

Roraback Wildlife Management Area Demonstration Trail



Rock Brook, a major feature within the Roraback WMA and a tributary to Leadmine Brook and the Naugatuck River



Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's
Wildlife Division, Habitat Management Program, Roraback Wildlife
Management Area, South Road, Harwinton, CT

Roraback Wildlife Management Area

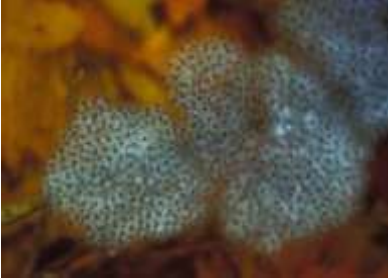
Roraback Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is the State's largest WMA, consisting of 1,976 acres and located in the town of Harwinton. The property was acquired by the Roraback family over a 5-year period commencing in 1930. The property was gifted to the State of Connecticut, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in 1982, from the estate of Lewis P. Roraback. It was the family's request that the property be maintained as undeveloped open space and be used for outdoor recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, and trapping. The property is located within the Northwest Hills Ecoregion of the Central Hardwoods – White Pine Zone (Connecticut Ecoregions, Dowhan & Craig 1976), which is a lightly populated region of the State with limited residential and commercial development. The most prominent features of this WMA are Leadmine and Rock Brook streams, which are important tributaries of the Naugatuck River. The property also contains important natural communities, such as hardwood swamp, vernal pools, old field habitat, agricultural land, mixed hardwood forest, hemlock ravines and extensive riparian zones. The area contains 1,814 acres of forested habitat.

This demonstration trail traverses a 12-acre forest clearing completed in 2009. The clearing serves as the first phase of a wildlife restoration project that will provide critical habitat to a suite of wildlife species currently experiencing population declines in Connecticut. This work was funded by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection in partnership with the Connecticut Woodcock Council, the Wildlife Management Institute and the Beardsley Zoo. The trail abuts an additional 10 acres of forest clearing completed in fall 2010. These treated areas, along with suitable habitat, will provide a 40-acre mosaic of young regenerating forest and reverting agricultural fields.

American woodcock and the New England cottontail rabbit are featured species within this project site. A total of 47 species, which have been identified in Connecticut's comprehensive Conservation Strategy Plan as species requiring early successional stage habitats, will benefit from these habitat treatments. The site will serve as a habitat demonstration area and you are welcome to walk along the designated trail and enjoy the interpretive displays.

1) Vernal Pool

A vernal pool is a temporary body of fresh water—filling with melting snow and spring rains. Many amphibian species, such as the wood frog, breed only in vernal pools and not in any other type of water body. The moist soils surrounding these sites serve as feeding locations for woodcock.



Egg mass in vernal pool

2) Stone Walls

The stone walls that meander through the forest indicate the past use of the land for agriculture. As farmers cleared the forest to create fields, they piled stones in rows to serve as boundaries for crops and livestock. As fields were abandoned, the forests grew back. Although they add to the scenic quality of the New England landscape, stone walls also provide escape cover for small animals, such as New England cottontail, chipmunks and garter snakes. Stone walls also serve as drumming sites for ruffed grouse.



Garter snake

3) Managed Thicket

The mature forest provides little desirable structure for early successional species. Forest regeneration following clearcutting promotes young, dense growth, or thickets. These thickets are critical as winter cover, and also provide food in the form of buds and twigs. Thickets are managed to provide dense cover for species such as New England cottontail rabbits, American woodcock, eastern towhee, and blue-winged warblers.



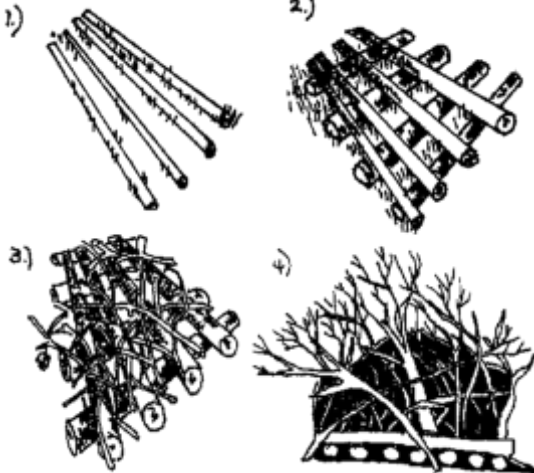
New England cottontail

4) Brush Piles

Brush piles provides excellent escape cover for cottontails and other small mammals, as well as snakes

and birds like the white-throated sparrow.

