Botanical Treasure

Cabin Swamp is a very rare coastal plain seepage swamp containing many rare plants including rare mountain disjuncts (species normally found in high elevation mountains of SW VA). An astonishing 500 species of plants have been reported from Cabin Swamp, as well as 125 species of birds. Several rare Dragonflies and Damselflies also depend on forested seeps like Cabin Swamp. It is a great spot to see several woodland butterflies in spring.

Green Ash, Tulip Poplars, Swamp Chestnut and other trees make up the overhead canopy, and Smooth Winterberry, Spicebush, Hazelnut, and Wild Raisin viburnum are common shrubs. Rare mountain disjuncts include: Marsh Marigolds blooming in March, American False-hellebore blooming in May, and the globally rare Kentucky Lady Slipper orchid. Other unusual plants include Skunk Cabbage, extraordinarily large specimens of Cinnamon, Royal, and Golden Chain Ferns, and many sedges. And of course, Skunk Cabbages thrive in the saturated soils of the swamp.

Be sure to return to Hickory Hollow and Cabin Swamp in spring when the swamp will be filled with hundreds of blooms and songbirds.

Note:

Although Cabin Swamp and its Skunk Cabbages are our ultimate destination on this walk, there are many wonderful winter plants to explore along the way. The following seven slides showcase just a few of these. Keep a sharp eye out, as there are many others to explore and plenty of reasons to return to Hickory Hollow in every season.



