

IOWA-IOWA CITY  
PARKS  
HICKORY HILL

# Hickory Hill Park



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SEP 1978

PAMPHLET FILE

## Fall Nature Guide



Autumn is a fascinating time of year at Hickory Hill. Masses of rust, brown, orange and reds blend together in another of nature's breath-taking displays. The crispness of the air, the sound of the leaves and grasses rustling in the shifting winds, the whole feeling of harvest and winterizing sets the mood for a new type of discovery in this unique park.

This is a time for plants to give forth their seed and go into a resting period. The animals and birds that reside in this area are either harvesting food to stockpile, preparing for hibernation, or flying to a warmer climate to escape the harsh season that follows. This is a time of activity and inactivity - a time to fill all the senses with the sights, sounds and aromas this environment offers. It is rich, earthy, and warm - it is autumn!

The nature trail, 1½ miles in length, is a welcome retreat for individuals seeking to view life in the various communities of Hickory Hill. The numbers in the booklet correspond with the twelve station markers along the trail (see centerfold map) to aid visitors in their discoveries.



Looking up the hill at the oak-hickory stand, one can often see brilliant scarlet columns vining up these mature trees very early in the fall. This plant is often confused with poison ivy which turns a similar color in the fall. Virginia creeper has five leaflets and is one of the very first signs of fall. The grasses and other plants found on the trail to station 2 feed many birds. Self-heal feeds ruffed grouse and ragweed sustains a long list of birds some of them being cardinal, red-winged blackbird, slate-colored junco, ring-necked pheasant and many others. Goldenrod seeds are eaten by American goldfinches and ruffed grouse.

Between station 1 and 2 listen for the "fee-bee" call of the eastern phoebe. The phoebe can be visibly identified by its light-colored breast, downward wagging motion of its tail, dark head and back, and black bill. Often the phoebe, a flycatcher, can be seen perched on the lower branch of an oak tree. Here the phoebe waits for the opportune moment for an insect to fly its way. In hot pursuit, the agile flycatcher will dive and swoop from its perch to snap up its prey.



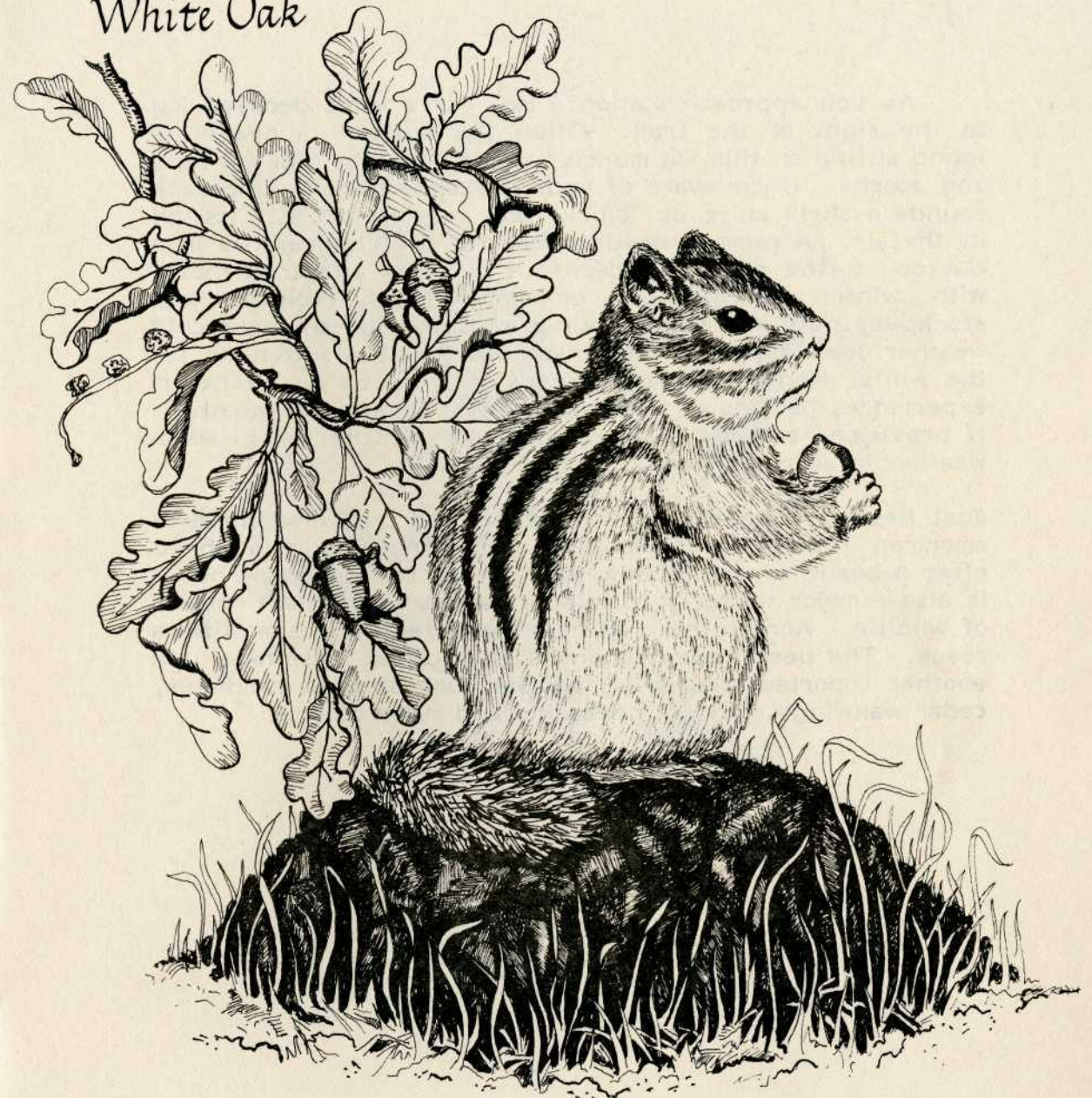


# 3

A number of gray squirrels will be seen scurrying about the trail. Fall is food storage time for the squirrels and they busily work at collecting and burying acorns, hickory nuts and hazelnuts for a lasting winter food supply. The upper boughs of the hardwood trees contain the leafy nests of the gray squirrel. One gray squirrel usually has several nests in its territory.

To the right of Station 3 is a small stand of staghorn sumac. The compound leaves of the sumac turn a beautiful red-orange early in the fall. The red cone-shaped seed heads add even more color and interest to this plant. The plants among the oaks and hickories to the left of the station marker, may look insignificant, but provide an important function in the ecological system here. Thistle and joepeeweed seeds are a choice food of the American goldfinch. Prickly lettuce seeds (the very tall plants with puffy seed-heads) feed pheasants in the fall. The hickory and oak trees themselves are more than just pleasing to the eye. They provide food for many mammals and birds; cardinals, nuthatches, warblers, red-bellied woodpeckers and many others.

White Oak

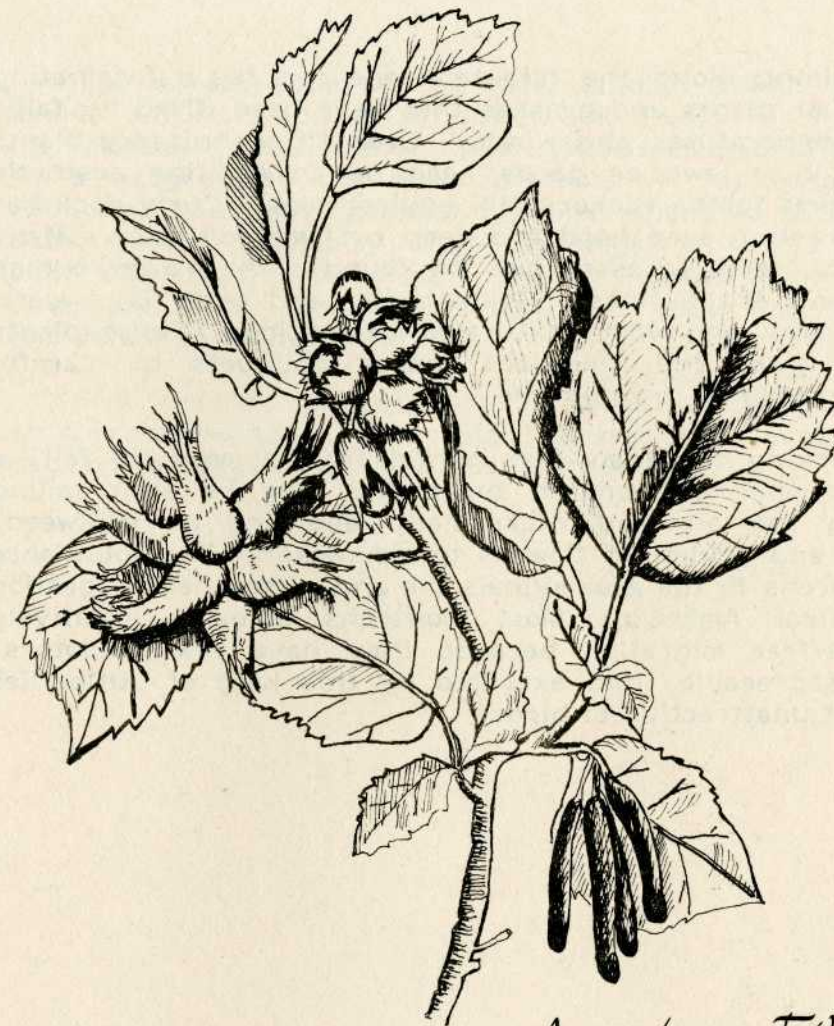


Eastern Chipmunk



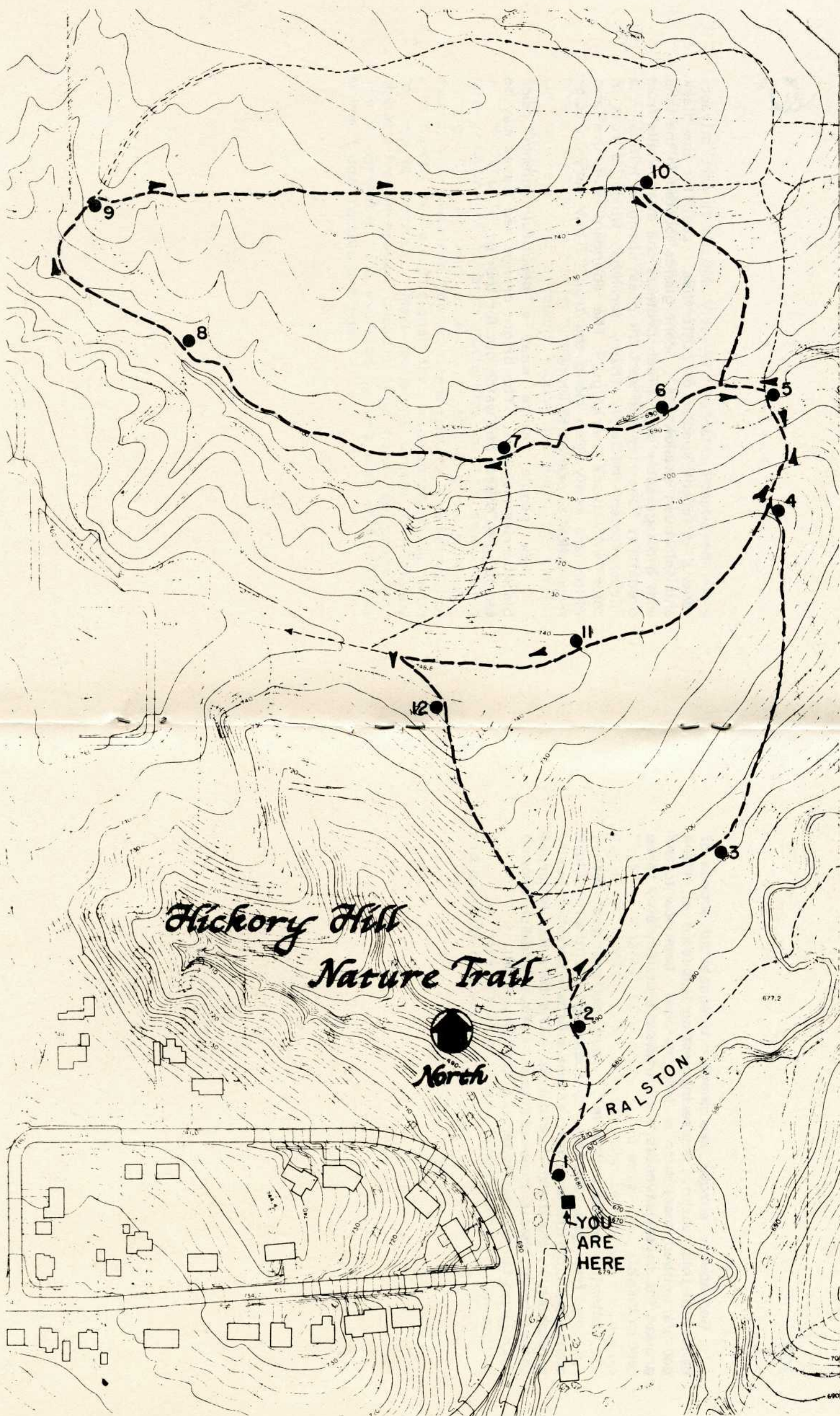
As you approach station 4 look for a large decayed log to the right of the trail. Often the eastern chipmunk is found sitting on this log munching on hazelnuts, hickory nuts and acorns. Once aware of your presence the shy chipmunk sounds a shrill chirp or "cluck" and scurries off with its tail in the air. A common nesting area for the chipmunk is in a burrow in the ground underneath old logs and tree roots. With winter nearing the chipmunk busily collects and stockpiles nuts and various kinds of seeds for an ample cold weather food supply. The chipmunk does not fatten up for the winter months because it does not hibernate. Rather it experiences periods of dormancy during severe cold weather. If provisions run low the chipmunk will venture out in warm weather in search of food.

Just beyond station 4 to the right of the trail is a stand of american filberts or hazelnuts. Not only does this shrub offer a beautiful green/pink color to the fall landscape but it is also a major winter food supply for many different species of wildlife. Across the trail from the hazelnuts are multiflora roses. The berry-like clusters of fruit called "rose hips" are another important source of food for such birds as cardinals, cedar waxwings, juncos, pheasants and many others.



