

WILLOW POND LOOP

Self-guided Trail



Core Sound Waterfowl
Museum & Heritage Center

1785 Island Road
P.O. Box 556
Harkers Island, NC 28531
(252) 728-1500
www.coresound.com

Please recycle this brochure by replacing in the brochure box, or return to the visitor center.

This 1/3-mile trail winds around a restored freshwater pond, with gorgeous views of wetland habitats and maritime woodlands. It will return you to this same spot. Watch for ducks and songbirds year-round from observation sites along the trail. The trail starts behind the Museum.

Caution: The unpaved trail is flat, but boggy conditions may be encountered. Poison ivy, mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers, and fire ants are found in this area.



Devilwood

A Devilwood. *Osmanthus americanus.* If you tried to split the “devilishly hard” devilwood, you would learn how it got its name. Birds and squirrels relish the small, olive-like black berries.

B American Holly. *Ilex opaca.* Tolerant of salty breezes, American holly bears green berries that mature into a deep crimson color by fall. Birds love to eat them. Look for colorful patches of red, orange, green, and yellow lichens growing on the holly tree bark. Lichens are a combination of algae and fungi. The algae use light to make food, while the fungi absorb moisture and provide support.

C Duck Blind Overlook. Shhh! Make a quiet approach to the Willow Pond duck blind. In the fall and winter, birds migrating south might rest for a few days here. Others stay for months. Migrating ducks include mallards, black ducks, green- and blue-winged teal, and American wigeon. In the spring and summer, look for breeding ducks such as wood ducks and mallards.



Lizardtail

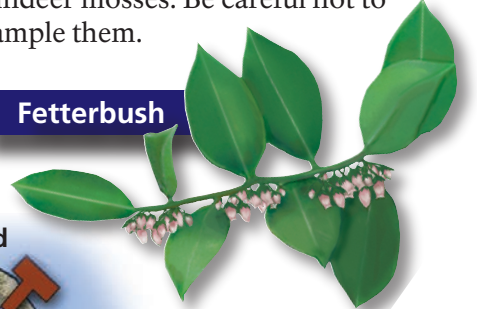
D Lizardtail. *Saururus cernuus.* Named for its drooping clusters of brown nutlets, this perennial plant likes moist ground. Perhaps it is home to one of the real lizards of Harkers Island, the green anole or legless eastern glass lizard.

E Cutoff to the “Short Trail.” Use this spur trail to return to the trailhead without looping around the Willow Pond.

F Landing Strip. Harkers Island is a remnant barrier island. The sandy soils here were once high dunes. Humans have impacted Harkers Island for centuries. This open swath was a landing strip, built after World War II. It cut the Willow Pond into two separate bodies of water. Watch for fire ants!

G Wax myrtle. *Myrica cerifera.* Look for wax myrtle’s evergreen leaves dotted with small yellow resin glands on both the upper and lower surfaces. The similar bayberry has resin glands on the lower leaf surface only. The waxy berries of this common maritime shrub are an important food for birds, especially tree swallows and cedar waxwings. Many Down East natives called this plant “myrklebush,” and remember when wax myrtle boughs were a common flea deterrent and were tossed on fish carts to repel flies.

H Spur Trail to Moss Bed. This short trail leads to a forest opening carpeted with gray-green reindeer mosses. Be careful not to trample them.



Fetterbush

I Fetterbush. *Lyonia lucida.* Growing close to the forest floor, fetterbush has long, drooping branches with alternate leaves that show a pale midrib and leaf margin. The word “fetter” means “to confine or restrain.” Walk through a dense growth of fetterbush and you’ll understand the connection!

J White Ibis. *Eudocimus albus.* This graceful bird with the down-curved bill is frequently spotted in groups, winging over Harkers Island as it makes its way from rookeries on nearby islands to feeding areas. A year-round resident of coastal regions, the white bird probes its bill back and forth in shallow waters—such as the Willow Pond—as it searches for fish, crabs, and other aquatic invertebrates.

K Meeting Place Wayside. From here you can choose to continue across the sandy road and connect with the Soundside Loop, or return to the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center.



