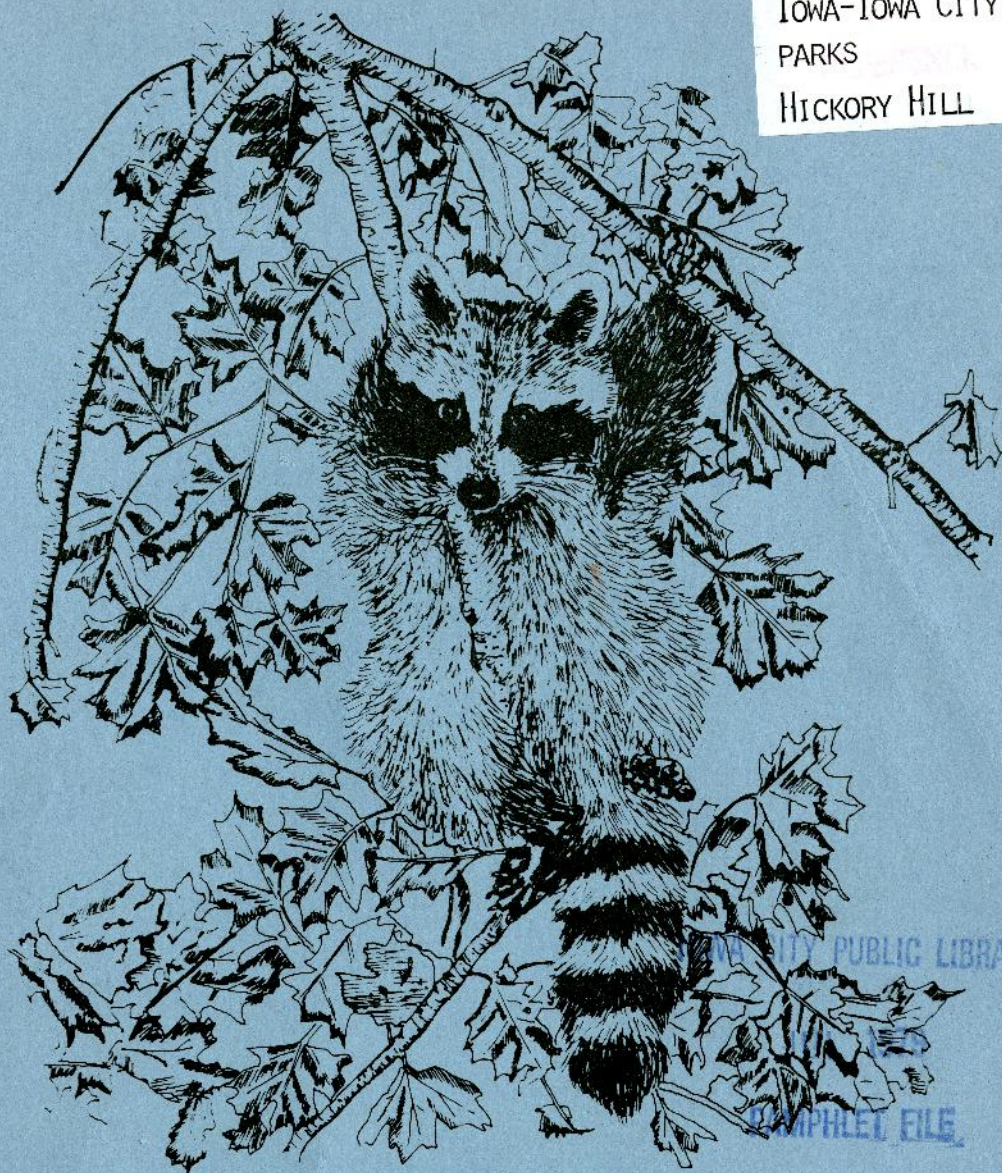


IOWA-IOWA CITY
PARKS
HICKORY HILL



hickory hill park
summer nature guide

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PHLEP FILE

A rewarding experience awaits the perceptive summer hiker in Hickory Hill Park. A blaze of color carpets the woodland floor and many aromas blend to delight the sense of smell. Visitors may notice the increased pace of action in this season. Insect and animal activity is at its height, for the food supply (fruits, seeds, flowers, and other animals) is abundant. This is an excellent time to observe and explore this unique park, as no other season can offer as many varieties of insects, birds, animals, and plants to discover.