*American Filbert  
or Hazelnut*





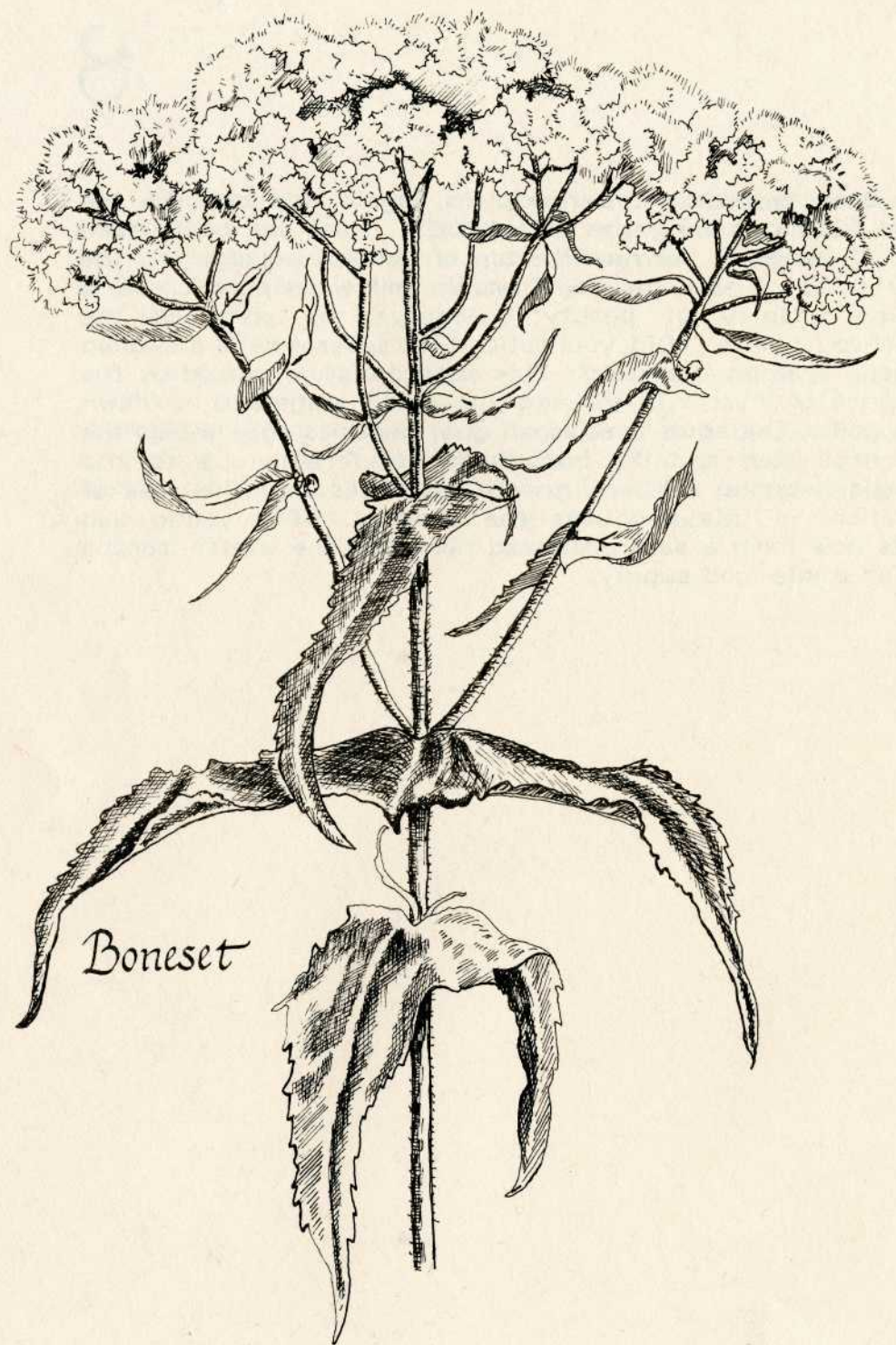


Gooseberry shrubs are another unsuspected source of beauty in this season. These interesting leaves (much like a goose's webbed foot) turn a deep maroon. Look low to the ground for these leaves as the shrubs are usually only three feet in height.

Later in autumn you may hear the sound of leaves rustling from the thickets surrounding the trail. Close observation of the area may reveal a brown thrasher busily scratching in the fresh leaf debris. The thrasher is larger than a robin, has a streaked breast, rufous (reddish-brown) back, long tail and a slender slightly-curved bill.

Looking across the floodplain, again one can see the dried flora carpeting the stream bed. Here the puffy seed head of boneset, the nut-like top of yellow nutsedge and the silky puffs of seed blowing from the milkweed pods create a massive display of beauty. Observe the stems of the goldenrod plants. Did you notice that several have a swollen bulbous area on the stem? This abnormality is caused by the presence of insects in the egg and larval stage and is known as a gall. The adult female gall gnat deposits eggs inside the goldenrod stem and the introduction of foreign objects into the plant tissue releases growth hormones into the area of irritation -- this produces the swelling. The young gall gnats now have a safe protected home for the winter months and an ample food supply.