Constructing brush piles is a simple way to provide cover for wildlife, even in small habitats or backyards.



Steps in constructing a brush pile for wildlife.

5) Riparian Zone

Riparian habitats (habitats that border the banks of rivers and streams) are highly valuable for fish and wildlife and are in limited supply. More species of wildlife use the delicate edge between land and water than any other habitat. Streamside vegetation helps protect the water quality of the stream, and provides cover for woodcock and food for species such as blue-birds. Moist soils with earthworms are key feeding locations for woodcock.



Winterberry

6) Drumming Log

Male ruffed grouse defend their territories and advertise for a mate by “drumming”. The drumming sound is made by beating his wings against the air. A log often serves as a stage for drumming display. This tree was cut and left to serve as a drumming log.



Ruffed grouse drumming

7) Aspen

Young aspen form dense thickets that provide cover for species such as New England cottontail, ruffed grouse, American woodcock, eastern towhee and blue-winged warbler. This aspen stand will be maintained as a thicket of 3-inch diameter trees and smaller.



Blue-winged warbler



8) Cedar Patch

Eastern red cedar trees have become established in this old pasture, providing nesting cover for goldfinch, robins and mockingbirds. Thickets often provide wintering owl habitat. Cedar waxwings eat the berry-like fruit of the cedars.



Cedar waxwing



9) Forested Wetland Buffer

Buffer zones adjacent to wetlands and watercourses help protect water quality and provide habitat for a wide variety of species. The high water quality of Leadmine Brook supports brook trout, a species that is sensitive to pollution. Woodcock feed in the moist soil of this forested buffer, and the wetland shrubs



Brook trout

provide cover for cottontail rabbits, yellow warblers and warbling vireos.

10) Invasive Plants

Many species of plants are not native to Connecticut. Some of these non-native plants are invasive. Invasive species rapidly disperse, displacing native plants. Due to their rapid growth and reproduction, invasive plants outcompete native species for sunlight, nutrients and space. Although some of these species provide food and cover, they reduce diversity.



Multiflora rose

11) Shrub Swamp

The interspersions of open water and wetland shrubs creates valuable habitat for a variety of wetland birds, frogs, toads, turtles, dragonflies and damselflies. Wetlands also provide flood control and maintain water quality by filtering sediment and contaminants from runoff. Woodcock feed along the edge of this swamp.



Ebony jewelwing damselfly

12) Red Maples Swamp

Red maple can tolerate soil that is saturated for part of the growing season. Red maple swamp is the most abundant wetland type in Connecticut. This red maple swamp provides thick feeding cover for woodcock. Other plants in this wetland include skunk cabbage, false hellebore and trout lily. Listen for peepers here in the spring.



Redback salamander

13) Radio Telemetry

Research has been conducted on American woodcock at this site using radio telemetry. Radio-transmitters were attached to captured birds to determine home range, survival rates and causes of mortality. A Geographic Information System was used to analyze



habitat connectivity within home ranges. Results will help determine a long-range management plan for woodcock.

American woodcock fitted with radio-transmitter

14) Apple Orchard

Apple trees provide food and cover for a variety of wildlife. Ruffed grouse eat the buds, Baltimore orioles feed on the nectar, cottontail rabbits and porcupines eat the bark, and turkey, fisher and gray catbirds eat the fallen fruit.

Woodcock feed on earthworms in the moist ground of this orchard. The patchiness of habitat provides nesting cover for species such as eastern kingbird, orchard oriole and song sparrow.



Baltimore oriole

15) Snags

Dead standing trees, or snags, are important habitat elements. Insects use snags for food and cover. Woodpeckers eat the insects and excavate nesting cavities. Birds such as bluebirds, chickadees, nuthatches and great-crested flycatchers nest in abandoned woodpecker cavities.



Pileated woodpeckers

16) Herbaceous Field

Cottontail rabbits spend much of their time feeding in herbaceous fields. These fields are also used by bluebirds, kingbirds, eastern phoebes, tree swallows and insects such as butterflies and dragonflies. They also provide singing display areas for American woodcock.



