

Station 3: Wetlands and Chestnut Trees

This small pond forms the lower end of a larger wetland complex. Water flows from a large wetland on the southwest side of Hayes Woods, through a well-constructed beaver dam, and into this pond which is drained by an intermittent stream that flows eastward. Notice the mud dam constructed by the resident beavers years ago. This shallow pond and its surrounding wetlands provides essential habitat to a wide variety of plants and animals.

As you continue up the hill toward Station 4, look for the young American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) tree on the left side of the trail. The American chestnut played a crucial role in its native ecosystem before the chestnut blight devastated its populations in the early 20th century. The nuts produced by American chestnut trees were a vital food source for various wildlife, including squirrels, deer, and numerous bird species. These trees provided important habitat and shelter for many species, contributing to biodiversity in forest ecosystems. As a large canopy tree, the American chestnut helped shape the structure of eastern forests, influencing light availability and understory growth. The tree's leaf litter contributed to soil health, aiding in nutrient cycling and supporting a diverse understory of plants. Efforts to restore the American chestnut to its former prominence in the ecosystem through breeding programs are ongoing.

