

Welcome to Nathan Mott Park!

Nathan Mott Park was created in 1939 by a woman named Lucretia Mott Ball to honor her father, Nathan Mott, and to provide islanders with a natural place to enjoy.

Originally farmland, this land was owned by several old island families and in the 19th and early 20th centuries, provided fresh garden produce for the island's hotels during the island's early tourism boom.

After its protection, the Park was owned and managed by the Nathan Mott Park Corporation. For several decades, the Corporation planted many trees in Nathan Mott Park, including evergreens and chestnuts, in an area that became known as the "Enchanted Forest".

The area was one of Block Island's only forested spaces for many years. In 1996, the Corporation was dissolved and the land transferred to the Block Island Conservancy.

Today, the Block Island Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy manage and steward the property to allow its habitats to thrive and people to enjoy its rambling trails, just as Lucretia Mott Ball imagined.



1

We'll be starting at the trailhead off Center Road near the end of the airport's runway. To your left, you can see all the fields bounded by stonewalls that were once used by farmers.

2

The first section of trail leads you through dense shrubs. These shrubs are important for birds and other wildlife. As you look around, try to find a:

Shad — a tall shrub with multiple, light gray trunks.



Shad bark



Shad leaves



Shad berries

Bayberry — shorter shrub with shiny green leaves and small, waxy berries



Bayberry leaf



Bayberry berries

Arrowwood — a group of straight trunks with deeply ridged leaves and blue, clustered berries



Arrowwood
Leaf



Arrowwood berries

3

After walking through the shrub-lined trail, you'll enter a large open field. The field contains grassland plants, like goldenrod, deer tongue, and other grasses. You may also notice a plant with dark green, shiny leaves and blackish purple flowers. This is black swallowwort, an invasive milkweed on Block Island. The conservation groups are working hard to control this plant because it can confuse and disrupt the lifecycle of monarch butterflies.

Keep an eye out for monarchs, as well as a smaller orange butterfly, the American copper, which you might see flitting down the trail ahead of you.



American Copper
Butterfly

4

As you cross the open field, take a look at the steep hill to your left. Do you notice how sandy it is? This is a morainal grassland, a globally-imperiled habitat. Admire it from a distance!

Bird Calls on the Trail

"Teakettle, teakettle, teakettle, tea!"

Carolina Wren

"Sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet"

Yellow Warbler

"Drink your tea!"

Eastern Towhee

"Birdie, birdie, birdie, birdie"

Northern Cardinal

"Chickadee, dee, dee"

Black-capped Chickadee

5 After heading back into the taller vegetation, rounding a corner, and heading uphill a little ways, you'll begin to notice prickly, unusually-shaped husks littering the ground. These are from the oriental chestnut, an introduced tree species. The husks, which are leftover from last fall, have been cracked open by deer, who love to eat the sweet seed inside. Handle them carefully if you decide to pick one up!



Oriental chestnut husks

6 As you continue along the trail, look to your left and listen for the sound of frogs calling, particularly if you're walking in the early morning or evening. Back behind the shrubs is a vernal pool, a body of water that is seasonally wet and is excellent habitat for amphibians and a variety of invertebrates. These creatures are able to thrive because no fish live in vernal pools.



A spring peeper, one of Block Island's amphibians that lives in vernal pools

7 Further down the trail, you'll come upon an old hawthorn tree that has holes bored into it all up and down the trunk. This pattern of holes, known as tattooing, were created by a woodpecker called the yellow-bellied sapsucker. Sapsuckers drill into the trunks of trees and then leave to allow sap to seep out. Insects are attracted to the sweet sap, but frequently get stuck in the oozing liquid. The yellow-bellied sapsucker returns a little later to find its meal all prepared!



Tattooed bark of the hawthorn tree



A yellow-bellied sapsucker

8 Look for shelf fungus growing on trees and downed logs along the edges of the trail. Fungus plays an important role in the ecosystem, breaking down plant material and recycles nutrients back into the soil.



Shelf fungus

9 The Enchanted Forest was a grove of trees planted by the Nathan Mott Park Corporation in the 1940s. It was one of the only large stands of trees on the island and provided excellent habitat for nesting and roosting birds, particularly owls. In the early 2000s, the Enchanted Forest was cut down because the trees were causing a navigational hazard for planes landing at the nearby airport.

10 After climbing a steep hill, bear right and head to the very top, where you'll be rewarded with views north to Clay Head and east over town. You can continue in many directions, looping through the various trails that cover this large protected area. Enjoy your hike!

Did you know?

Nathan Mott Park is an important link in the chain of conserved land at the center of the island.

There are over 200 acres of preserved land in this area – a block of open space for nature to thrive and people to explore!

Trail guide brought to you by:

