

Dean Nature Sanctuary, Oak Brook

Dean Nature Sanctuary is a hidden gem at the very eastern edge of DuPage County near the intersection of the Tri-State Tollway (I-294) and Ogden Avenue.

Habitat type/site overview

The 40-acre site is located along Salt Creek, sharing a border with Bemis Woods North in Cook County. Habitat types include oak savannah, wetland, pond and prairie. It also contains a micro-aviary, a land for bees.

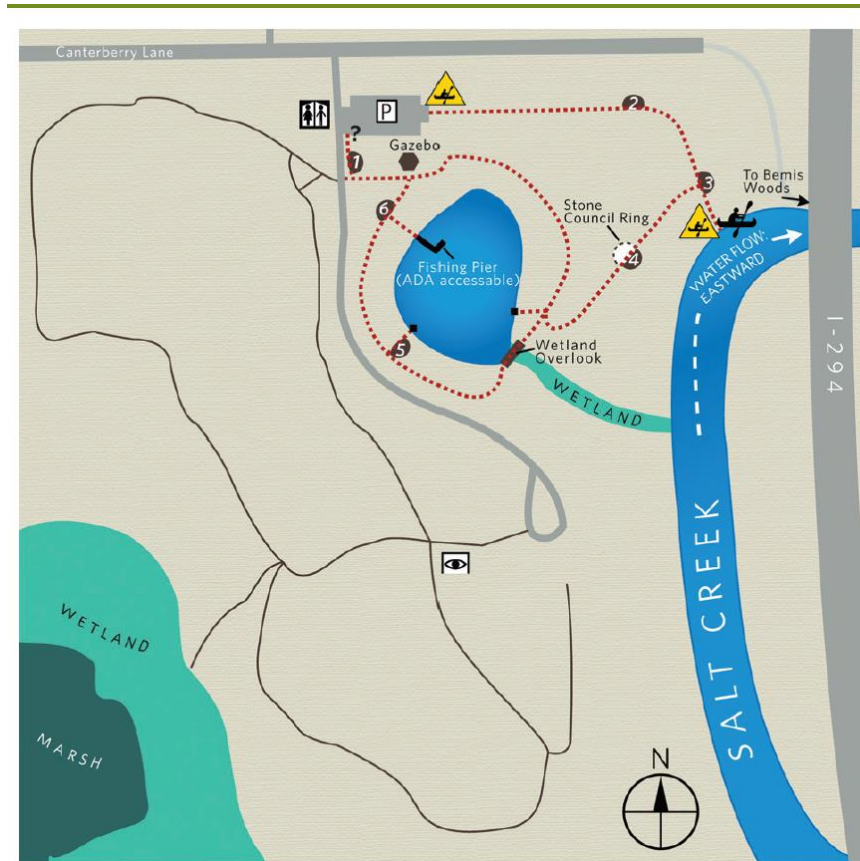
Topography

Hiking trails on the eastern side of the Sanctuary are of crushed limestone and fairly smooth. These trails circle around a small pond at two levels and lead to the Salt Creek canoe ramp on the east and to the Salt Creek Greenway Bicycle Trail on the northeast.

The entrance to the bike trail goes under the I-294 overpass and is a place to be careful of unwary bicyclists exiting Bemis North.

South of these loops the trail leads to a small barn, an open mowed area with an apiary, and a wooded area. Low parts of these trails can be subject to substantial flooding after wet weather, particularly in the spring.

The east and west sides of the Sanctuary are separated by a small berm. To access the western side of the Sanctuary, take the upper loop trail that leads toward the small white barn (no, it doesn't really look like a barn). Just to the west of the barn, follow a short trail that leads to a wooden bench and then down a somewhat steep slope through prairie to an ephemeral pond. These trails are mowed, grassy prairie and can be uneven in parts. This area can be subject to heavy flooding, particularly in spring.



DBC Hotspot

Birds

Spring brings migrants to the Sanctuary's woods along the creek. During songbird migration, areas directly around and to the south of the pond hold warblers, vireos, flycatchers and more. The eastern prairie areas can be particularly good for sparrows – vesper and savannah sparrows have both been sighted there.



When the western ephemeral pond is in a wet cycle, it can be a good spot to view a variety of ducks (fall, spring) and shorebirds (standard shorebird migration periods). When flooded, a scope can be helpful for viewing from the berm.

In the summer, the southwestern and western areas have hosted Orchard Orioles, Indigo Buntings and Dickcissel. The eastern pond draws swallows and swifts as well as an occasional Caspian Tern. Bluebird boxes set up just west of the berm provide homes for tree swallows each year. The bluebirds usually manage to hang on to a box or two or find a natural site to nest.

The parking lot provides a very open view of the entire Sanctuary and can be a good locale for some cold weather car-birding. Keep your eyes open for migratory hawks in the fall.

Best time to go

Best birding is in spring, summer and fall.

Amenities

This site has a portable bathroom, a gazebo with picnic tables, a fishing pier and small educational gardens and exhibits along the limestone trails. An apiary is on the grounds. It also has a canoe launch on Salt Creek and is an entrance to the Salt Creek Greenway Bicycle Trail. The Sanctuary is part of the Oak Brook Park District.



Access

The address for Dean Nature Sanctuary is 115 Canterbury Lane, Oak Brook, IL. Take York Road south from 31st Street or north from Ogden Ave. to Canterbury Lane. Go east on Canterbury Lane to the end where you will find a limestone-paved parking lot on the south side of the road. Canterbury Lane and the parking lot are often in heavy use by bicyclists accessing the Salt Creek Greenway Bicycle Trail at this point.

Site contributors

Content by Linda Padera. Photography by Richard Roche.