The nature trail, $1\frac{1}{2}$ 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.

JUN 22 1995

1

To the right of station 1 you can see a group of red-osier dogwood at the top of the creek bank. This spring flowering shrub now displays many clusters of white berries. These plants are not only eye-catching but also serve as a nesting site and food source for several birds.

After passing station 1 you may want to stray off the trail and follow Ralston Creek upstream. Along the creek bank are the stubs of several willows, which were felled by beavers. Often the beaver uses young tender branches for food while utilizing the larger branches and excess smaller branches for the building of dams and lodges. One may not notice a lodge in the area because these industrious animals are probably living in burrows along the creek banks. The beaver is definitely an ambitious and resourceful creature whose dams (free of charge) serve a minor role in flood control.

BEAVER



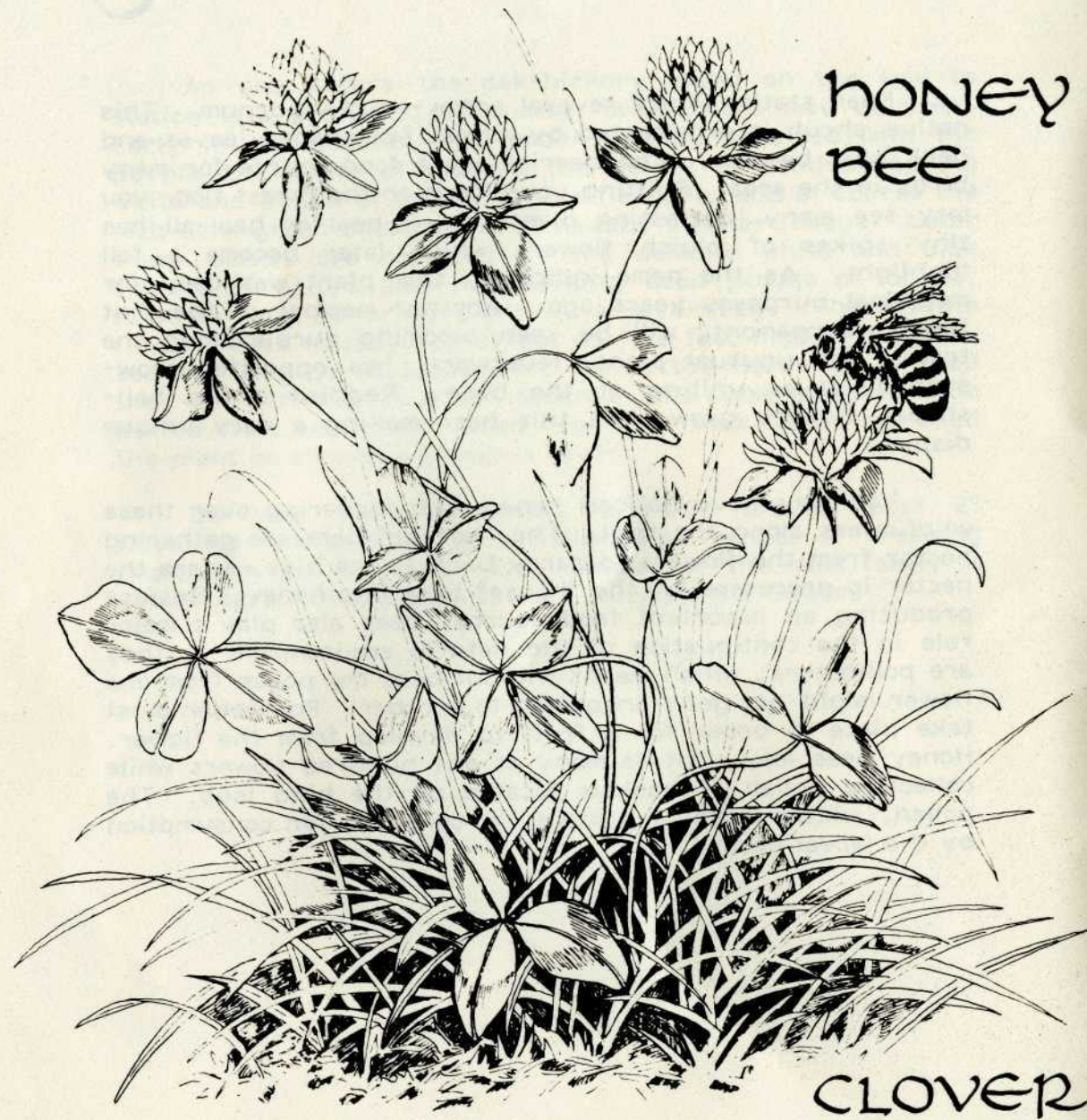
As one enters the oak-hickory stand on the way to station 2 a profusion of summer wildflowers may be seen. Early in the summer the timber floor is speckled with the purple and white of clover, the yellow of dandelions, the white and yellow of the daisy-like fleabane, and of course the rich dark green background of healthy summer foliage. Later these blooms are replaced by the delicate white and blue flowers of asters and the striking deep purple of lobelia. Another late flowering plant is joe-pye-weed. These white flower heads usually stand four to five feet high and can be seen in August to September. When the heads go to seed they are striking as a fall accent. The name is believed to derive from an Indian named "Joe Pye" who reportedly used the plant as a cure for typhus fever.