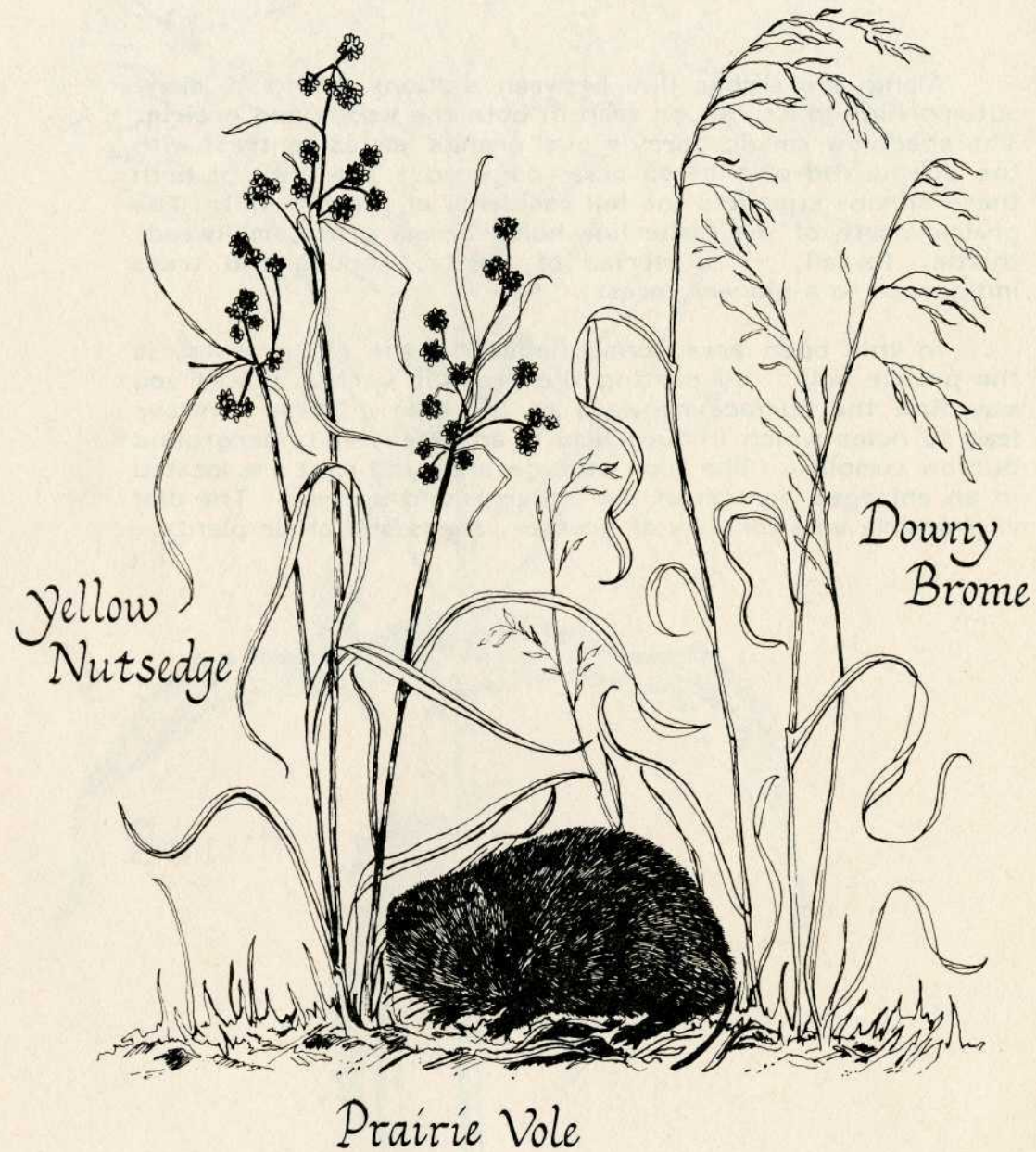




Along the timber line between stations 9 and 10 many autumn highlights can be seen in both the woods and prairie. The shadblow serviceberry's oval orange leaves contrast with the purple/red of the red osier dogwood. The fruit of both these shrubs supports the fall residents of Hickory Hill. The prairie north of the timberline holds brome grass, milkweed, thistle, foxtail, -- a myriad of plants, shrubs and trees indigenous to a pioneer forest.

In this open area, camouflaged by the tall grasses, is the prairie vole. By parting the grass in various places you may find the surface runways of the vole. These runways lead to holes which in turn lead to an extensive underground burrow complex. The food storage area and nest are located in an enlarged portion of the underground burrow. The diet of a prairie vole consists of grasses, seeds and other plants.





Another low growing shrub of fall interest is barberry. The small bright orange of the leaves may be seen sparsely peppered throughout the woods. At many places along the trail you will notice decaying logs covered with shelf fungi, lichens, cup fungi and puffballs. These organisms all depend on dead vegetation for a food source. The fungi release a secretion which breaks down dead plant tissue into an edible form. It is a balanced and harmonious relationship between fungi and fallen timber. The fungi receives nourishment from the downed trees and the logs in turn are eventually broken down into humus. The process of decomposition is a slow one but essential. Without the continual addition of nutrients to the soil the surrounding area could not support the number and variety of healthy trees and plants. Also look for the red or scarlet cup fungus along the edge of the trail. This fungus is found attached to decaying wood and sometimes is attached in soil with a high humus content. Look for a red cup-shaped fungus about one inch in height and diameter.



The reddish-gold leaves of the American Viburnum, a shrub eight to ten feet high spark the trail near station 11. If the wildlife has not yet harvested this food supply, clusters of red to purple berries can be seen still hanging on this shrub. Wild asters, a late summer flower, dry almost in their flowering state having much the same effect on the landscape as "baby's breath" has on a floral arrangement.

