

Wildlife of Long Wharf Nature Preserve


NEW HAVEN LAND TRUST

An Urban Oasis

Long Wharf Nature Preserve has significant ecological value for New Haven. This green space serves as a nursery and habitat for a variety of wildlife. It also reduces erosion and helps to filter pollutants from both the water and air.

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Egrets, graceful white birds with long legs, necks, and beaks, are present in the spring, summer, and fall. Egrets are stalkers, walking and waiting quietly to grab a fish, crab, snake or a variety of other small creatures.

Terns look somewhat like gulls but can be distinguished by their smaller size and their distinctive plunge dives for fish. The smallest of the American terns—the least tern—is a threatened species because its “nest” is a depression in the sand and is easily trampled by unwitting beachgoers.

The **catbird**, gray with a dark gray head, has a vast repertoire of sounds. One of these sounds resembles a cat’s meow - hence its name. You are more likely to hear the birds calling in the spring, when the males are establishing territories and trying to attract mates.

Mulberry trees, with yellowish bark and variously shaped shiny leaves, form a clump near the path to the beach. Introduced to the United States in the 18th century, the trees were spread by birds that enjoyed their sweet fruit, which look like raspberries.

Many sand dwelling **mollusks** and **crustaceans** can be found on the shoreline. These include mussels, oysters, scallops, clams, crabs, horseshoe crabs, and snails.

Tall **cordgrass** is a pioneer plant which starts the process of salt marsh formation. Between the rotting of its own stems and the sediment it traps, over time enough soil is formed that the level of the ground rises. Conditions then become favorable for other salt marsh plants, which are adapted to less frequent flooding.

Monarch butterflies, predominantly orange and black, appear on the preserve from midsummer through late September. Those that you see in the summer will be feeding on the nectar of various flowers. The monarch is the only insect with a regular migration like birds.

Milkweed is easy to recognize: break off a leaf and a sticky, milky juice comes out. The various types of milkweed, poisonous to most animals, are the only food source for the monarch butterfly larvae. Look carefully under the leaves and you may find a yellow and black striped caterpillar, which will turn into a monarch butterfly.

The **black swallowtail butterfly** is recognizable by its black wings with orange, blue, and yellow spots and the long protrusions from the hindwings.

The **cottontail rabbit** is one of the few large mammals that have been seen on the preserve. The open area, with its abundance of non-woody vegetation, provides abundant food for the cottontails, which in turn provide food for hawks.

Beach rose, also known as rugosa rose, might catch your attention in spring and summer, with its striking magenta flowers growing on thorny branches. Their fruits, known as rose hips, are edible and can be made into jam.