



Prospect Park Nature on the Peninsula

The Prospect Park Nature Trails are a project of the Prospect Park Alliance.

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The Prospect Park Audubon Center at the Boathouse is a partnership between the Prospect Park Alliance and Audubon New York, not-for-profit corporations that operate the Center through a lease agreement with the City of New York Parks & Recreation.

- Lullwater Trail
- Midwood Trail
- Peninsula Trail
- Waterfall Trail



Nature on the Peninsula



95 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn, NY 11215
(718) 965-8951
www.prospectpark.org

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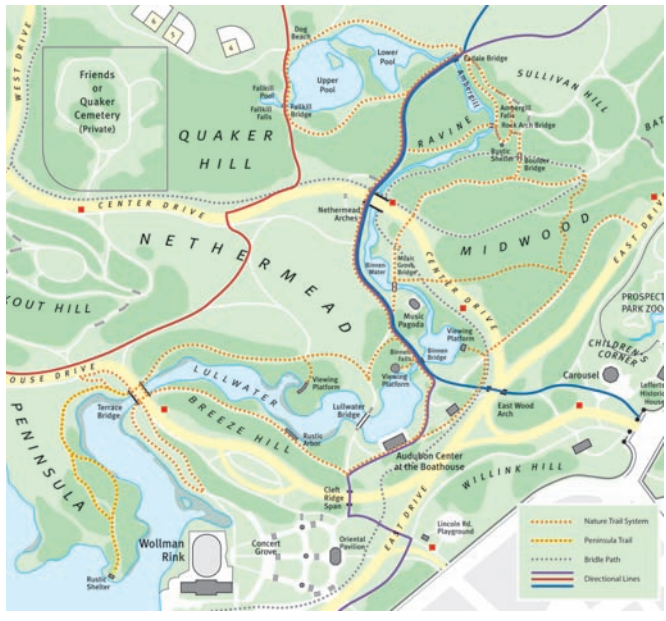
Peninsula Trail 1

Life on the Edge

Venture out onto the Peninsula and see what's happening at the intersection of land and lake. In a small space, the landscape changes from open water to wetlands to damp shoreline to dry woods. Some birds and animals like "edge" places like this, so it's a great spot to find many of the species that live in or visit the Park.

The original 1874 plan for the Peninsula called for a grand terrace and restaurant, but they were never built. The Park's designers, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, sought to create a "rural, natural, tranquilizing and poetic character" throughout Prospect Park. In keeping with this goal, the peninsula is being restored as a natural area and a place for wildlife.

This guide will take you on an easy, 45-minute walk along a paved path, beginning and ending at the Audubon Center.



Upland Plants
On the interior of the Peninsula are trees and shrubs typical of the moist forest. As you walk along the wood chip paths through the woods, you can see trees such as red oak and black cherry. Underneath the trees, look for a shrub called the arrowwood viburnum. It has large roundish leaves with saw-like edges. In the spring, flat-topped clusters of tiny white star-shaped flowers appear.

Marginal Plants
Along the shoreline are trees and shrubs that like damp ground. They'll grow in soil that is wet most or all of the time. Pin oak is one marginal tree that you'll find on the Peninsula. Squirrels and blue jays eat the acorns it produces. A shrub that thrives in wet areas is elderberry. Its juicy, purplish-black berries are an important source of food for songbirds.

Emergent Plants
If you look along the shoreline, you'll see many different kinds of plants growing out of the water. These are plants whose roots are under water for the entire growing season. One of them is blue flag, a small native iris. Look for its delicate, deep blue flowers in June. Later in the summer, pickerelweed's spikes of tiny blue-violet flowers rise above the water.

Floating Plants
The Lake has several types of plants whose leaves and flowers rest on top of the water. One of them is duckweed, which grows in thick mats of thousands of tiny plants. It has small round fronds instead of leaves or stems, and long rootlets that hang below under the water. The flowers bloom in summer, but they're hidden in tiny pouches so you can't see them unless you have a microscope. Do ducks like to eat duckweed? They do – and so do fish.

Some plants like it wet...or soggy or damp or just moist. Each type can be found at the Peninsula, where lake meets land.

Plants That Like Their Feet Wet



Many plants grow in the shallow water along the edge of the Lake. Fish and birds use this vegetation as a place to hide, build their nests, and find their dinner.



