

# Forest Preserves of Cook County, Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Natural Communities of Bunker Hill

Erin Haase, Michael Bingaman & John Balaban  
North Branch Restoration Project

Photos: Erin Haase, Michael Bingaman, Caroline Smith, Kathryn Corio, and J&J Balaban. Produced by Erin Haase, Michael Bingaman, and J&J Balaban.



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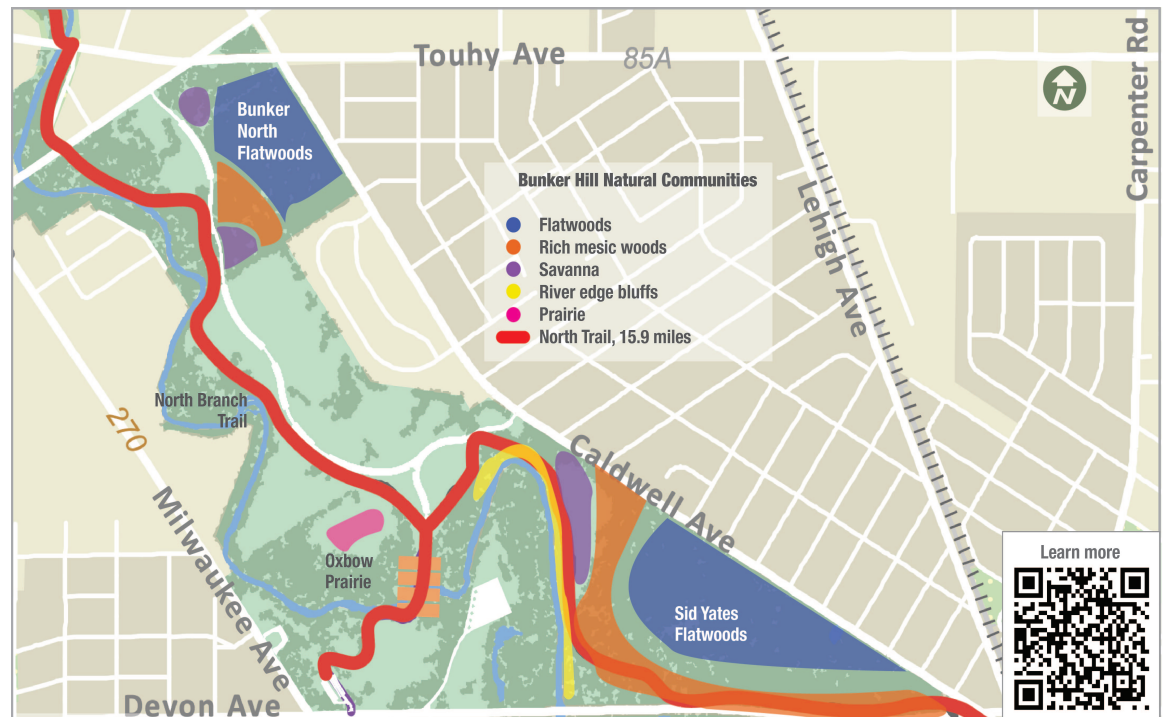
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The rich native biodiversity of the Bunker Hill preserves can be categorized into five natural communities, defined by topography, canopy cover, and soil moisture: prairie, savanna, river edge, mesic woodland, and flatwoods. Each of these communities is discussed in detail in the following pages. However, they are not separated by clean lines as on the map below; they have rough transition zones called ecotones. Fingers of mesic woods reach into the flatwoods. Open areas of the savanna are quite prairie-like in their appearance and in the plants that choose to grow there; they function as prairies for animals with limited range such as grasshoppers and voles, but not for grassland birds that need large open spaces uninterrupted by trees. In addition, many creatures need multiple communities to thrive—nesting in one community but feeding in another, for example. In fact, most of the species listed for each community can also occasionally be found in other communities; we just picked where they are most likely to be seen, and there is much more to be seen here.

One factor all these communities have in common is that they are all fire-dependent to some degree. Many shade-intolerant plants, such as oaks and prairie grasses, create highly flammable fuels that support frequent burning and set back their competitors for light. Historically, natural fires (and those set intentionally by indigenous peoples) cleared out dead vegetation to allow sunlight to reach the soil. In our highly developed landscape, prescribed fire is now employed in controlled settings to maintain healthy communities. Without these prescribed burns, many of our preserves would in time revert to dense, dark thickets of invasive brush.