Do you smell something aromatic around post 2? Covering the ground is a little-leafed carpet of creeping charlie or ground ivy. This member of the mint family is very fragrant and produces many tiny purple flowers.

Near station 3 are several arrow-wood viburnum. This native shrub is ornamented by almost fan-shaped leaves and dark blue berries. The berries are a food source for many birds in the area. Shifting your focus to the forest floor you may see many interesting plants. Self-heal or heal-all has tiny spikes of bluish flowers which later become a fall highlight. As the name indicates, this plant was used for medicinal purposes years ago. Another member of the mint family, bergamont, will be seen blooming purple along the trail. The unusual plant, feverwort, has opposite arrow-shaped leaves uniting at the base. Reddish brown bell-shaped flowers grow from this base making a very unique display.

You may have noticed honey bees hovering over these wildflowers along the trail. The "worker" bees are gathering nectar from the flowers to carry back to the hive, where the nectar is processed by the "house" bees into honey. Besides producing an important food source, bees also play a major role in the continuation of the natural environment -- they are pollinators; which means without bees the pollen from one flower might not get transported to another. Pollination must take place in order for a fruit to develop from the flower. Honey bees may visit as many as one hundred flowers while collecting pollen in baskets located on the hind legs. The pollen, which contains protein, is collected for consumption by the larval bees.

HONEY BEE



Gooseberry shrubs may be seen along the trail bearing tiny green striped fruits. The hairy and thorny twigs are a key to identification as well as the green to purple berries that feed many birds such as robins, thrashers, grosbeaks and catbirds.

Have you heard a squeaky mewling sound coming from the thickets surrounding the trail? That's no cat you're hearing but a catbird. Look back into the thickets and you may see this gray bird perched on a branch. Other characteristics to note about the catbird are it's black cap and the flicking motion of it's tail. The diet of the catbird consists largely of the fruits of wild grape, gooseberry, virginia creeper and honeysuckle.

