

To enhance and encourage
the public use and awareness
of Sessions Woods



Volume 20, Number 2
Spring 2022

The Friends of Sessions Woods was established
as an all-volunteer organization in 1998 to facilitate
projects and programs that enhance the value of
Sessions Woods.

Drum Beats for Spring

The sound of drumming woodpeckers is a sure sign spring is around the corner. Woodpeckers are noisy this time of year and very visible as territories are being established, followed by mating and nesting behavior. Keep your eyes and ears open for these interesting birds as you walk the trails this spring at Sessions Woods.

Connecticut is home to seven species of woodpeckers. The smallest and most common woodpecker at Sessions Woods is the downy woodpecker while the largest is the pileated woodpecker. The pileated, with its red crest of feathers, is often the most exciting to see! In addition to downy and pileated woodpeckers, other woodpeckers found at Sessions Woods include the hairy, yellow-bellied sapsucker, northern flicker, and red-bellied woodpecker. Chances are you will hear these woodpeckers before you see them!

Woodpeckers are uniquely adapted for drumming and excavating. Drumming is used as a means of communication, with woodpeckers using wood or even aluminum siding and downspouts to create sound patterns that likely tell other woodpeckers a mate is available or a territory has been established. Different woodpeckers create unique patterns to sounds and the advanced birdwatcher can often distinguish the species by sound alone.

The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior describes the anatomy of woodpeckers during the powerful activities of drumming and excavating. The brain cavity on these birds is enlarged and cushioned for the impact of bill on wood. The woodpecker uses head and neck muscles primarily while drumming and the whole body for excavation. Woodpeckers excavate with their strong chisel-like bills to find food, such as wood boring beetles or carpenter ants, or to hollow a tree for a nesting cavity. Like sound, nesting cavity size can be unique to the various woodpeckers. A woodpecker has stiff tail feathers and adaptations to its feet to help stabilize the bird on a tree trunk. The woodpecker's foot has two forward and two back-facing toes (called zygodactyl) to help grip the tree.

Woodpeckers are amazing, beautiful, and unique birds. Enjoy watching their behavior this spring on a future woodland walk or even in your own backyard.



Downy woodpecker (above) and pileated woodpecker family (below).
Photos by Paul Fusco

Ask a Biologist

What are the large birds often seen overhead at Sessions Woods?

The large birds soaring overhead are turkey vultures. Typically, they can be recognized easily when flying as the wings are held in an upward angle or “V-shape” as they soar. Gray flight and tail feathers can be seen when viewing from below.



Sometimes the featherless red head can also be distinguished. Turkey vultures have a strong sense of smell and locate carrion in this manner. They have found a favorable perch in the pines located in the first field on the left heading out at the start of the Beaver Marsh Trail. Scan the trees and you may see turkey vultures roosting during cold, cloudy days or in the early morning.

When do snakes become more active?

As soon as the sun is warm and the temperature is at least in the 60s, you may see common gartersnakes basking on the forest floor. Common gartersnakes are greenish olive and recognized by the yellow stripe along the top (and often sides) of the body. These snakes are named for their resemblance to the garters men used to wear to hold up their socks. Another snake you may see at Sessions Woods is the northern watersnake. Look for this snake among the sticks of a beaver lodge or dam or in the water. The northern watersnake appears black but actually has various markings including reddish crossbands alternating with dark blotches along its body. Its appearance is often mistaken for a cottonmouth, a snake found much further south than Connecticut. Snakes need the warmth of the sun to raise their body temperature to become more active.

Sessions Woods Calendar of Events

The Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center’s Public Program Series is a cooperative venture between the CT DEEP Wildlife Division and the Friends of Sessions Woods. For more information, please call (860-424-3036) or email (laura.rogers-castro@ct.gov).

March 26, 2022 (Saturday), 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
First Day Hike in partnership with the Pequabuck River Watershed Association
Join Friends of Sessions Woods Board of Director Jan Gatzuras and Director of the Pequabuck River Watershed Association Mary Rydingsward for a 5-mile, somewhat strenuous hike over varied terrain while following the blue-blazed Tunxis Trail. The trail is a pretty woodland loop and includes the Great Wall, a steep rock escarpment nearly 70 feet high. Participants should meet in front of the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center. Appropriate shoes, water, and a snack are highly recommended. Please register for this popular hike.

April 12, 2022 (Tuesday), 12:00-1:15 p.m. Spring Walk
Look for signs of spring with Wildlife Division Educator Laura Rogers-Castro. Participants will walk 1 to 2 miles on the gravel path through the woodlands to the beaver marsh and view wildflowers, birds, early reptiles, and occasional insects. Please wear appropriate shoes and bring water.

May 10, 2022 (Tuesday), 8:00-10:00 a.m. Bird Walk
May is one of the best months to go birdwatching in Connecticut. This is the time birds are establishing territories, singing, and stopping to feed during migratory flights. Wildlife Division Outreach Program Wildlife Photographer Paul Fusco and Educator Laura Rogers-Castro will lead this guided walk to the beaver marsh and back, approximately 2 miles roundtrip. Paul and Laura will help participants identify birds and provide insight on some of the behavior likely to be seen. No experience is necessary. Please bring binoculars if you have them, wear appropriate shoes and a hat, and be prepared to enjoy the diversity of birds at Sessions Woods.

Contact Laura (laura.rogers-castro@ct.gov or 860-424-3036) to register for any of the programs and be provided with a cancellation call/email if the weather is unfavorable. Please stay home if you are not feeling well. Social distancing required.



Northern watersnake



Common gartersnake

All photos by Paul Fusco

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For new members only: Memberships received during the months of January to June are effective through June 30 of the following year.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

We gratefully accept your contributions. Fees and contributions are fully tax deductible. My check for \$_____ is enclosed. Please send your check, made payable to Friends of Sessions Woods, to:

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