A dedicated group of volunteers meets every weekend to help to take care of Bunker Hill, restore the biodiversity and health of the preserve. All are welcome. Go to <https://northbranchrestoration.org/events/> to find out more.



Base map provided courtesy of the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

### The Forest Preserves of Cook County Land Acknowledgment:

The Forest Preserves of Cook County acknowledges that we are on the lands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi—as well as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki peoples.

We acknowledge that we have played a role in shaping the histories of local Native Americans by acquiring this land. We also recognize, share and celebrate their immemorial ties to this land.

We commit ourselves to developing deeper partnerships that advocate for the progress, dignity and humanity of the many diverse Native Americans who still live and practice their heritage and traditions on this land today.



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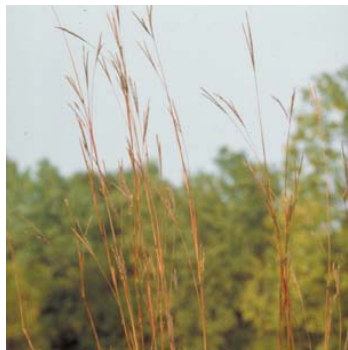
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### Prairie

In the center of Bunker Hill, the North Branch Trail runs along a shady bluff. Down the ridge and across an old riverbed you will come to a sun-filled treeless opening with wildflowers and tall grasses. This is the Oxbow Prairie, named after the old bends in the river that formed the topography here. In addition to the mesic prairie on the upper terrace, the lower levels also contain a wet prairie and sedge meadows.



1 *Andropogon gerardi*  
**Big Bluestem Grass**

This prairie tallgrass can be eight feet tall and is also called Turkeyfoot after the shape of the seedheads.



2 *Silphium laciniatum*  
**Compass Plant**

It towers over the prairie in mid-summer. Its deeply lobed basal leaves orient themselves north to south.



3 *Parthenium integrifolium*  
**Wild Quinine**

The paper white flowers attract pollinators in early summer.



4 *Prenanthes (Nabalus) racemosa*  
**Smooth Prairie Lettuce**

This wonderful purple flower in the lettuce family is now uncommon in Illinois.



5 *Dalea purpurea*  
**Purple Prairie Clover**

A favorite of bumblebees, this legume fixes nitrogen in dry and well-drained sandy soils.



6 *Arnoglossum plantagineum*  
**Prairie Indian Plantain**

Pepoon writes of seeing fields of thousands before most wet prairies were drained for agriculture.



7 *Sporobolus heterolepis*  
**Northern Dropseed Grass**

This fine grass forms clumps on the open prairie and its flowers and seeds smell like popcorn in early fall.



8 *Amorpha canescens*  
**Leadplant**

This prairie shrub is an indicator of high-quality dry prairie and is another nitrogen soil fixer.



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### Prairie



9 *Baptisia alba*  
**White Wild Indigo**  
This beautiful legume is favored by deer which has greatly reduced its population in recent years.



10 *Allium cernuum*  
**Nodding Wild Onion**  
The wild cousin of many ornamental onions. Seeds itself prolifically on the open prairie.



11 *Pedicularis canadensis*  
**Wood (Prairie) Betony**  
This hemiparasite draws nutrients from the roots of tall grasses diminishing them & promoting diversity.



12 *Liatris spicata*  
**Dense Blazing Star**  
These showy purple spikes dance across the prairie in late summer – a favorite of Swallowtails.



13 *Solidago juncea*  
**Early Goldenrod**  
The first goldenrod to bloom (in July) Goldenrods are not wind pollinated so they do not cause hay fever.



14 *Schizachyrium scoparium*  
**Little Bluestem Grass**  
In fall this grass turns a rusty red with almost transparent fluffy white seeds.



15 *Oenothera pilosella*  
**Prairie Sundrops**  
These eye-catching yellow flowers bloom during the day and attract sweat bees & other native pollinators.



16 *Celithemis eponina*  
**Halloween Pennant**  
You will find this lovely perched on the tops of stems even on windy days giving it its pennant name.



17 *Hemaris thysbe*  
**Hummingbird Clearwing**  
This large moth beats its wings so quickly it appears to float while it nectars on Monarda & other flowers.



18 *Sphecius speciosus*  
**Eastern Cicada Killer**  
This large but peaceful (unless you're a cicada) wasp nectars on Rattlesnake Master, then fueled, it hunts cicadas.