5

As you walk down the hill toward station 5 you will find yourself moving gradually into a new environment. Here you will find plants which prefer moisture and/or full sunlight. The flowers that bloom here attract some very beautiful and interesting birds. Jewelweed has delicate orange and yellow flowers whose nectar is relished by the ruby-throated hummingbird. The juices retained in the stems are believed to be a cure for poison ivy. The ominous bull thistles found along the tributary possess beautiful bright purple flowers at their very top. Some of these thorny plants grow in excess of six feet. When the pretty flowers turn to puffs of seed one will see gold finches flying from plant to plant consuming their favorite dish. Other beauties that are favorites of the American goldfinch are the familiar yellow spikes of goldenrod and the many lovely varieties of coneflowers; black-eyed susans being an example. Wild sunflowers may also be seen on the way to station 6. These pretty yellow flowers attract grosbeaks, towhees, meadowlarks and many others.



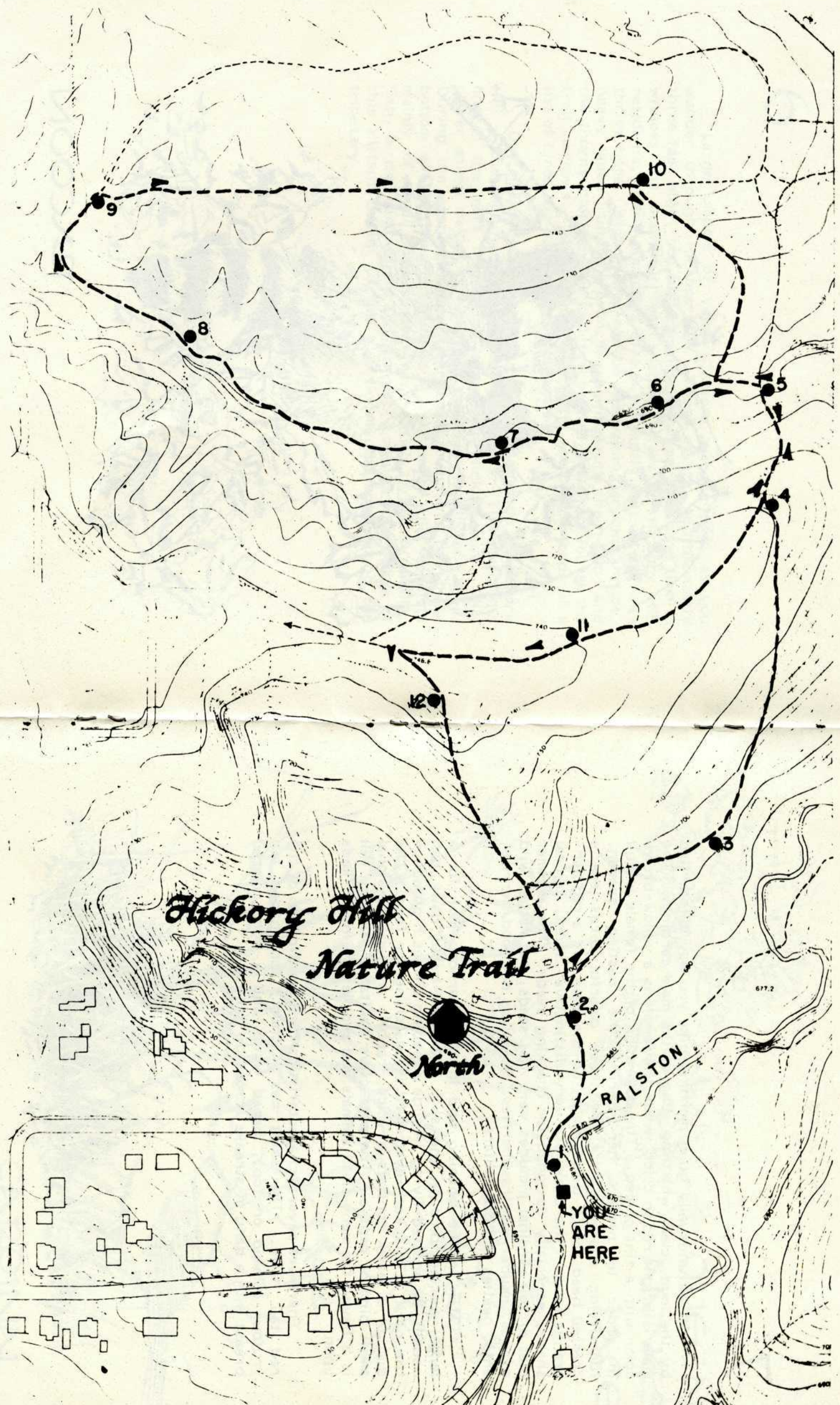
JEWEL WEED

Large umbels of yellow flowers will be seen as you wander through Hickory Hill. These plants, approximately three feet high, are wild parsnips. Summer is a good time to witness the bountiful feast nature offers to Hickory Hill residents. Many ancestors of our presently cultivated fruits thrive here. Wild grapes can be seen vining around shrubs, heavy laden mulberry branches bowing with their load, and the thorny blackberries and raspberries may grab you as the trail narrows. All of these wild fruits are choice foods of a list of birds too numerous to mention.

Day hikers fail to see many of the inhabitants of Hickory Hill -- the nocturnal (night-feeding) animals. The raccoon is one of the more interesting animals in Hickory Hill. This clever animal makes its home in a large dry cavity of a tree. During the evening hours the raccoon frequents the creek bottom area in search of food. Its summer diet consists mainly of small animals such as crayfish, insects, snails, fish, birds, earthworms and snakes. Look for the tracks of this distant cousin to the bear in muddy areas along the tributary.



RACCOON



On an unusually quiet morning hike you may be startled by the loud, clear whistling song of the male cardinal. The male is bright red in color, while the female is a yellow-brown color with a tint of red. The coloration of the female is dull in order to protect her during the nesting season. Identifying characteristics for these colorful birds are a crested head, black throat patch on the male and a reddish-orange beak. The beak is a very distinctive, short, conical shape; especially designed for cracking seeds. The summer diet of the cardinal includes very few seeds, but rather wild grapes, mulberries, raspberries, flowering dogwood berries, ants, beetles and caterpillars.

