

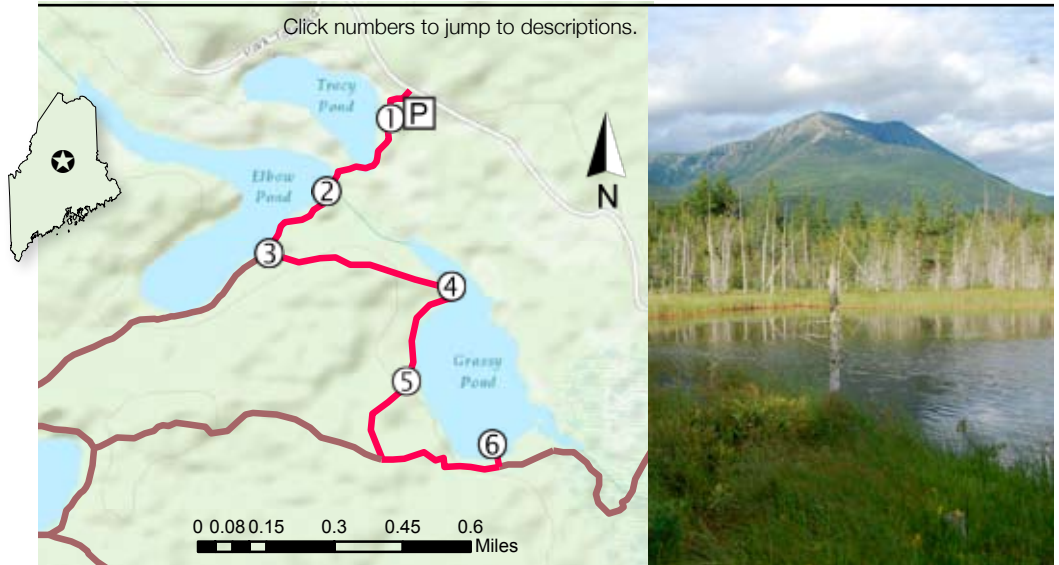
BAXTER STATE PARK

Grassy Pond Trail - 1.25 miles each way, easy

The Grassy Pond Trail tours Tracy Pond, Elbow Pond, and Grassy Pond, all nestled in the cool lowlands overshadowed by Mt. Katahdin. Wildlife abounds in the wetlands, thickets, and mature forests here; even the novice wildlife watcher may spot frogs, dragonflies, snowshoe hare, a variety of birds, and maybe even a moose. Canoes* at the end of the Grassy Pond Trail offer visitors the opportunity to explore even more habitats. *For a small fee - see park staff for details and bookings.

Getting There

From the Togue Pond Gate, take the road to the left. Drive approximately 6 miles, passing Abol Campground and Katahdin Stream Campground. The parking lot for the Grassy Pond Trail will be on the left, just before the trailhead.



① Home Sweet... Bog -69.015739, 45.890138

[A to map](#)

30 yards after the trailhead, the trail emerges from a dense fir stand onto a ridge between a wetland and a pond.

Think about a routine weekday. Where do you spend your time? Chances are, your routine includes a place to go to work or school, a place to eat, and a place to sleep. Together, these places make up your habitat.

Like you, animals also need a home or habitat that includes places to eat, to sleep, to reproduce, and to meet other needs. For some species, that place is an evergreen forest. For others, that place is under rocks or leaf litter. Look around. How many habitats do you see from this ridge?

Habitats come in all shapes and sizes, from a patch of hair on a moose's back (habitat of a tick), to many square miles of Baxter State Park (habitat of a Canada lynx). Take notice of the evergreen thicket behind you, the wetland ([Black Spruce Bog](#)) to your left ♀, and Tracy Pond to your right. These are a preview of the habitats that you will explore during the walk.