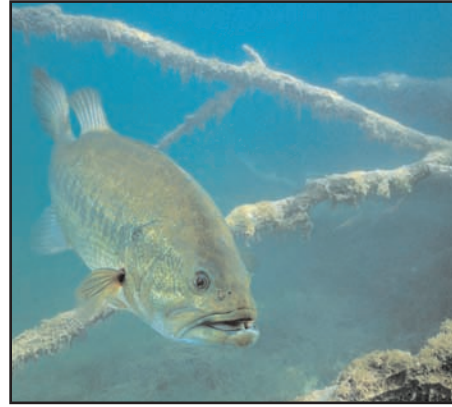
Most fish and other animals prefer places where many different kinds of plants grow. But sometimes, invasive plants take over. Do you see the tall reeds with fluffy tops? Those are Phragmites.

Although they look pretty, they crowd out other plants that help birds and fish survive.

As part of the restoration of the Lake (which is still ongoing), workers used heavy machinery to dig out thousands of Phragmites plants, roots and all, near the Terrace Bridge.

When Park gardeners put in new plants along the shore, they choose species that are native to this area. Look along the water's edge for tall, spiky, grass-like plants called bulrushes. Ducks and other birds feed on their tassels of seeds.

Gone Fishing (and Birdwatching)



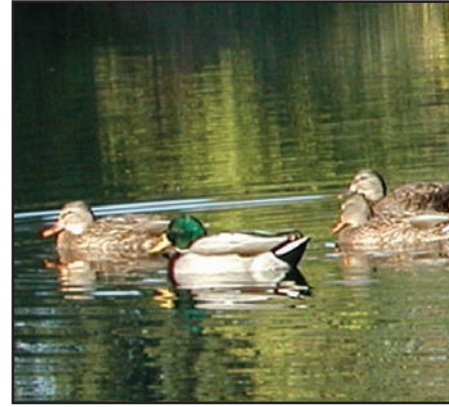
The beach is a great place to cast your line — or raise your binoculars. Be careful not to step on the plants along the banks and in the water. They help the young fish survive by giving them a place to hide. The Lake is stocked with more than a dozen species of fish, including largemouth bass, yellow perch, and bluegill.

The Lake, which is man-made, is seven feet deep at its deepest point. Over time, soil washes down from the land and accumulates on the bottom. Occasionally, this sediment has to be dredged, so the Lake doesn't get too shallow. Before dredging, workers have to dam off a section and drain out the water. Don't worry — they rescue the fish first.



When the Lake was recently dredged, workers reshaped the lakebed and covered it with a mix of gravel and soil. Some places are sandy, others are mucky, and still others have underwater plants. Each fish species in the Lake has a favorite type of underwater terrain for laying its eggs and feeding.

A Waterfowl Jamboree



The end of the Peninsula is a good spot to see waterfowl, especially in winter. Ducks, geese, swans, and coots gather on the Lake, quacking and honking. Some waterfowl come only in winter, but others live in the Park year-round, such as Mallards and Canada Geese. In the spring and summer, ducks, geese, and swans nest on the islands and along the shores to raise their young.

Most of the waterfowl eat plants and small insects. But in the winter, you might see a bird dive and come back up with a fish in its beak. Two fish-eating birds, the Hooded Merganser and the Pied-bill Grebe, spend the winter on the Lake because it doesn't freeze solid and they can always find food.

Do you see a small duck with a long, flat bill?

It's a Northern Shoveler. It uses its bill to sift tiny animals called plankton from the water. At the end of the winter, you might see a group



of shovelers swimming little circles around each other. This is their mating dance.

Into the Woods



Look for paths covered in wood chips that lead off the trail. Follow them for a quiet walk down to the shoreline through woods that are being restored.

Staying on the path protects the plants growing on land and along the Lakeshore. Too many footsteps pack down and wear away the soil, making bare spots where nothing can grow.

Notice the understory of shrubs and plants beneath the trees.

Here native species — the kind you might find in a wild forest

— have been planted to make a more natural woodland. If you look closely, you'll see clusters of small white flowers in the spring and dark purplish berries in the fall. Insects drink the nectar produced by these flowers, called viburnum. Then birds gobble up the insects. Birds and small mammals feed on the berries.