Later in the morning and in the afternoon look for a large soaring bird in the sky. The red-tailed hawk can usually be spotted flying in wide sweeping circles high above the park. This keen-eyed bird is searching for food. The diet of a hawk consists of mice, rabbits and an occasional small bird or reptile. The protective habitat of Hickory Hill is a haven for many small animals and reptiles the hawk feeds upon.

There are several characteristics for identification of the red tail hawk. The adult has a short, fan-shaped tail (rufous colored on top), broad wings and a light colored breast with a band of streaks across its belly.



QUEEN
ANNES
LACE

CARDINAL

The flood plain near station 8 is a profusion of color and activity in summer. Common milkweed, cursed as a garden weed, produces a beautiful lavender flower. Swamp milkweed, its cousin, has thinner leaves and dark purple flowers. These blossoms will often be seen covered with fritillary butterflies. At dusk one will discover the habits of a strange and beautiful plant. The fragrant evening-primrose opens its yellow bloom as the sun sets. One may see the faded flower the next day and assume it to be a rather unattractive blossom. Later in the summer as the sun is less powerful the bloom will be more noticeable in daylight.

Earlier when you glanced at the milkweed did you notice any insects? It's not unusual to see ants and aphids co-habiting on a milkweed plant. Their unique relationship provides mutual security. The defenseless aphids are protected by the aggressive sometimes vicious ants. Why? Because the aphids produce honeydew, a sweet substance the ants relish at the dinner table. The little black aphid-herder will go to any length to protect its flock -- much like a dairy farmer with a prize dairy herd.

Looking north from station 9 one will see the many plants of a pioneer forest. This area was mowed for many years before it was allowed to naturalize. The yellow flower spikes of the mullein plant, the white lacy flowers of yarrow and queen anne's lace and the orange to red rose hips, all contribute to the beauty of this region. As the trail follows the timberline you will see many young hawthorns. This small tree is quite important to the residents of Hickory Hill for many reasons. The thorny branches that project from the trunk protect small mammals from their predators. These same branches are a favorite nesting site for many birds and the lovely red berry clusters are choice food of cardinals, cedar waxwings and others. Wild plum trees are abundant here also. Among their green leaves one can see the small purple fruit hanging. Many birds relish these fruits as a major food supply.

