

Spring Trail Guide to Sapsucker Woods





Spring is a beautiful season to visit Sapsucker Woods.

The swallows circle in tight spirals above the pond and nesting geese bicker at its surface, proclaiming spring's arrival. As bird-song rings throughout the wood, nature settles in to begin anew the ancient, earnest cycle of procreation.

If you have enjoyed our trails, please consider becoming a member of the Lab. Information is available in the Visitors' Center or at www.birds.cornell.edu.



The bright rays of the spring sun warm the pond's overwintering turtles up to its surface. The **painted turtle** is our most common turtle. Look for their bright stripes as they sun themselves on half-submerged logs in the pond. The pond also hosts several large snapping turtles that eat fish, frogs, and other small prey.



The **Brown-headed Cowbird** is best known for its parasitic nesting behavior. Females lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species, reducing the ability of the hosts to raise their own nestlings as they tend to the young cowbird. Female cowbirds can lay up to 40 eggs a year. Cowbird parasitism has been implicated in the decline of many songbirds.



Look for female **Red-winged Blackbirds** gathering nest materials around the pond. Birds may use many materials to build a nest: grass, mud, bark, spiderwebs—even animal hair and plastic! They weave the materials together for a safe place to lay their eggs.



Frequently seen hunting insects and small mammals in the meadows around Kip's Barn, the **American Kestrel** is our smallest and most widely distributed falcon. Kestrels readily nest in old woodpecker cavities. They may also use the nest boxes here in Sapsucker Woods.



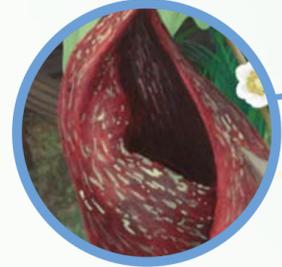
The piercing cry of a **Killdeer** is a familiar spring sound near the edges of Sapsucker Woods. This shorebird makes a shallow depression in the ground for its nest. The male and female share incubation duties. When a predator comes close, the adult flushes off the nest, flashing a cinnamon patch above its tail and dragging a wing on the ground, making it appear as though it has a broken wing. It uses this display to distract the intruder and lead it away from the nest. Once the eggs hatch, young downy Killdeer are up and running, foraging for themselves, in less than 24 hours!



It might seem odd to see a duck in a tree, but both **Hooded Mergansers** and Wood Ducks make their nests in the large hollowed-out tree cavities of older wetland forests. Nest cavities located above water minimize predation and give a softer landing for the ducklings, who heave themselves earthward less than 24 hours after hatching.



A ringing **KONK-LA-REE!** marks the presence of a male **Red-winged Blackbird**. Look for his bright red epaulettes as he displays to attract females and to keep his territory free of other males. Flashing these red feathers signals aggression. Males can also cover them up completely in order to sneak through a neighbor's territory unnoticed.



The faint odor of **skunk cabbage** is one of the earliest smells to greet the nose in spring. These early sprouters generate heat in their leaves, enabling them to grow in icy soil and melt through snow to reach pollinators. Its pungent odor attracts flies, stoneflies, and bees.



Ovenbirds can be heard singing a loud **Teacher-Teacher-TEACHER** while foraging in the deep humid leaf litter beneath the trees. They get their name from the dome-shaped nest of leaves and grass that is shaped somewhat like an oven.



Flashes of yellow, blue, black, and white highlight the plumages of spring warblers in migration. Many of these tiny birds, such as the **Black-throated Green Warbler**, winter in Central America and the Caribbean, and are seen here only during migration, feeding on insects and small fruits.



The bright green leaves of **mayapples** dot the understory in many parts of Sapsucker Woods. Mayapples don't reproduce until their second year. You can tell their age by looking at their leaves: plants with one leaf are one year old; plants with two are at least two years old. The box turtle is the only animal known to disperse the seeds from the apple-like fruits.



Wood frogs are among the first frogs to emerge in spring and are common in New York woods. The females lay large globular egg masses that contain as many as 3,000 eggs! Over time, the egg mass turns green with algae. The tadpoles hatch after two weeks. It can take more than two months for the tadpoles to metamorphose into froglets.



In 1909, Louis Agassiz Fuertes and Arthur A. Allen found the Cayuga Basin's first nest of a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** in this very tract of woods, giving it the name "Sapsucker Woods." In the bark of trees, sapsuckers create small holes called sapwells, which allow the sweet sap to drip out and be eaten. Hummingbirds and insects also consume this precious resource.



Legend:

- Wilson Trail, with boardwalk
- Other trails, in part
- Ponds and pools
- Marsh and wetlands
- Paved areas