

## MARKER # 2

# EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT

This portion of the trail leads toward a sunny, open early successional area, and the change from shadowed forest to brilliant sunlight is dramatic. Patches of bare sand and gravel are evidence of the esker-forming deposits left by the retreating ice sheet thousands of years ago. This dry substrate, coupled with relentless sunlight, places great demands on plant life. Despite the harsh conditions, plant life is abundant.

This type of habitat occurs in places where disturbances due to fire, flood, wind, or in this case, human activity, have resulted in the removal of most of a habitat's plant communities. Pioneer species such as lichens, mosses, grasses, clover, sweet fern, sumac, birch, and poplar quickly colonize the bare areas. The yearly decomposition of their leaves enriches and increases the soil layer, paving the way for other plant species.

Sun-lovers such as cherry, birch, raspberry, blackberry, grasses, clover, aster, and goldenrod abound. They are hardy plants that thrive in this arid, sun-drenched habitat.

The open areas, occupied by low-growing plants interspersed with the taller stems of young trees and shrubs, allow animals to move easily through the habitat and provide cover and shelter from the elements.

Throughout the growing season, many bee, wasp, and fly species arrive to harvest nectar and pollen from the flowering plants that grow here. The resulting abundance of fruit and seed crops provide food for many different insect, bird, and mammal species. Predators such as frogs, snakes, foxes, bobcats, fishers and raptors are drawn by the wildlife that come to feed here .

Early successional habitats are important as breeding grounds for shrubland birds such as thrashers, towhees, warblers, grouse and woodcock. Woodcocks provide a spectacular show each spring when males arrive to perform their sky dance, attracting females who will nest and raise their chicks in the surrounding forested wetlands. Because they are increasingly uncommon in New Hampshire and are of great importance to wildlife, habitats such as this are kept in "early succession mode" by periodically cutting trees such as young pines and locusts when they begin to dominate the habitat.

