

St. James Farm Forest Preserve, Warrenville

The 595-acre St. James Farm Forest Preserve in Warrenville is the former retreat of the McCormick family. It contains more than 100 acres of woodlands, prairies and wetlands set among outbuildings that once supported the McCormick family's equestrian and dairy operations. The entrance to St. James Farm Forest Preserve is on the east side of Winfield Road a short distance north of Butterfield, in Warrenville, west central DuPage County.

Habitat type/site overview

St. James Farm supports a diverse habitat of old-growth forest, prairie, wetlands, and scrub. McCormick Woods is a high-quality forest north of the parking lot and picnic area. It is the largest block of forest to have survived from presettlement times in the western half of DuPage County. There are smaller forests to the north and south, with a significant grove of conifers in the south woods between Butterfield Road and the entrance drive. Ponds and small marshes are scattered south of McCormick Woods, the largest marsh area around a pond east of the Prairie Path. A stream flows from east to west north of McCormick Woods, with some recently restored marsh along it. The largest meadow area, at the northern edge of the preserve, is under management eventually to be restored prairie.



Topography

Crushed dolomite trails skirt the southern edge of McCormick Woods, connecting to the Prairie Path at the east end, and also bend through the western part of the preserve. There are connections to a trail through western McCormick Woods and a service road through it. Old equestrian trails persist in parts of the forest, but these are unsupported by the Forest Preserve District and are in decline. There is some

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topographic relief in the western half of the forest, none of it extreme. For an enlarged view of this map, go to www.dupageforest.org.

Birds

Though there is no significant river through the preserve, a good variety of forest and meadow migrants stop by there in the spring. Some of the more unusual migrants have been Cerulean Warbler, Veery, Whippoorwill, and Acadian Flycatcher. The forest supports a typical variety of birds in the nesting season. Usually two or three Wood Thrushes can be heard singing in various parts of the forest. A Hooded Warbler was a summer resident, possibly nesting, for several years but was not observed in 2020. Red-headed Woodpeckers have been known to nest in open areas of McCormick Woods and in the stream corridor.



Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers are regular nesters. Ospreys and Bald Eagles have visited the stream corridor occasionally. Killdeers and Spotted Sandpipers are the only regular shorebirds.



Woodcocks often have displayed in the northern meadow area but have not been known to nest on the preserve. Bluebirds are regular nesters, both in nest boxes and natural cavities. Pine Siskins and other winter visitors frequently have utilized the southern forest.

Single Pileated Woodpeckers have hung around the preserve for weeks at



a time on several occasions; the forest probably could support a nesting pair. At the appropriate part of the season, a visitor at dusk might hear a distant Great Horned or Barred Owl.

Best time to go

May provides the greatest diversity of migrants. Winter visitors vary from year to year, but the southern forest is not far from the parking lot and so easy to check.

Amenities

Though the McCormick family house has been torn down, various buildings associated with dairy farming and equestrian activities remain. These gradually are being brought up to standards that will allow public access. Signs interpret some of the buildings as well as the horse and hound cemetery along the service road north of the buildings. Restrooms are available in the indoor arena east of the parking lot, as well as temporary ones added in busy months, as pandemic conditions permit. Tours and a major, equestrian-centered public event around Memorial Day weekend will resume as the coronavirus pandemic is resolved. A large picnic area is immediately north of the parking lot.

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Access

The parking lot accessed from Winfield Road is the best, most central place to park. The Prairie Path and other regional trails connect to St. James Farm's trail system at four locations, with a fifth under construction in late 2020.

Site contributors

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