

Pencil Factory Kiosk

Life Along The Nashoba

“Here the earth is fluid to my thoughts, the sky is reflected from beneath, and around yonder cape is the highway to other continents.” Henry David Thoreau

Nashoba Brook offers a unique environment as it babbles along, sweeping and scouring the bottom without pause. It is continually recharged with oxygen, and carries sediment and organic matter, both from land run-off and from the shredding of leaves by microorganisms in overhanging trees and bankside vegetation. Where the brook widens, offering more exposure to sunlight, photosynthesis by in-stream algae and plants takes over as the principal energy source. The rich organic soil along the river edge supports many plants, such as the cardinal flower. Nashoba brook, like most rivers and streams, provides diverse wildlife habitat and supplies water to the wetlands. The wetlands, in turn, perform invaluable tasks such as weather quality improvement, flood control, and removal of chemical and organic wastes.

The wildlife corridor along the edge of the brook comes alive at night with many animals searching for food. A racoon may search the bottom, hoping to find a crayfish, a very tasty invertebrate. Mink, skunks, coyotes, river otters, beavers, muskrats, and other mammals also rely on the brook. There are innumerable water insects. Some, like the black-winged damselfly, and the caddis fly, leave their water nursery when they mature. Many birds, such as the belted kingfisher and eastern phoebe, depend on rivers and streams for their food. In addition, the brook provides habitat for many migratory bird species.

Every river species has evolved mechanisms to utilize, counter, and survive the moving waters. Plants may have long, complex root systems to hold them in place. Many stream invertebrates have flat and/or contoured body shapes, hooks, life lines, and suckers to keep them from being swept away. They tend to operate in the current and take advantage of the passing food supply. River fish are neurologically equipped to instinctively maintain a constant position in relation to the current – this is called rheotaxis. Brook trout, stocked annually, are an example of such a species. River ecosystems are among our greatest reservoirs of biological diversity.

Belted Kingfisher – Fish diet. The young are able to catch fish after a week or two of leaving the nest. Living near streams, ponds, and even the seacoast, the kingfisher dives into the water to catch small fish. Kingfishers also eat crayfish, frogs, shellfish, and insects.

Black Winged Damselfly – Mates at water’s edge. The female lays eggs on a stem just below the water surface. The nymph winters over in the water and emerges in the spring or summer as an adult. The damselfly is similar to the dragonfly, but holds its wings together in an upright position when resting, whereas the dragonfly holds its wings flat and perpendicular to its body.

Caddis Fly Larva – Marvelous architect. It builds its home using bits of old leaves or sticks. It captures nutrients as they float past. Once reaching adulthood, the caddis fly larva swims to the

surface and holds on to a rock or plant sticking out of the water long enough to dry its wings and then flies off.

Royal Fern – Often seen at the edge of marshes and streams.

Great Crested Flycatcher – Nests in abandoned woodpecker holes in the forested uplands. It has a grayish green back with a pale yellow breast.