Monarch butterfly

17) Bluebirds



Once common throughout Connecticut, the Eastern bluebird declined in numbers through the 1980s due to loss of field habitat with

suitable nesting cavities. The construction of nest boxes in appropriate habitat is helping the bluebird make a comeback. House sparrows, an introduced invasive species, outcompete bluebirds for available nesting cavities, but proper construction and placement of nest boxes will encourage bluebirds and not their alien competitors.

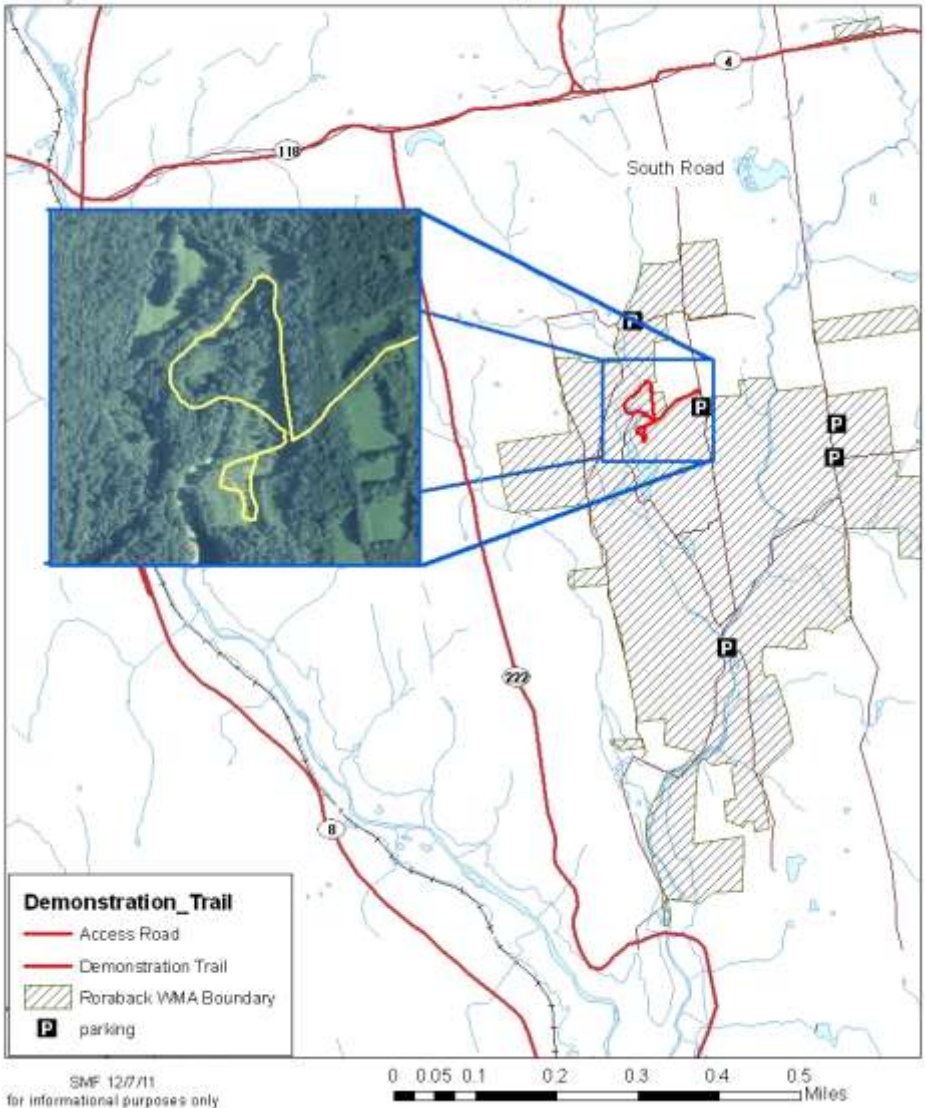
Nest Box Dimensions

- Floor: 4" x 4"
- Entrance Diameter: 1.5"
- Depth: 8"
- Entrance Above Floor: 6"
- Height Above Ground: 5-6'





Roraback Wildlife Management Area Harwinton, CT



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