

# PATSY POND NATURE TRAIL GUIDE

## THE ROLE OF FIRE

- Fire is a natural influence in this forest community, and many of the plants and trees have adapted to survive burns. Many species in the longleaf forest require fire for plant reproduction and many others are actually healthier after fires. Longleaf pine seeds fall in the autumn and germinate after the fire season. Wild flowers and wiregrass also need fire to bloom and set seed.
- The original forest probably burned every three to five years, with lightning causing most of the fires during summer months. The US Forest Service now manages the forest with controlled burning. For more information on prescribed burning, refer to the brochure at the trailhead kiosk or contact the Croatan National Forest Ranger Station in New Bern at 252-638-5628.

## SMALL PONDS

- The Patsy Pond Natural Area contains groundwater interception ponds, which means they get their water supply from the ground. The water is dark in color due to the presence of tannic acid, which comes from peat (decaying matter and pine needles.) The ponds do not have many fish because of their acidic nature.
- There are three theories explaining the formation of these ponds. The first theory suggests that the Neuse River once flowed through here on its way to the sea. When the ocean receded, the Neuse changed its course, leaving depressions in the ground which filled with groundwater. The second theory states that the ocean used to wash over this area. As it receded millions of years ago, it formed sand dunes. Depressions in the sand dunes formed the ponds. The third theory proposes that many of these ponds are actually sinkholes (see sinkhole information provided on the trail).

## 1 REDBAY (avocado relative)

- Leaves have bluish color on their underside and reddish veins.
- Leaves, when crushed, have an aromatic odor and can be used for cooking.

## 2 WAX MYRTLE

- Evergreen shrub – dwarf variety – grows two feet tall. Flowers April-June, and fruits May-October.
- Tiny, yellow glands on the underside of the leaves give this shrub its famous aroma. In Colonial times, wax from the berries were used for making candles, and leaves were used to repel insects.

## 3 SWEETBAY (magnolia relative)

- Leaves are 3-4 inches long; topside is green, underside is whitish-gray.
- Used by Native Americans to treat rheumatism. Used by Colonists to treat malaria.

## 4 RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (endangered species since 1970)

- 7¼ inches long, black head with numerous small white spots; white lines across its back; white cheeks and chest.
- Lives primarily in longleaf forests. Nests are made 20-50 ft. above ground in living longleaf pines. The only woodpecker

species to excavate nest cavities in live pine trees. Notice the white bands on trees marked for the nests' protection by the forest service.

- These woodpeckers drill small holes, called "resin wells" around their nests to allow sap to ooze down the trunk, making a sticky surface to protect them from predators.

## 5 CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

- **Bladderwort:** Floats on the surface of pond. Bladders on the "leaves" at the base of its stem trap and digest small aquatic creatures.
- **Sundew:** Found along the pond's edge. Tips of the red "hairs" on the leaves produce a sticky liquid that catches and paralyzes insects to be digested.

## 6 SASSAFRAS

- Easily identified by its three shapes of leaves (elliptical, mitten-shaped and three-lobed).
- Once used for making root beer, medicine, tea, and a thickening powder for soups.
- Declared to cause cancer and banned from public use by the FDA in 1960.

## 7 EDIBLE BERRIES

- Several kinds can be found in Croatan National Forest: *Low Sweet Blueberry*, *Dwarf Huckleberry*, *Highbush Blueberry*, and *Sparkleberry (Tree Blueberry)*.
- Some berries contain *Anthocyanocides* which are thought to reduce swelling and prevent cataracts.

## 8 CHINQUAPIN (chestnut relative)

- Grows 6-12 feet tall. Leaves have toothed-edges and soft hairs on the underside. Nuts have spiny casings.

## 9 POCOSINS (Indian word, meaning "swamp on a hill")

- A raised bog formed from the buildup of organic material – part of an ever-changing landscape.
- Plants in a pocosin have a high tolerance for fire, long wet-periods, high acidity, and few nutrients.

## 10 HOLLY

- This shrub – or small tree – can live for 150-200 years. Five species can be found in the Patsy Pond Natural Area: *American*, *Yaupon*, *Dahoon*, *Inkberry (Bitter Gallberry)*, and *Sweet Gallberry*.
- American Holly's lumber is used for making piano keys.

## 11 FETTERBUSH (blueberry relative)

- Deciduous and evergreen varieties are plentiful in this area, have leathery leaves, and produce white, bell-shaped flowers in the spring.
- "Fetter" means "to get caught up."

## 12 LONGLEAF PINE

- Longest needles (10-15 inches) and largest cones (6-8 inches) of any pine species in NC.
- Sap is rich in resin which is used to produce tar, pitch, turpentine and rosin.
- Fire is required for seed germination. The trees' fast growth rate (up to 5 feet/year) and thick, scaly bark help protect them from fire.
- New pines begin with a "grass stage," lasting 3-15 years, during which it develops a taproot that leads to the groundwater supply (8-10 feet below the surface).



**GREEN TRAIL**  
.75 miles

**BLUE TRAIL**  
1 mile

**YELLOW TRAIL**  
1.9 miles

PARKING

X TRAIL HEAD