

# Wetland Overlook Trail in Autumn

The Wetland Overlook Trail at Pickering Creek Audubon Center is a year-round treat for nature enthusiasts. As you wander this mile-long path, you'll stumble upon three viewing platforms, two wetland windows, and even a viewing blind, all providing glimpses into the thriving freshwater wetlands. Low to the ground, small numbered posts align with our brochure, showcasing autumn's highlights along the trail and Meadow Viewing Platform.

Don't rush; take your time to observe and listen. Embrace the ever-changing seasons of Pickering Creek, from the lively burst of butterflies and wildflowers in the spring and summer to the softer tones and visiting migratory birds in fall to the quiet solitude of winter.

Right now, it's autumn, and the wetlands are painted with vibrant yellows, reds, and browns. The air is filled with the hum of insects and the arrival of waterfowl. With clear skies and cooler temperatures, fall is the ideal season to explore Pickering Creek.



Pickering Creek has miles of trails over 450 acres waiting to be explored. Check out our forests, fields, meadows, and waterfront while you're here!

*"There is such glory over everything;  
the sun came like gold through the trees,  
and over the fields, and I felt like  
I was in heaven."*

— Harriet Tubman 1869



**Key to Wetland Overlook Trail Map Symbols**

Observation Point	Wetland
Children's Garden/Herb Garden	Forest
Parking	Farm Field
Boundary	Field to Forest
Wetland Overlook Loop Trail .9 miles	Meadow
Farm To Bay Loop Trail 1.8 miles	Water
Pond Loop Trail .4 miles	
Spur	

North

**Hours:** Pickering Creek is open to the public every day of the week, free of charge. Site hours are from 7am to near dusk, check our website for up to date closing times.  
Office hours are Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.

Pickering Creek Audubon Center conserves natural habitats on Maryland's Eastern Shore by engaging and empowering our community through exploration, education and stewardship.

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# Autumn

A Seasonal Look at Our Restored Wetlands



# Welcome to Pickering Creek



**1. Take a moment** here to pause, be still and silent, and take in your surroundings. For the next mile, you will be strolling along the Wetland Loop, immersing yourself in the autumnal wonders of this vibrant season. Engage your senses to connect with the landscape. Listen for the gentle rustling of branches and the cheerful song of the white-throated sparrow. The air is alive with the soft hum of insects, adding to the symphony of the season. Let your eyes be captivated by the rich tapestry of fall hues, including the bright reds of sweet gum trees. Allow the whispers of the wind and the distinctive calls of Canada geese to serenade your walk.



**2. Goldenrod** (*Solidago rugosa*) is a vibrant, yellow-flowered plant that's a common sight in North America, especially during autumn. While there are many species of native goldenrods, a common sight in our meadows is wrinkleleaf or rough-stemmed goldenrod. These hardy perennials brighten up fields and roadsides with their cheerful blooms from late summer through fall. Despite a common misconception, goldenrod isn't the cause of hay fever – it's actually ragweed. In fact, goldenrod is a crucial pollinator plant, providing nectar for bees and butterflies. So, while it might get overshadowed by showier fall foliage, it's a vital part of the autumn landscape. *Photo by Michele Johnson.*



**3. Groundsel bush** (*Baccharis halimifolia*), is a shrub native to coastal areas of the U. S.. In the autumn landscape, this shrub takes on a unique and striking appearance. Its small, fluffy, silver-white seed heads develop in late summer and persist through the fall, creating a fascinating contrast against the changing colors of the surrounding foliage. These fluffy seeds often resemble small cotton balls, giving the plant a distinct, almost ethereal quality. Groundsel bush is ecologically important, providing habitat and food for various wildlife species, especially birds, who feed on its seeds. *Photo by Michele Johnson.*



**4. The native persimmon**, (*Diospyros virginiana*), is a hidden gem in the autumn landscape. Its leaves turn brilliant shades of orange and red, creating a stunning display. But the real magic happens when its small, plum-like fruits ripen. During fall, these persimmons become sweet and soft, making them a delectable treat for wildlife, including deer, birds, and raccoons. Beyond their deliciousness, native persimmons play a role in supporting local ecosystems. They're adapted to the region's climate and pests, making them hardy and sustainable. So, this unassuming tree not only adds beauty to autumn but also nourishes the creatures that call it home. *Photo by Patrick Carney.*