Start with the black spruce bog. [White-throated sparrow](#), with its distinct and wavering "Old Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody" song, its white throat, and its striped crown, likes to nest in places like this. If you were a little bird, where would you hide

Naturalist's Notes



Plants in this Black Spruce Bog can tolerate stressful acidic, nutrient-poor conditions. They include black spruce, tamarack, leatherleaf, sheep laurel, Labrador tea, and pitcher plant.



White-throated sparrow



Common yellowthroat



Beaver-chewed sticks

Naturalist's Notes



The ponds in this valley originated as shallow basins scoured out by the movement of glaciers over 10,000 years ago. Beavers prefer to dam streams in valleys that are wide and shallow as opposed to steep and narrow. A dam of the same height will inundate more land in a wide, shallow valley than in a narrow, steep valley. Basins like these are beaver bonanza.

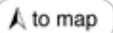
Kid's Corner



When there is fresh snow on the ground, find a small stone or paperweight and try to place it on top of the snow. Does it sink? Now put something flat, like a piece of cardboard, on the snow and then place the stone on top. Does it sink this time? The weight of the rock is spread out over the cardboard, keeping it afloat. This is how snowshoe hares use their big feet to stay on top of deep snow!

your nest to keep it safe from predators? The white-throated sparrow tucks its teacup-shaped nests into thick brush near the ground. Wet places, like this one, are often thick with shrubs, making them good habitat for not only white-throated sparrow but also [Lincoln's sparrow](#), [palm warbler](#), and [common yellowthroat](#).

② **America's Largest Rodent** -69.012734, 45.88820



At 0.15 miles, the trail crosses the second of two log bridges; this bridge crosses the outlet of Elbow Pond.

It cuts down trees to build its empire. It's the torment of landowners and the muse of naturalists. It's America's largest rodent, the beaver, and it's the reason this pond is so big.

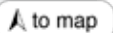
Beavers have a knack for customizing their own habitats. A beaver pond, like the one you are crossing, is created when beavers dam a stream with sticks and mud. The resulting pond or series of ponds provides the beaver with food and safety.

Beavers prefer to eat the bark of hardwood trees, like red maple and alder, over soft-wood trees, like tamarack and black spruce. As they run out of food, they must travel farther from their pond to reach suitable food, which poses risks for a tasty beaver.

Clumsy on land, beavers are relatively easy meals for coyote, fisher, and bobcat. In the water, they are completely safe. Beavers constantly increase the size of their dam to widen their pond, shortening the distance they must travel over land to find food 🦫 .

Look for sign of beaver here. Sticks that are chewed to pencil-like points and trees with teeth marks and shavings around the bases are good clues.

③ **Bigfoot** -69.019966, 45.887051



At 0.4 miles, the trail splits in the midst of a dense tunnel of young balsam fir.

If Bigfoot exists, he probably lives in snowy regions. Disproportionately large feet are an adaptation of animals that frequently travel in snow ☆.

This is a good place to spot an animal whose name, snowshoe hare, says it all. To avoid predators and to keep warm in winter, snowshoe hares seek dense coniferous stands like this one.

Snowshoe hare is one of several northern mammal species whose fur changes from summer brown to white in the winter to blend in with the snow. Snowshoe hares that turn white too soon, before it snows, will travel to higher elevations seeking snow to complete their camouflage.

In northern Maine, snowshoe hares are constantly haunted by the elusive Canada lynx. Lynx are so dependent on snowshoe hares as a food source that lynx populations often plummet following a decline in snowshoe hares. Like snowshoe hares, lynx have large feet for traveling in snow.

Take the left branch of the junction toward Grassy Pond. Within about 50 yards, the trail

Naturalist's Notes



Here, red spruce dominates the canopy which is also sprinkled with white pine and paper birch.

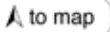
Herbs are scarce; balsam fir seedlings and mosses cover the ground. Forests like this are often found atop moderate-elevation slopes with shallow, well-drained soils. More herbaceous plants appear where the trail approaches the lake; they include wintergreen, creeping snowberry, rattlesnake plantain, Canada mayflower, and blue-bead lily.