One small rodent quite common in this grassy thicket is the western harvest mouse. It is the size of a house mouse but is brown in color with a silver belly. This mouse is a seed eater and often will climb up plants to gather seeds. One may discover the small globular nest of the harvest mouse several feet off the ground in dense grasses and plants. Other small animals found in this grassy field are white-footed mice, pocket gophers and short-tailed shrews.

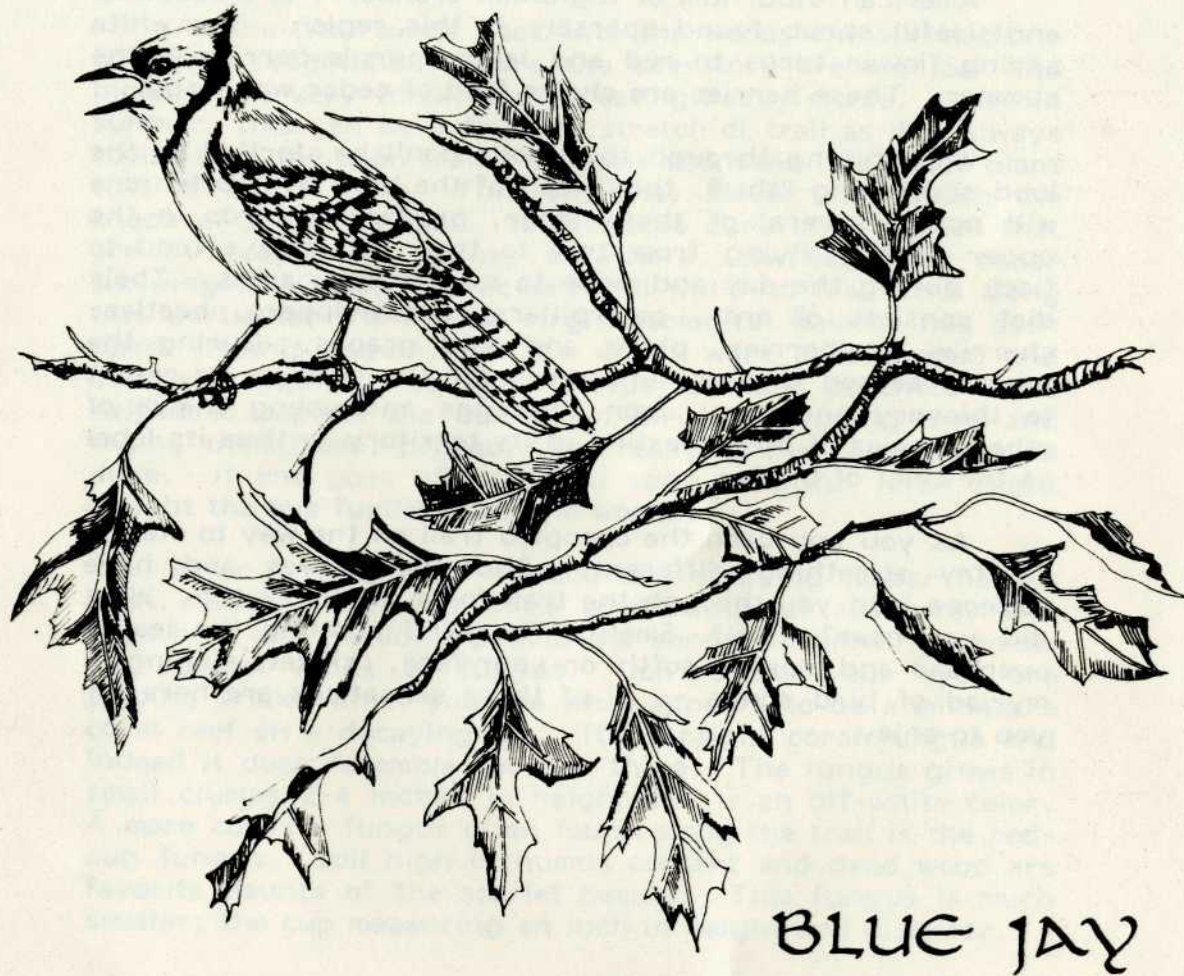
As the trail winds back into the woods one will notice a change in vegetation. Here the overstory trees of oak and hickory are very thick, thus creating heavy shade. Often in summer, this can be a favorite stretch of trail as it is always cooler than the open trail. Common moonseed is a shade plant that is found here. This vine has leaves very much the shape of a goose's foot. It produces dark blue berries that are a favorite of robins, thrashers, towhees, and cedar waxwings. Visitors to Hickory Hill will find few ferns along this particular trail. The virgin ecological balance has been upset in this region, for the woods were once grazed and otherwise utilized by man. Unfortunately poachers have helped to deplete the number of ferns by digging them and taking them home, probably not realizing the damage that is done. If one goes off the trail some beautiful ferns might delight the eye further into the woods.

