

## Spring Bluebell Trail Walk

### Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area

*Look everywhere for the Falcate Orangetip butterfly! Considered a harbinger of spring, these small butterflies have only one flight in Northern Virginia, between late March and mid-May. Start at the Stone House front porch, then walk toward the Wildlife Garden.*

1. **Bloodroots and Violets** are some of the first native plants to bloom in spring. Bloodroot is named for the dark red sap in stems and roots. Violets are a host plant for the Great Spangled Fritillary butterfly.
2. **Gray Dogwood** shrubs grow at the entrance to the Wildlife Garden. They form thickets, grow to 16', and have greenish-white blossoms. It's a host plant for Azure butterflies.
3. **Hackberry trees** are a host plant for six different species of butterflies, including the Hackberry Emperor, Comma, and American Snout. Their tiny fruit is popular with winter birds.
4. **Autumn Olive** is a deciduous shrub from eastern Asia and is an aggressive invasive species that is difficult to eradicate. Regretfully, it was introduced intentionally for erosion control and wildlife habitat.
5. **Poison Ivy** can appear as shiny reddish/green leaves, mature leaves or a hairy vine. It is an important food source for animals. Birds in particular enjoy the waxy white berries in late fall/winter. Enjoy from a distance, all parts can be irritating to human skin.
6. **Bluebird Boxes** provide nesting sites for bluebirds, please don't disturb! Our volunteers monitor the box all nesting season as part of a national effort to protect bluebird populations.
7. **The Old Barn** has been a safe haven for nesting Black Vultures for years. Black Vultures stay with their mates and maintain strong social bonds with their families throughout their lives.
8. **Entering the floodplain** where Spring Beauties and nonnative Common Chickweed cover the ground. Spring Beauties are one of the earliest nectar sources and important native plants for bees.



Falcate Orangetip



Bloodroot



Violets



Hackberry Emperor



Poison Ivy



Spring Beauties

9. **Green Level Cemetery** shows five graves that have been rediscovered, all part of the French family. Note the Periwinkle, a non-native species historically planted at cemeteries.
10. **Ralph's Pond** is home to a variety of frogs. This permanent wetland pond provides great habitat for frogs since no fish are present to eat frog eggs, tadpoles, and newts.
11. **Cricket Frogs** are often seen mating in small wetland pools along edge of the boardwalk. These small frogs come in a range of color combinations, including black, yellow, or orange on a base of brown or green.
12. **Pawpaw** trees grow delicious custard-like fruit loved by many mammals including humans. An understory tree commonly found in floodplains, it has unique burgundy-colored flowers. Pawpaws are the only host plant for Zebra Swallowtail butterflies.
13. **First Virginia Bluebells**. This native perennial is likely why you're here. They thrive in floodplain habitats, where they attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies. The Virginia Bluebell is the official flower of Prince William County.
14. **Trout-lilies** are an early spring bloomer that only flower after developing two leaves on its stem. It's named for its mottled leaves, which look like the markings on brook trout.
15. **Grape Vines** are one of our most abundant vines. They provide cover, nesting sites, and plentiful amounts of fresh fruit for over 100 species of birds and 79 species of caterpillars.
16. **The Spring House** indicates the end of this journey. Note how cool this spot feels as the underground stream bubbles up to the surface. The spring house was used as a source of refrigeration.



Green Level Cemetery



Green Frog



Comma



Trout Lily



Virginia Bluebells