Hooded merganser

climbs out of the dense balsam fir stand and into a shady but open [Lower Elevation Spruce - Fir Forest](#) .

④ Foster Parenting among Water Birds -69.008416, 45.886086



At 0.7 miles, a spur on the left leads to the northern end of Grassy Pond, offering a spectacular view of Mt. Katahdin.

If you approach this spot slowly and quietly in summer, you may get a look at families of [common goldeneye](#) and [hooded merganser](#). The common goldeneye is sometimes mistaken for the common loon. Loons, however, never have more than two hatchlings.

Adult male common goldeneyes have a prominent white spot near the base of the bill; females have plain brown heads. Both do indeed have golden eyes. Hooded merganser males sport a white crest edged in black; females are rather plain brown.

Common goldeneyes typically care for many hatchlings. This is in part because one female goldeneye can sometimes manipulate another mother into raising her young, a tactic known as “brood parasitism.” Goldeneyes nest in cavities of dead trees, but like in musical chairs, there aren’t always enough cavities during breeding season. A female goldeneye without a nesting cavity of her own will sometimes lay her eggs among the clutch of another female goldeneye. In the darkness of the nest cavity, the unwitting female will incubate both clutches, sometimes reaching as many as 24 eggs, but more often closer to a dozen.

While wandering beside these ponds, hikers in summer may feel as though they are being dive-bombed by small helicopters. Blurs of blue and black, mosaic darners are large, noisy dragonflies. If you are lucky they might feed on the insects that are trying to feed on you!



Spruce grouse

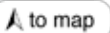
Image © Bryan Pfeiffer, used with permission



Gray jay

Image © Bryan Pfeiffer, used with permission

⑤ Birds: A Double-Take -69.010684, 45.884033



At 0.8 miles, the trail becomes an aisle in a cathedral of tall, evenly-aged red spruce with virtually no understory. Here, the ground is carpeted in feather moss.


You may think you’ve spotted a [black-capped chickadee](#) in this red spruce forest, but look again. Perhaps you found a [boreal chickadee](#), the black-capped chickadee’s [boreal](#) counterpart. Nearly identical to the black-capped chickadee, the boreal chickadee has a brown cap and sings a raspy, nasal “*tsik-a-day*.”

Boreal counterparts are similar to species found in warmer (temperate) [climates](#), but with differences that make them better adapted for the cold. Boreal chickadee, [spruce grouse](#), and [gray jay](#) are the boreal counterparts of the black-capped chickadee, [ruffed grouse](#), and [blue jay](#) that many of us recognize from warmer places.

This red spruce stand provides excellent habitat for all three boreal species, but the easiest one to spot is the boreal chickadee.

At 1 mile, turn left at the junction toward Grassy Pond.

© **A Sexy Sound to a Frog** -69.006882, 45.881775

 to map

At 1.2 miles, turn left down the final spur to the southern edge of Grassy Pond.

This is a good place to rest and take in the scenery. Across the pond Doubletop, West Peak, and Mt. OJI stand in the distance. Sweetgale and leatherleaf shrubs lean over the water to the right of the landing.



Green frog

Listen for green frogs, notable for their distinct, banjo-like “unk” call. Unlike many frogs that call at night, green frogs vocalize throughout the day.

Both male and female green frogs are territorial, but males abandon their territories for shallow ponds and lakes in spring and summer, where they call for females (*unk, unk, unk*). Females spend only about a week at these breeding sites, where they mate, lay up to 5,000 eggs, and depart. The eggs hatch less than a week later, releasing a new generation of dark green tadpoles into the water.

Naturalist’s Glossary

Boreal: Living in northern climates.

Climate: Long-term temperature and weather patterns.

*Natural Heritage Hikes is a project of the [Maine Natural Areas Program](#) in partnership with the [Maine Trail Finder website](#).
For more Natural Heritage Hikes, please visit www.mainetrailfinder.com.*

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Designed and written by Kelly Finan, University of Vermont Field Naturalist Program

Map sources: Maine Office of GIS, Esri