After a rainy spell the soil and decaying timber have a high moisture content. The combination of moisture, and high heat and humidity provides a wonderful growing medium for several kinds of fungus. Don't think your eyes are playing tricks when you see what appears to be a miniature coral reef on a decaying log. It's straight coral fungus and indeed it does resemble the real thing. The fungus grows in small clumps 2-4 inches in height and is an off-white color. A more colorful fungus often found along the trail is the red-cup fungus. Soil high in humus content and dead wood are favorite haunts of the scarlet beauty. This fungus is much smaller; the cup measuring an inch in height and diameter.

American viburnum or highbush cranberry is a beautiful and useful shrub found sparsely in this region. The white spring flower turns to red and later, purple berries in the summer. These berries are choice food of cedar waxwings.

While hiking through the woods don't be startled by the loud screeching "thief, thief" call of the blue jay. Often one will notice several of these large, gregarious birds in the upper canopy flying from tree to tree. Blue jays tend to flock during the day and move to new feeding areas. Their diet consists of ants, caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles, cherries, mulberries, plums and wild grapes. During the nesting season it is not uncommon for the blue jay to resort to thievery and prey upon the eggs and young chicks of other species of birds nesting in its territory -- thus its label as the thief of birds.

As you approach the canopied trail on the way to station 12 try something different. Shut your eyes and have someone lead you through the trail for a minute or two. What did you hear? Feel? Smell? The wind rustling the leaves overhead and blowing softly on your face, crickets singing, a myriad of bird songs -- all of these sensations are here for you to enjoy.



BLUE JAY

After station 12 when one approaches the end of the thick timber it would be wise to stand in the middle of the trail and look at the lower vegetation on either side. Here is a healthy stand of poison ivy. Remember the saying, "three; let it be." Poison ivy has three lobed leaflets, often shiny, with reddish stems. This plant, although dangerous to human beings, produces berries whose wax is choice food of catbirds, flickers, sapsuckers, woodpeckers, thrashers and others.

On an early evening hike you can enjoy a chorus of insects. One of the most noticeable songs is that of the field cricket. The cricket, like most insects is an instrumentalist rather than a vocalist. This miniature musician produces its song by rubbing two parts of its wing together. These parts are similar to a file and a piece of metal. The filing action causes the wing to vibrate thus producing sound. Crickets not only sing to stake out their territory but also for sheer enjoyment. Down through history many people have believed that a cricket in the house brings good luck and crickets singing at dusk are a sign of peace and contentment.

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

Birds of North America - Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Brunn, and Herbert S. Zim

The Shrub Identification Book - George W. D. Symonds

The Tree Identification Book - George W. D. Symonds

Golden Guide Series:

- A. Non-flowering Plants - Floyd S. Shuttleworth and Herbert S. Zim
- B. Birds - Herbert S. Zim and Ira N. Gabrielson
- C. Mammals - Herbert S. Zim and Donald F. Hoffmeister
- D. Butterflies and Moths - Robert T. Mitchell and Herbert S. Zim