

SAND PLAIN FORESTS

Several sizeable and more or less contiguous Town, State and private lands in the central part of town provide a variety of walking opportunities in a sand plain forest setting. The walks are relatively flat with some modest knolls, and include Great Pond State Forest, Stratton Brook State Park, Still Brook Open Space, Town Open Space at the southwest corner of Bushy Hill and Stratton Brook Roads, Ethel Walker School, and Belden Forest (see following pages for individual descriptions).

Sand plain forests are home to a rich variety of birds and animals, who prefer this environment to wetlands or nearby hills for foraging and raising their young. The forests are characterized by thick layers of sand and gravel below topsoil. The soil, deposited by retreating glaciers tends to be well drained and can become quite dry in places. This creates variations in the patterns of vegetation relative to the nearby ridges and wetlands. Influences such as fire in pre-colonial days, followed later by logging, plowing, and pasturing have profoundly shaped present sand plain vegetation. For example, non-palatable plant species such as cedar and juniper, able to thrive under heavy grazing conditions, have relatively recently been forced into decline under the canopy of oak, maple, hickory and black cherry. Fire sensitive conifers are the most recent large trees to join the canopy.