Cabin Swamp full of lush foliage - late May

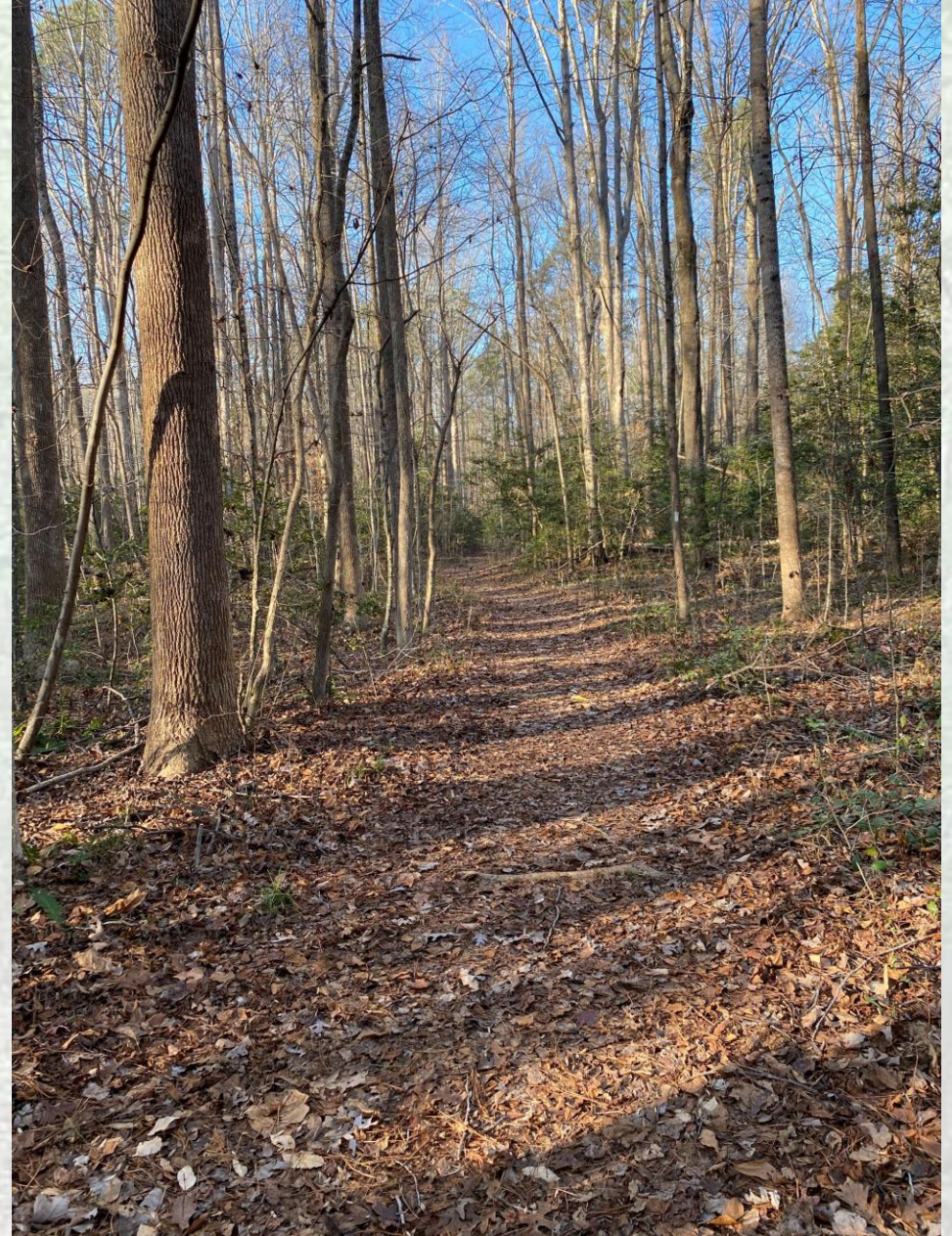


Skunk Cabbage foliage in Mid-March

The Oak Hickory Forest

As you begin your walk down the White Trail into Hickory Hollow you are in the midst of an Oak Hickory forest, and as you might guess, Oaks and Hickories are the dominant species. These tall deciduous trees make up the canopy or overstory layer of the forest and lose their leaves in fall to conserve energy during in the cold winter months.

White, Northern Red, and Southern Red Oaks are common in this coastal plain forest as is the Mockernut Hickory and all provide abundant acorns and nuts for a variety of wildlife. Take a moment to admire the various types of bark and branching structure that light up the winter forest.



Loblolly Pines

You will notice some evergreen Loblolly Pines along the trail that are remnants of a past forest. Planted for timber in the early part of the 20th century, their young saplings are not shade tolerant and will not regenerate in the shade of the Oak-hickory forest.

Notice the rugged bark with its thick plates that help protect loblollies from fires. They have long, lustrous needles in bundles of three that remain on the tree for several years before dropping.



Ironwood & American Holly



Ironwood, sometimes called Musclewood, and American Holly are common understory trees along the Trail.

Ironwood, often with multiple trunks, is easily recognizable by its the smooth, sinewy gray bark. The wood is extremely strong and was used to make bowls, tools, and ox yokes. Being deciduous, the Ironwood loses its leaves in the fall.

American Holly is a very common evergreen understory tree in coastal plain forests, and is readily identified by its spiny leaves and the bright red berries on female trees. It is quite shade tolerant and at home in the deciduous forests and provides shelter and food for hungry winter birds. Their evergreen leaves really add a sparkle to the winter woods.



Cranefly Orchids

Near the beginning of the path, you may notice some oval evergreen leaves with pleated veins and raised spots/bumps. Turn a leaf over and notice if it is deep purple – very distinctive. These are the leaves of the curious Cranefly Orchid. The leaves emerge each fall. The leaves remain all winter and then go dormant in late spring when the forest canopy closes overhead as the temperatures rise.



As if by magic, the leafless, wispy flowering stems emerge in mid-summer be-decked with tiny pale greenish-brown flowers, that look for all the world like tiny crane flies taking wing! They bloom from July to September and are worth a return trip to Hickory Hollow in late summer. Cranefly orchids are found throughout the Southeast especially in moist and mixed Forests.

Running Cedar



Running-cedar or Ground Pine is a member of the Clubmosses, a primitive group of plants that have thrived since the age of the dinosaurs. This evergreen plant forms large patches of evergreen groundcover in woodlands with creeping stems and scale-like evergreen leaves. In spring it sends up forked shoots that carry spores to reproduce. In fall, enormous clouds of yellow dust-like spores disperse to make new plants. These oily spores have been and continue to be used to make flash powder for a variety of uses.

For example, this “Lycopodium Powder” creates small explosions for the circus, science lab, theater and film industries.

Running-cedar is commonly found in dry, acidic forests, but is a slow grower. Once used for holiday decorations, these ancient plants are very slow-growing; a large colony may be decades old and *should not be collected or moved*. Large colonies of Running-cedar can be seen along the White Trail.



Christmas Fern

Christmas Fern is very common plant along the trails in Hickory Hollow. This evergreen fern grows in clumps and is extremely adaptable to dry or moist soils. You will find it along streams, swamps, and on dry ridges, and even lining the steep slopes of ravines.

The evergreen fronds of this fern are leathery and each leaflet (called a pinna) has a small lobe or toe at its base. Children supposedly called this the toe of “Santa’s boot”. This and the fact that Christmas ferns used in Christmas arrangements gave rise to its common name.

Like the Clubmosses, ferns are an ancient group of plants that existed long before flowering plants. They reproduce with spores which develop in tan spore cases or bumps beneath the tips of the fertile fronds.