19 *Mydas tibialis*  
**Golden Legged Mydas Fly**  
Rattlesnake Master flowers provide nectar for many insect species including this amazing huge fly.



20 *Libellula luctuosa*  
**Widow Skimmer**  
The skimmers feed like flycatchers, perching and waiting for lunch to fly by before zooming out to grab it.



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### Savanna

The savanna community can be found in the south section of the Bunker Hill complex, along the east side of the bike trail. It is characterized by widely spaced oaks and open areas, and transitions gradually into denser woodland to the east. The partial shade conditions of the savanna create good habitat for plant species typical of both prairie and woodlands. The subsurface clay soils lead to poor drainage and fairly wet conditions, with standing water evident during much of the spring season.



21 *Quercus macrocarpa*  
**Bur Oak**  
This white oak group member has thick, corky bark and twigs, which helps it survive periodic fires.



22 *Quercus palustris*  
**Pin Oak**  
This red oak group member has pointy leaves with deep sinuses. Low branches appear dead and scraggly.



23 *Agalinis tenuifolia*  
**Slender-leaved False Foxglove**  
Distinguished from *A. purpurea* by having smaller flowers and long pedicels. Found in wetter areas.



24 *Asclepias sullivantii*  
**Sullivant's Prairie Milkweed**  
Distinguished from common milkweed by bright pink, upright flower clusters and waxy leaves.



25 *Dasistoma macrophylla*  
**Mullein Foxglove**  
Easily identified in winter by stiff, dark brown stems and round stalkless seed capsules. Prefers partial shade.



26 *Gentianella quinquefolia*  
**Stiff Gentian**  
Flowers lighter purple and much more numerous than other gentians. Found in prairie and open savanna.



27 *Lysimachia quadriflora*  
**Prairie Loosestrife**  
A high-quality resident of wetter areas in the prairie and savanna; abundant in the north part of savanna.



28 *Rosa setigera*  
**Climbing Prairie Rose**  
Our only rose that consistently has 3 leaflets on each leaf; its canes climb and drape over other vegetation.



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### Savanna



29 *Rudbeckia subtomentosa*  
**Sweet Coneflower**  
This robust plant has multiple flowers per stem, long petals, lobed leaves, and very hairy pale green stems.



30 *Oxypolis rigidior*  
**Cowbane**  
Similar to Queen Anne's lace, but flower heads are less dense and domed rather than flat.



31 *Phlox glaberrima*  
**Smooth (Marsh) Phlox**  
Distinguished from *Phlox pilosa* by hairless stems and leaves, and flowers in summer rather than spring.



32 *Spartina pectinata*  
**Prairie Cordgrass**  
A tall, coarse grass found in wet open prairie. Abundant along the E-W trail that bisects the savanna.



33 *Carex gracillima*  
**Graceful Sedge**  
This high-quality yet common sedge is easy to spot with its long, narrow, pendulous inflorescences.



34 *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*  
**Narrowleaf Mountain Mint**  
Strong minty smell; found in open and shady areas of savanna. A favorite of pollinators!



35 *Sphex pensylvanicus*  
**Great Black Wasp**  
Important pollinator of mountain mint, milkweeds, rattlesnake master, and wild bergamot.



36 *Lithobates pipiens*  
**Northern Leopard Frog**  
Has been spotted hanging out in wet areas of the north savanna opening, enjoying the recent brush clearing.



37 *Papilio glaucus*  
**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail**  
Enjoys nectaring at a large variety of savanna flowers. Females often have a dark form that looks very different.



38 *Pantala flavescens*  
**Wandering Glider**  
Large dragonfly found zooming high above the savanna in hordes. Rarely sits down long enough for photos.



39 *Scolopax minor*  
**American Woodcock**  
This secretive bird does a spectacular mating ritual in the savanna at dusk in early spring; a treat to witness!



40 *Junonia coenia*  
**Common Buckeye**  
Common savanna resident; caterpillars feed on a variety of plants including Agalinis and Plantago.



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### River Edge

The (relatively) high bluffs overlooking the North Branch of the Chicago River are characterized by well-drained soils and drier conditions than the rest of the complex. The narrow strip between the bike path and the river has widely spaced oaks that allow dappled light to reach the ground, and the drier soils allow for sparse, low vegetation. Erosion due to river flooding and off-trail hiking has led to instability of the bluff, with large sections sliding downslope. Please use delicate steps when exploring this area!