As the days shorten you may find yourself in Hickory Hill walking at dusk. Look into the upper canopy of the trees surrounding the trail. The little brown bat can be seen flying among the tree tops dipping, diving, and swooping to catch insects. Usually these small bats feed until mid-November and then go into a state of hibernation in a hollow tree until the following spring.

As you walk back towards station 1, look into the underbrush on either side. Many of these shrubs offer shelter for the fall and winter resident birds. The cardinal often chooses honeysuckle and the multiflora rose as a nesting site. Stumps and tree trunks house woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice and others. The oaks above not only give food to blue jays but also provide a home for these colorful birds.

Keep your eyes on the low shrubby, thicketed areas along the trail. Many migrating warblers can be heard and seen flitting among the shrubs and low trees searching for insects. The Wilson's, Canada, Tennessee and Nashville warblers are several of the birds one can expect to see in Hickory Hill during autumn migration.



There is so much to see, smell, hear, and feel at this time in Hickory Hill Park. This booklet does not try to name everything in this park, but attempts to touch the wonder and curiosity in our visitors. We hope that you will be inspired to search further, with the aid of our bibliography and any other sources that are at your disposal, for the magic that can be experienced in this unique park.

If you have any questions concerning the nature trail or are interested in a guided hike for groups, please contact Dianne E. Lacina or Deb Quade at 354-1800, extension 249.

Thank you.

Prepared for the City of Iowa City  
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

A Field Guide to the Insects - Donald W. Borror and Richard E. White

Reading the Woods - Vinson Brown

Handbook of Nature Study - Anna Botsford Comstock

Attracting Birds: From the Prairies to the Atlantic - Verne E. Davison

Fieldbook of Illinois Mammals - Donald F. Hoffmeister

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The Shrub Identification Book - George W. D. Symonds

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