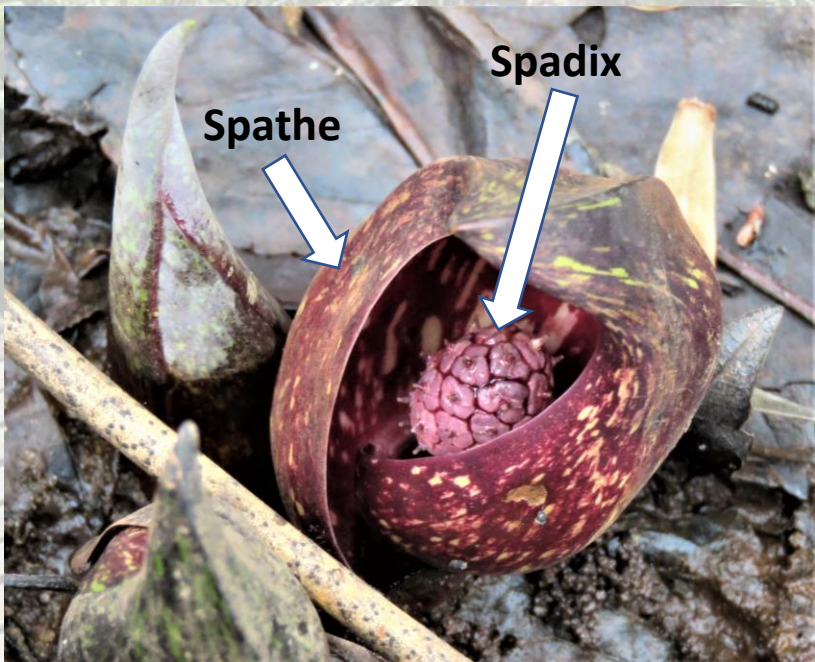
Virginia Heartleaf, Heartleaf Ginger, or 'Little Brown Jugs'

Virginia Heartleaf is a beautiful low evergreen perennial with heart-shaped green leaves mottled with silver and pale green along the veins. The leathery leaves develop from fleshy aromatic roots that produce only one new leaf each spring. Both the leaves and the roots smell like ginger giving rise to one of the common names.

The small early spring flowers are equally distinctive but often hidden at ground level beneath the foliage and leaf litter. The flowers are often referred to as "little brown jugs", a name that suits them well. Each flower is purplish-brown in color and bell-shaped with three fleshy lobes that flare out revealing the speckled interior. The flowers are pollinated by ants and other tiny insects that crawl into the flowers.

Virginia Heartleaf is found in acidic soils in moist to dry woods and can be seen along most trails at Hickory Hollow, but is especially abundant along ravine slopes and moist soils near the edges of Cabin Swamp.





Our Destination: Skunk Cabbage

Skunk Cabbage grows only in the rich wet environment of swamps and wetlands. At Hickory Hollow it is found at the end of the Ann Messick Trail along the Boardwalk at the Cabin Swamp and is a dominant component of the swamp flora.

Skunk Cabbages are the earliest wildflower to bloom in our area often in full bloom by January 1. As you might imagine, a wildflower blooming in the dead of winter has developed some fascinating adaptations to attract pollinators. The tiny flowers have no petals and are held on a club-like structure (Spadix) and is surrounded by a fleshy hood (spathe) that partially encloses and protects the flowers. The hood is a dark purplish-burgundy color with spots/mottling. The plant emits a skunky or fetid odor to attract its pollinators and carrion flies that are enticed inside to lay their eggs on what appears to be rotting meat.

They have another trick up their hood, so to speak. The plants are able to generate enough heat to raise the temperature inside the hood well above freezing, even when snow is on the ground.

Once the plants have flowered, the huge cabbage-like leaves emerge and form lush tropical-look to the swamp. As temperature rises and the wet soil conditions dry up, the foliage dies back to await the following winter.

Do Watch Our Website for A Virtual Spring Walk To See Some of Hickory Hollow's Beauties



A photograph of a yellow-tipped coral fungus (Ramaria flammula) growing on a tree trunk. The fungus has a thick, white base that branches out into numerous thin, yellow-tipped stalks. The background is a soft-focus forest floor with brown leaves and green foliage.

Presentation & Photographs by:

**Kevin Howe & Betsy Washington
Board Members of Northern Neck Chapter, National Audubon Society**

Technical Help from Kyle Langford

Support from other Chapter Board Members:

**Paula Bounty
Joe Cooney
Buz Cox
Maggie Gerdts
Beth Kendrick
Les Kilduff
Kyle Langford
Porter Washington**

Background Photo is a Yellow Tipped Coral Fungus, a Summer-Fall resident of Hickory Hollow