- Trailhead
- Willow Pond Loop (1/3 mile)
- Willow Pond Spur (1/10 mile)
- Connector to Soundside Loop (1/5 mile)
- Soundside Loop (4/5 mile)
- Connector to Willow Pond Loop (1/10 mile)
- No public road access beyond gate

SOUNDSIDE LOOP

Self-guided Trail



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Cape Lookout National Seashore

131 Charles Street
Harkers Island, NC 28531
(252) 728-2250
www.nps.gov/caloc

Please recycle this brochure by replacing in the brochure box, or return to the visitor center.

This 4/5-mile trail winds along the eastern shore of Harkers Island, through maritime forest and saltmarsh. It will return you to this same spot. The trail features a boardwalk and observation deck overlooking Core Sound. Stand on the edge of land and sea and think about the forces that shape Harkers Island—and her people.

Caution: This trail is flat but has some rough surfaces and soft soil. About half of the trail is wooden boardwalk. Poison ivy, mosquitoes, chiggers, and fire ants are found in this area.

A The Skeletal Forest. Life is harsh on the edge of the island. Here, salt from tides, floodwaters, and high winds takes its toll on plants. Most of these dead or dying trees are live oaks and pines, with smooth trunks bleached by the sun.

B Salty Lifestyle. Many plants have adapted to this salty environment. The waxy leaves of evergreens such as live oak and wax myrtle protect the plants from salty breezes. Look closely, however, on the trail and the rest of the island, and you can see the wedge-shaped silhouettes of salt-pruned shrubs and trees.

C Read the Water. Harkers Island fishermen relied on their ability to “read the water,” a skill you can practice from this vantage point. Watch for opposing currents that meet and create visible “seams” on the water’s surface. Changing tides are often marked with bands of differently colored water. And “nervous water” is rippled by baitfish, which may signal a school of sought-after spot or Spanish mackerel below.

D Red Bay. *Persea borbonia*. Red bay leaves are arranged on the twig in alternate fashion, while the similar devilwood sports leaves that sprout opposite one another. Many Core Sound locals cook with red bay leaves, which are in the same family as the Mediterranean bay leaves found in grocery stores.

E Seen and Heard. Birds are among the most easily observed—and heard—wildlife of the sound, salt marsh, and maritime forest. Travel quietly along the trail, and you might spot tall white wading birds such as great and snowy egrets. In the spring and

F Duck Watch. Like an inland cape, this end of the island extends far into Core Sound. It’s a great place for watching waterbirds. In the fall and winter, look for huge flocks of redhead ducks far in the distance. Closer to shore, watch for red-throated and common loons, red-breasted mergansers, and buffleheads. Hunting ducks is a local tradition providing folks with both food and recreation.

G A Moving Shore. Harkers Island is protected from the full brunt of Atlantic storms by Shackleford and Core Banks, but still this shoreline shows the marks of erosion, often from winter storms or Nor’easters. There are trees on stilts of taproots. You can see harder soils exposed from underneath the sand. Since the 1960s, the shoreline here has moved an average of 100 feet. Rising seas due to global warming will only increase this rate of shoreline retreat.



H Cycle of the Saltmarsh. As you walk on this spur trail to the overlook, notice that most of the vegetation in this wide expanse of marsh is saltmarsh cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*. This tall, coarse grass grows in the zone of marsh flooded by high tides. It is the very foundation of the saltmarsh, serving as both shelter and sustenance. Fiddler crabs pick algae from living cordgrass with spoon-like claws. Dead grass helps blunt erosion and returns organic nutrients to the soil. The intact marsh filters pollutants running off from the land.

I Core Sound. Sweeping to the northeast from this overlook is Core Sound, 22,000 acres of shallow waters, saltmarsh, and tidal creek. It is named for the Coree Indians, who once lived in the area. Here, freshwater and saltwater meet and mingle to provide a rich nursery for juvenile fish, and wintering grounds for vast numbers of ducks and other migrating birds.

J Yaupon Holly. *Ilex vomitoria*. The leaves of this evergreen with red berries were used to brew a tea used in Native American ceremony. The purification rituals involved drinking enough of the “Black Drink” to induce vomiting, hence the plant’s species name.

summer, migrating songbirds through the treetops. Only the luckiest visitors will spot the gaudy male painted bunting, a 5-inch-tall bird decked out with a brilliant red belly, a green back, and a purple head. A bird checklist is available from the Museum and Park Visitor Center.

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Red Bay



Yaupon Holly