

WILDFLOWERS

FOUND AT GALES POND

Trillium



Marsh Marigold



Cardinal Flower



Swamp Milkweed



Asters



Jewelweed



Joe-Pye Weed



Turtlehead



Boneset



BIRDS

SEEN AT GALES POND

Sandhill Crane



Yellow Warbler



Belted Kingfisher



Pileated Woodpecker



Spotted Sandpiper



Green Heron



Great Blue Heron



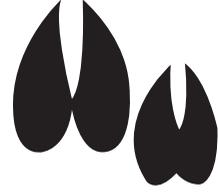
Wood Duck



Mallard



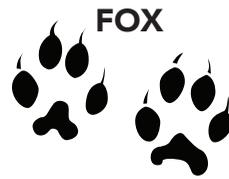
DEER



MUSKRAT



FOX



COYOTE



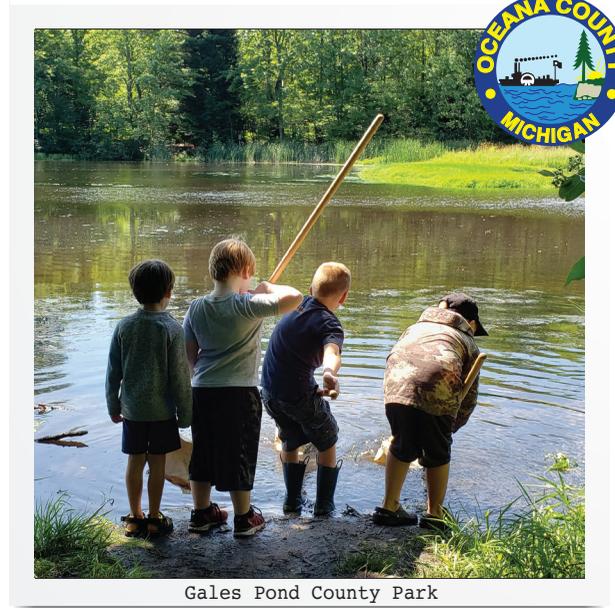
SKUNK



OPOSSUM



RACCOON



Gales Pond County Park



Water/Pond



Seasonal Restrooms



Leashed Pets Allowed



Hiking



Fishing



Bird Watching

GALES POND COUNTY PARK

49 E. Filmore Road
Hart, MI 49420

The nature trail signage was revamped in 2019 as part of an Eagle Scout project by Andrew Carter of Hart.

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www.oceana.mi.us/discover-oceana/county-parks

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GALES POND COUNTY PARK

NATURE TRAIL INFORMATION



NATURE TRAIL GUIDE - GALES POND - OCEANA COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Welcome to Gales Pond County Park. Situated in the center of Oceana County, this quiet area is rich in history and offers visitors a variety of natural features. The numbered items in this pamphlet correspond with numbered posts placed along the half-mile trail beginning at the end of the boardwalk. A treasure of birds, wildflowers and natural beauty can be found here. Please take only photographs and leave only footprints.

- 1 This mesic northern forest is composed of sugar maple, American beech, eastern hemlock, black cherry, white cedar and white pine. The forest floor is covered with berry producing plants like American wintergreen, partridge berry, and Canada mayflower.
- 2 A rotting stump or "nurse log" encourages germination of tree seedlings as is the case with this yellow birch and red maple growing out of an old white pine stump.
- 3 What look like pine tree seedlings here are actually a type of clubmoss called ground pine. Historically used for flash powder in cameras and magic shows, overharvesting has caused the plant to become endangered and protected in some states.
- 4 Look closely at the tree trunks around you. It's easy to see why American hornbeam has been given the common name "musclewood". The wood is used for tool handles, long bows and golf clubs due to its very hard and strong nature.
- 5 This opening provides an excellent view of the pond with opportunities to see ducks, Canada geese, spotted sandpipers and sandhill cranes which have nested in the marsh in recent years. Gales Pond is considered a birding hotspot for migrant and breeding birds.
- 6 Behind you is a small grove of eastern hemlock trees. This long-lived conifer provides a source of food and shelter for wildlife. Deer browse the foliage in winter and the seeds are consumed by many birds including a variety of warblers.
- 7 The edges of the creek are great for observing wildlife tracks in the mud or snow. Many animals come here for a drink including deer, opossum, raccoon, fox, coyote and muskrats. Look for marsh marigold in spring.
- 8 Gales Pond is fed by Reunions Creek, York Creek and other spring-fed creeks nearby. Macroinvertebrates like dragonfly nymphs, gilled snails and crayfish are sensitive to pollution and can be found in the creek here, indicating good water quality.
- 9 Decay is part of the natural cycle in the forest benefitting insects, mushrooms, salamanders, moss, lichens and tree seedlings. It is important to leave cuttings on site when trimming and clearing trails. Moving wood can spread harmful, invasive species and pests.
- 10 In the evening, this is a great location to listen for owls. More often heard than seen, owls become active and vocal near dusk. Listen for the characteristic call of the barred owl: "Who-cooks-for-you? Who cooks-for-you-all?"
- 11 You are now entering a hardwood-conifer swamp featuring wetland tree species like yellow birch and northern white-cedar. Look for wetland flowers like boneset with its dense clusters of tiny white flower heads. Boneset was introduced to American colonists by natives who used the plant for breaking fevers.
- 12 Ferns lack flowers and reproduce by means of spores instead of seeds. Many species can be found here including lady, sensitive, maidenhair and cinnamon fern.
- 13 Forested wetlands experience frequent disturbance through windthrows and fluctuating water levels. This leads to a collection of dead cedar and ash trees, quickly utilized by wildlife like the pileated woodpecker. Michigan's largest woodpecker, they create large rectangular holes in trees and use their long tongue to lap up carpenter ants and wood-boring beetle larvae.
- 14 Wildlife is well hidden in the thick vegetation of a hardwood-conifer swamp. Look for snakes, turtles, frogs and muskrats navigating the undergrowth. Overhead look for woodpeckers and warblers.
- 15 Take note of the dramatic change as you climb this incline into the upland northern forest. Undergrowth is minimal and tree species composition changes to black cherry, sugar maple, eastern hemlock and beech.
- 16 Listen. From this seating area you can hear the roar of the water flowing over the weir, birds singing in the trees, wind blowing through the branches, ducks and frogs announcing their presence. Take a break, close your eyes and lose yourself in the moment.
- 17 Bigtooth aspen prefers ground that is drier, becoming established on this high spot. A fast growing pioneer species, aspen is one of the first trees to become established after logging. Grouse feed on the buds in winter.
- 18 Have you ever seen flowers with snow on the ground? The shrublike tree in front of you, witch hazel, flowers from September to November. Seeds, buds or twigs are fed upon by pheasant, quail, grouse, deer, rabbits and beaver.

BE CAREFUL OF TRAFFIC as you exit the trail onto the road. Turn left, toward the weir, staying on the south side of the road. Look for snakes and turtles sunning on the bridge. After the bridge, a trail leads you back to post 19 and the picnic area.

19 Snapping turtles and Blanding's turtles have been spotted here. This is the end of the nature trail. Enjoy a picnic!

Please return this pamphlet to the nature trail box.