



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP MATTERS

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR AT THE RACE TRACK NATURE PRESERVE: WINTER

Welcome to the Tuxedo Park Race Track Nature Preserve. Winter at the Preserve is a special time, the quiet, muted colors and subtle shapes and forms are truly offered only once a year. Now is the time to appreciate the bowl nature of the preserve, the shape and height of the trees and the hearty creatures, residents and migrants, who are out and about.

Layout

James D. Hays, professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and a fellow Tuxedo Park resident, shares his thoughts on the Tree Advisory Board website about the creation of the topography of the track, a meadow in a bowl surrounded by trees, which is unique in the Hudson Highlands. <http://www.tptreeboard.org/> On warm days water from melting snow and ice flows into the preserve, slowed by the trees, fallen and upright, filtered through the grasses and other vegetation, and absorbed finally to exit under Clubhouse Road as Augusta Brook, a tributary to the Ramapo River. The Ramapo River supplies an EPA recognized "sole source aquifer" which provides drinking water to several million people in NY and NJ.

Native Trees

The easiest trees to identify are the huge, **Eastern White Pines (*Pinus strobus*)**. Though its silhouette is irregular, the White Pine has a straight grey-green trunk and reaches heights of over 80 feet. The needles are long, soft, thin, bluish-green in bundles of five. The pine cones are slender about 6 inches in length. The seeds are enjoyed by black bears, squirrels and birds. Nuthatches, woodpeckers, and chickadees are amongst the numerous birds who nest in White Pines. White Pines are even host trees (a host plant provides a nesting site and or food source) to butterflies, the Eastern Pine Elfin.



Another native tree in the Race Track is the **White Oak (*Quercus alba*)** and its winter silhouette shows its widespread canopy which, when covered in leaves, provide shade. A large tree, the White Oak can also reach 80 feet, has large, nearly right angled to the trunk, branches up to 45 feet in length and can live for centuries. The light grey bark of the White Oak has vertical ridges with horizontal breaks. Nearly two hundred species of wildlife use the white oak acorns as food. Warblers, resident and migratory, and other birds feast on the moths and butterflies hosted by White Oaks when they bloom in the spring. Living and dead White Oaks provide cavities for dozens of different birds from the small chickadees to the large owls and hairy woodpeckers, all year-round residents of Tuxedo Park.



Another tall tree (over 100 feet) is the **Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)** with a straight trunk, often forking into two or more main stems with a symmetric, somewhat upside down pyramidal crown, i.e. usually wider than tall with many branches. The bark is smooth and light brown or grey when young, becoming darker and irregularly furrowed as the tree matures. The Cottonwood loves the moist soil of the Race Track.



Tracks

Check the snow and mud for the tracks of white-tailed deer, grey squirrel, red-tailed fox, and wild turkeys. Print out a wildlife track guide to take with you.

https://www.fws.gov/newengland/pdfs/track_card.pdf

Birds

Overhead look for soaring Red-tailed Hawks, year-round residents. According to John Yrizarry, Preserve Naturalist, a couple of **Red-tailed Hawks** have nested nearby for years. If you see a large nest at the top of a tall tree, let us know! Large, hefty, white bellied, a soft brown raptor, adults have a red tail, immatures have brown tails with dark bands. This fall, a young Red-tailed Hawk has been repeatedly seen over the Race Track and lingering along Tuxedo Road, harassed by American Crows and hunting and eating squirrels.



In the trees, look for **Pileated Woodpeckers**, a very large woodpecker, black with bold white stripes along neck and a bright red crest. Pileated Woodpeckers have a long, chisel-like bill. Listen for the sound of them whacking dead trees and fallen logs for their favorite meal, carpenter ants. The holes they create are rectangular and become essential shelters to other birds and bats.



Also among the trees and on the ground, you will see and hear **American Crows**, another large bird like the Pileated Woodpeckers. Crows are jet black, and during flight, the wingtip feathers spread out like fingers. American Crows enjoy each other's company and can form large groups. In flight, unlike the Red-tailed Hawk the American Crow rarely glides



On the ground, look for groups of **Dark-eyed Juncos**, a small dark gray bird with white outer tail feathers and a pink bill, hopping around trees and shrubs and onto open spaces searching for seeds. Juncos winter in Tuxedo Park, having migrated from their boreal breeding ground.



If you are lucky, this winter you might see what at first you think is a mouse scurrying around a fallen log but could turn out to be the very small **Winter Wren**, a dark bird with its short tail cocked upward. Like the dark-eyed Junco the Winter Wren usually visits the Race track in the winter, spending the summer in the Canadian boreal forest.



A good app for bird identification is the free app of Cornell Lab of Ornithology for iPhone and Android devices. <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/> An excellent bird field guide is National Audubon Society: The Sibley's Guide to Birds.

For more information on the Race Track Nature Preserve, please visit: www.tptreeboard.org