41 *Aureolaria grandiflora*  
**Yellow False Foxglove**  
Very similar cousin to mullein foxglove, but has larger, stalked flowers. Puts on a show in August.



42 *Camassia scilloides*  
**Wild Hyacinth**  
Spectacular spring wildflower whose early stalks look like asparagus spears.



43 *Moehringia lateriflora*  
**Grove Sandwort**  
This low-growing beauty pops up in spring in barer areas along the bluff where there is low competition.



44 *Taenidia integerrima*  
**Yellow Pimpernel**  
The delicate, widely spaced florets of these firework-shaped umbels are difficult to capture in a photograph!



45 *Symphotrichum shortii*  
**Short's Aster**  
This fall bloomer can be distinguished from the similar *S. drummondii* by its entire leaves with wingless petioles.



46 *Euonymus obovatus*  
**Running Strawberry-bush**  
A low-growing trailing shrub with green stems and bright red seeds in bizarre spiky pink seed capsules.



47 *Boechera laevigata*  
**Smooth Bank Cress**  
A graceful, understated member of the mustard family, growing in well-drained open areas along the bluff.



48 *Lonicera reticulata*  
**Grape Honeysuckle**  
One of our nice native honeysuckle vines. You're lucky if you catch it in flower--it needs lots of sunlight!



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### River Edge



49 *Lithospermum latifolium*  
**American Gromwell**  
This forb has a shrub-like growth form and has seeds like tiny white marbles.



50 *Silene stellata*  
**Starry Campion**  
Flowers open during the evening and early morning, but close up midday. Stem leaves occur in whorls of 4.



51 *Brachyelytrum erectum*  
**Long-awned Wood Grass**  
This delicate, high-quality grass has wide, flat leaves and grows in dense colonies on the slopes of the bluff.



52 *Hystrix patula*  
**Bottlebrush Grass**  
One of the easiest grasses to identify, this grass is common in open woods all along the North Branch.



53 *Carex sprengei*  
**Long-beaked Sedge**  
The narrow, pale green leaves of this distinctive dangly sedge forms sprawling ring-shaped clumps.



54 *Ptelea trifoliata*  
**Wafer Ash**  
The 3 leaflets of this shrub can easily be mistaken for poison ivy, but are not as toothy.



55 *Enchenopa* sp.  
**Two-marked Treehopper**  
White splotches (egg masses) on the undersides of wafer ash branches are a giveaway to this insect's location.



56 *Papilio cressphontes*  
**Eastern Giant Swallowtail**  
This caterpillar feeds on the citrus leaves of wafer ash and is a dead ringer for bird droppings.



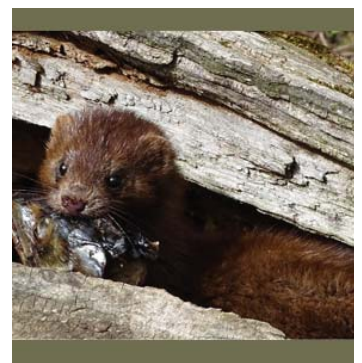
57 *Aix sponsa*  
**Wood Duck**  
Beautiful duck that nests in trees in the woods and flatwoods near water and visits the North Branch.



58 *Ardea herodias*  
**Great Blue Heron**  
An iconic wading bird that can be found flying over the river or stalking prey in the shallows.



59 *Calopteryx maculata* (M)  
**Ebony Jewelwing**  
A damselfly that hangs around slow-moving water; females are drab with two white spots on the upper wings.



60 *Neogale vison*  
**American Mink**  
Sightings of this river carnivore have become more frequent as cleanups and restoration improve habitat.



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### Rich Mesic Woodland

“Mesic” refers to the relative moisture levels in the soil and means that the soil is not overly wet nor dry, but somewhere in between. The most spectacular displays of wildflowers are in the early spring, before the tree canopy blocks out the majority of sunlight from the woodland floor. Look for them in the meandering creek bed to the east of the savanna; there are trails along the top of the bluffs lining both sides of the creek. To reach them, take the E-W trail that crosses the center of the savanna from the bike trail.



61 *Quercus alba*  
**White Oak**  
This oak has pale gray, sometimes patchy bark and leaves with smooth, rounded lobes.