**5. Green-winged teal** (*Anas carolinensis*) grace Pickering Creek's wetlands during the fall. These waterfowl, known for their vivid green speculum feathers, are the smallest dabbling ducks of North America. Their arrival at the Center is a seasonal spectacle, attracting birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. They relish our wetlands and marshes, which offer rich foraging grounds. Green-winged teal's presence not only adds to the fall's avian diversity but also underscores the vital role that places like Pickering Creek Audubon Center play in providing habitat and shelter for migratory birds. It's a sight to behold in the autumn landscape. *Photo by Patrick Carney.*



**6. Common buckeyes** (*Junonia coenia*), a well-known butterfly species, are frequent visitors. These medium-sized butterflies are recognizable by their distinctive markings, which include large eye spots on their wings, making them resemble the eyes of a larger creature. Common buckeyes are spotted in open areas, meadows, and gardens. They are nectar feeders and can be seen sipping from various wildflowers. These butterflies are known for their sporadic migrations, and their populations can vary from year to year. *Photo by Mary Helen Gillen.*



**7. Snowy egret** (*Egretta thula*), a dazzling all-white heron, is a prominent resident here. Recognizable by its striking black legs and distinctive "yellow slippers," this elegant wader stands out in the wetlands. Unlike its counterparts, snowy egrets are notably active feeders, often darting energetically. They employ a dynamic foraging style, vigorously stirring the water to startle prey, such as fish and aquatic invertebrates, into view. This mesmerizing bird adds a touch of grace and liveliness to the serene wetland landscape here. Look in the trees too, to find them taking a rest! *Photo by Ron Ketter.*



**8. The two massive red oak trees** (*Quercus rubra*) are not only botanical giants but living witnesses to history. These majestic trees are part of the landscape's natural heritage, providing both aesthetic beauty and environmental benefits. They were here when this land was all farmland and had reign to grow straight up into this majestic presence you see today. Red oak trees are native to North America and known for their vibrant, lobed leaves and impressive size. They typically grow to 60-75 feet in height with a wide canopy. Red oaks, as long-lived deciduous trees, have thrived at Pickering Creek, establishing their presence as part of the natural landscape over a considerable span of time. *Photo by Megan Swadley.*



**9. The meadow viewing platform** is a recent addition at Pickering Creek, offering visitors an idyllic spot to soak in the beauty of fall foliage and immerse themselves in the sounds of nature. Overlooking the meadow, this platform provides a peaceful vantage point to observe the vibrant colors of autumn as leaves change. While seated on the platform, you can appreciate the intricate symphony of nature. The meadow comes alive with the sounds of numerous insects, including the melodious trill of the two striped grasshoppers or praying mantis. As you listen, you might catch the charming notes of young white-throated sparrows as they practice their songs, in preparation for the spring. This serene and sensory experience makes the Meadow Viewing Platform a must-visit spot for nature enthusiasts and those seeking a tranquil escape. *Photo by Michele Johnson.*



**10. Eastern cottontail** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) is a common and endearing resident. This small, round-tailed rabbit is a frequent sight in the meadows, fields, and woodlands. Eastern cottontails are known for their soft, brown fur and distinctive white puff of fur on their tails, which resembles a cotton ball. They are herbivores and play a vital role in the ecosystem by helping control plant growth through their grazing habits, and are often spotted nibbling on a variety of vegetation, including grasses, clover, and young plants. These clever rabbits have escape routes memorized in their territories. Look down! You can often see "holes" on paths where rabbits run along the sides of the meadow. *Photo by Patrick Carney.*



**11. Winged sumac** (*Rhus copallinum*) is a native North American shrub known for its striking, feather-like leaves. It belongs to the cashew family (*Anacardiaceae*) and can grow up to 15 feet tall. Its leaves are pinnately compound with distinctive "wings" along the rachis, giving the shrub its name. During autumn, the leaves turn vibrant shades of red, creating a beautiful landscape. The plant produces clusters of small, greenish-white flowers that later form clusters of fuzzy, red berries, which are a food source for wildlife. Its ecological importance and vibrant fall foliage make it a valuable addition to the natural landscape. *Photo by Megan Swadley.*

