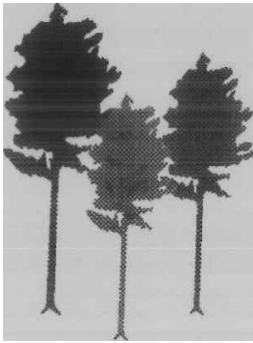


## Our Forest



As you enter the woods from the sound berm along Route 1 or from the Sayre Drive entrance, notice the relatively small size of the trees. This is a young forest re-growing from land that was part of the old Princeton nursery, from landfill dredged from the Carnegie Lake construction project or from other human activities. There are very few mature trees in our forest, and the mature ones exist only on its edges on the south side below the spillway and on the west side bordering Mapleton Road. As you pass these areas, compare the large size of the mature trees with the trees on the rest of the property.

This is a forest island. It is cut off from other forest islands by Princeton Landing on the North, Route 1 on the East, and by Mapleton Road on the South and West. Since it is a small forest island, the variety of both plant and animal species is limited.

The noise berm along Route 1 is an excellent example of the succession phase of transition from old field to early forest. The trees and grass planted by the highway department are being crowded out by a duke's mixture of goldenrod, pokeweed, locust, blackberry, and other species that flourish in the open. It will be interesting to watch the progression of the plants on the berm over the next few years.

The forest is a hodgepodge of both native and alien species that indicates a middle phase of a succession - from open fields to a mature forest, a process that may take a full century. The common native trees includes several varieties of *maple* (red, black and sugar), *black locust*, *box elder*, *dogwood*, *sumac*, a few *oaks* (near the mail box), *black cherry*, *catalpa* (large heart shaped leaves, hollow woody fruit), *black willow* (not the weeping willow which an alien from Europe), *cottonwood* (produces cotton like seeds in the spring that drift into Princeton Landing) and other hardwood species. Some of the trees

were planted by the Princeton Nursery, but never harvested. The best example of the planted trees are several rows of red maples just inside the Sayre Drive entrance.

Note that there is almost a total absence of evergreen trees in our woods. There are a few *red cedar* trees left along the northern bypass, and planted pine trees along the northern edges near Princeton Landing.



The understory is made up of tall *goldenrod* (there is an excellent stand on the northwest end of the woods), *pokeweed* with its deep blue berries and red stems (the roots are poisonous), *white asters*, *white boneset*, tall *India Grass*, and our ever present *multiflora rose*.

The *multiflora rose* is an alien plant from Manchuria that was introduced as a hedge by farmers in the area. It seems to have no natural enemies (even the deer won't eat it) and it takes over everywhere including growing over the trail. In the spring and early summer, the bushes are covered with small white blooms. Now, in the fall, the blooms are gone and only the red rose hips remain. Be careful handling the rose bushes as the thorns are very sharp.

In the alien category, one of the most common "weed" trees is the tree-of heaven that spreads rapidly and crowds out native trees. There is a stand of those trees on the northern end of the woods along the goldenrod field; some of the trees have been cut in the ongoing battle to permit the native trees to grow.

Scattered all along the trail, but especially along the northern bypass, you will also see the arching canes of *blackberry* and *black raspberry*. With the wet spring came a good crop of blackberries and raspberries, but the birds ate most of the berries just as they ripened. The blackberry is a bi-annual plant. The first year canes flourish and grow tall, but don't produce fruit until the second year, and

then the canes die. Blackberry thorns are quite sharp, so be careful.

On the south side of the trail there are large *wild /ox grape* and other vines. In some portions of the trail, the vines cross the trail and climb up the neighboring trees. We didn't have the heart to cut them, so watch your step.



And then there is the *poison* ivy. In our woods, poison ivy "hairy ropes" can be seen on almost every tree. As you walk through the woods, note the large poison ivy vines on the trees; this time of year you can see its leaves turning yellow and orange and its bunches of dull white berries. Poison ivy is not poisonous to most birds and animals, and the berries are eaten by many species of birds. It is highly poisonous by touch to many humans; even if you have never been sensitive, don't touch since allergies can begin at any age.

As you walk along the trail, and especially along the southern leg near the spillway, note how the deer have overgrazed the woods. In places, they have nibbled the plants down to the bare earth. You will also see large deer trails through the woods and going down on the south side of the steep berm. There are several families of deer living in the woods. Recently, I saw three small families, but they often mix with the deer near the seminary and north of the Windrows, and accurate count is impossible. On the other side of US 1 by the Plasma Lab, there is a huge herd of deer; I counted 31 one day this fall. I do not know if the herds on both sides of US 1 mix.

Other wildlife that I have seen in our woods include *cottontail rabbits*, *fox* (both red and gray), *skunks* (cute), woodchucks (there are several large holes in the berm on the southern trail) gray squirrels, red-tail and sharp-shinned hawks, great horned owls (migrating?), American and fish crows (the fish crow sound like he has a speech impediment), a small garter snake, and a variety of smaller birds (dove, jay, robin, cardinal, etc.) that you often see in Princeton Landing.



Our forest is young; it needs at least another fifty years to grow into a mature forest with fully grown trees and a corresponding understory layer. Over the next half century, remember how it looks today to compare it in your mind with the mature forest to come.

Enjoy!

Gary Canant

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