62 *Ostrya virginiana*  
**American Hophornbeam**  
A small understory tree with “cat-scratch” bark, finely-toothed leaves, and dangly hop-like fruits.



63 *Carya cordiformis*  
**Bitternut Hickory**  
Also called mustard-bud hickory, this tree is easy to find in the winter with its bright yellow leaf buds.



64 *Fraxinus quadrangulata*  
**Blue Ash**  
Still hanging on in the wake of the emerald ash-borer beetle, this ash has distinctive square twigs.



65 *Sanguinaria canadensis*  
**Bloodroot**  
One of our first spring wildflowers to bloom, this plant is indicative of healthy woodland.



66 *Podophyllum peltatum*  
**Mayapple**  
A single white flower hangs below the umbrella-like leaves, which can form large colonies.



67 *Hepatica acutiloba*  
**Sharp-lobed Hepatica**  
Another very early bloomer, this flower tends to inhabit sunny, south-facing slopes at Bunker Hill.



68 *Enemion biternatum*  
**False Rue Anemone**  
This low-growing spring ephemeral is distinguished from other anemones by its tiny, mitten-shaped leaves.



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### Rich Mesic Woodland



69 *Arisaema triphyllum*  
**Jack-in-the-Pulpit**  
This odd cousin to calla lilies has three leaflets and a spadix hidden by a droopy green spathe.



70 *Arisaema dracontium*  
**Green Dragon**  
The elongate, yellow flower is hidden beneath a flat, C-shaped array of many leaflets.



71 *Maianthemum canadense*  
**Canada Mayflower**  
A boreal relict left over from colder glacial periods, this elusive plant can be found in cool, shady spots.



72 *Cardamine concatenata*  
**Toothwort**  
A very early spring ephemeral in the mustard family; has finely divided leaves and 4-petaled flowers.



73 *Trillium grandiflorum*  
**Large White Trillium**  
Once abundant, this showy spring wildflower is now rare due to deer browse. Look for it along Devon!



74 *Erythronium albidum*  
**White Trout Lily**  
The purple-splotted leaves form dense colonies in the spring that sport dangling white flowers.



75 *Carex pensylvanica*  
**Pennsylvania Sedge**  
This common, early spring-blooming woodland sedge forms a turf in some areas that resembles a lawn.



76 *Cinna arundinacea*  
**Wood Reed**  
A graceful grass that blooms in late summer in sun-dappled areas.



77 *Canis latrans*  
**Coyote**  
This canid is making a comeback and is now a frequent sight; they are shy and not considered a threat!



78 *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*  
**Red-headed Woodpecker**  
Declining in other areas, this species has responded well to woodland restoration in the Chicago area.



79 *Schizocopa crassipes*  
**Brush-legged Wolf Spider**  
These spiders hunt on foot for their prey instead of building webs; they can be found patrolling the leaf litter.



80 *Araneus marmoreus*  
**Marbled Orb Weaver**  
In October this beauty will curl a leaf hideaway at a corner of her large orb web, dropping quickly as prey lands.



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### Flatwoods

Just below the surface of the oak hickory woodlands found along Caldwell road, there is a layer of clay. In the spring, water pools on the surface here creating a matrix of habitats in this tree-covered wetland. By summer the ground is dry again. This unique plant community is well represented at Bunker Hill with two large examples of intact flatwoods.



81 *Quercus bicolor*  
**Swamp White Oak**  
Swamp white and pin oaks grow in these wet areas creating the cathedral-like character of the flatwoods.



82 *Carpinus caroliniana*  
**Musclewood**  
The smooth barked musclewood can be found in the understory - its fruits resembling Christmas ornaments.



83 *Zanthoxylum americanum*  
**Prickly Ash**  
This thorny native citrus forms thickets near the flatwoods. Another host for swallowtail butterflies.



84 *Lindera benzoin*  
**Spicebush**  
Visit the flatwoods in early spring to see (and smell) the bright yellow flowers of spicebush.



85 *Carex bromoides*  
**Flatwoods Tussock Sedge** The green clumps of this eye-pleasing sedge are found in the wettest areas of the flatwoods.



86 *Carex squarrosa*  
**Narrow-leaved Cattail Sedge** A wide variety of sedge species make up the wet ground layer here; this is one of the most common.



87 *Onoclea sensibilis*  
**Sensitive Fern**  
Sensitive fern turns brown at the first freeze but its separate fertile fronds stay up all winter.



88 *Thelypteris palustris*  
**Marsh Fern**  
Marsh fern is recovering its place at Bunker North as restoration opens the canopy and lets in sunlight.



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### Flatwoods



89 *Cardamine douglassii*  
**Purple Cress**  
In April the flatwoods put on a show with these delicate purple flowers.



90 *Scutellaria lateriflora*  
**Mad Dog Skullcap**  
Named after the cap shape of the seedheads, this mint family flower is avoided by foraging deer.



91 *Chelone glabra*  
**Turtlehead**  
Turtlehead flowers of are just the right shape but a tight squeeze for a bumblebee visit. See the turtle heads?



92 *Dioscorea villosa*  
**Wild Yam**  
This delicate herbaceous vine climbing on shrubs in the flatwoods has the most beautiful of leaves.



93 *Lobelia cardinalis*  
**Cardinal Flower**  
Cardinal flower brightens the sunniest wet areas in late July. This lovely flower is returning in restored areas.



94 *Archilochus colubris*  
**Ruby-throated Hummingbird**  
You may find this hummingbird darting through the flatwoods especially seeking cardinal flower.



95 *Bubo virginianus*  
**Great Horned Owl**  
Owls make their home in these woods. You may be lucky to see them fly away on silent wings.



96 *Micrathena gracilis*  
**Spined Micrathena**  
The large webs of this orbweaver are commonly found in oak hickory woodlands – at face height!



97 *Anaxyrus americanus*  
**American Toad**  
Toads are very successful amphibians in these urban wetlands. The males' trills fill the spring air.



98 *Apioperdon pyriforme*  
**Pear-shaped Puffball**  
Disturb these and their spores puff out. Frequently found atop rotting logs.



99 *Omphalotus illudens*  
**Jack O'Lantern Mushroom**  
Decomposition is sped along by these wood eating fungi. This one glows in the dark!



100 *Stereum complicatum*  
**Crowded Parchment**  
This colorful fungus decomposes dead trees and sometimes forms a thin, paper-like crust on the bark.



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### Other plants and animals you may see on a visit to Bunker Hill

White-tailed deer, while lovely creatures, are severely overpopulated here. They do great damage at these population levels to the natural communities here – as well as to our vehicles as they cross neighboring roads. Deer forage selectively on plant species. Whole banks of large-flowered trillium that filled the woods in the past are now gone, as are the showy Michigan lilies that grew in the savanna. Deer belong here and should always be here, but the population must be brought into balance. Since the natural predators of deer (such as wolves and cougars) have been eradicated from Illinois, selective culling must be employed to reduce the number of deer to a healthy level.



101 *Odocoileus virginianus*  
**White-tailed Deer**

Herds of nearly 20 individuals have been seen here in the winter (and that's probably not even all of them). That's roughly 1 deer per 12 acres... while to have healthy biodiverse ecosystems requires about 50 acres per animal.



102 *Lilium michiganense*  
**Michigan Lily**

You'll see these flowers ablaze in July...if a lucky individual manages to escape the notice of the herd.



103 *Veronicastrum virginicum*  
**Culver's Root**

These candelabra-like inflorescences act as a beacon to many pollinators in the prairie and savanna.



104 *Asclepias incarnata*  
**Swamp Milkweed**

This resident of wet, open areas has narrower leaves than most other milkweeds and deep pink flowers.



105 *Euchaetes egle*  
**Milkweed Tussock Moth**

Monarchs aren't the only caterpillars to feed on milkweeds; these gaudy fuzzballs are stiff competition.



106 *Ischnura hastata* and *verticalis*  
**Citrine & Eastern Forktails**

Delicate damselflies move slowly through the vegetation inspecting stems and leaves for small prey.



107 *Diaperomera femorata*  
**Walkingstick (female and male)**

They spend most of their time feeding on leaves up in the oaks but sometimes fall down and visit us.



108 *Buteo jamaicensis*  
**Red-tailed Hawk**

Their large, chunky bodies are designed to soar in wide open spaces over prairies & waterways.



109 *Lasiurus borealis*  
**Eastern Red Bat**

Very secretive, these tiny winged mammals can sometimes be found in the daytime sleeping under leaves.



110 *Magicicada*  
**Periodical Cicada**

Coming in 2024! When this brood emerges, their deafening chorus will be well worth a visit.