

Orange County Natural Areas Inventory

CEDAR TERRACE BOTTOMS

Site Number: B03
Site Significance: County

Size: 115 acres
USGS Quadrangle: Chapel Hill

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This area includes a large tract of relatively mature bottomland swamp forest located on the westernmost limits of the Durham Triassic Basin. The regionally rare gray petaltail dragonfly (*Tachopteryx thoreyi*), removed from the state rare list in 2002, breeds in seepage areas at the margins of this forest.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES: Piedmont Swamp Forest

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: The wide and gentle bottoms of the Triassic Basin touch only the easternmost portion of Orange County. Except for Big Oak Woods and Morgan Creek Swamp (M17 and M18), this is the best example of swamp forest in the county. Along the unnamed tributary of New Hope Creek, which flows through this site, the forest cover is composed mostly of red maple (*Acer rubrum*), white ash (*Fraxinus americanus*), and sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Other important trees are willow oak (*Quercus phellos*), Shumard's oak (*Q. shumardii*), overcup oak (*Q. lyrata*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), with hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) and ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*) occurring in the subcanopy. Many of the herbaceous species are those restricted to wet bottomlands, and include water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*), lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*), false nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*), aneilema (*Aneilema keisak*), lycopus (*Lycopus virginicus*), and jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*).

These bottomland forests are often prime nesting sites for birds; 33 species were recorded here over only two brief visits in 1988. Some of the typical bottomland species include the green heron (*Butorides striatus*), acadian flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*), and northern parula (*Parula americana*), while the hooded warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*) and scarlet tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) represent species that simply prefer extensive hardwood forests especially where the cover is fairly dense. The tracks of deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and groundhog (*Marmota monax*) are also conspicuous, while large pools provide breeding habitat for marbled salamanders (*Ambystoma opacum*) and other amphibians. The most noteworthy animal is the regionally rare gray petaltail dragonfly (*Tachopteryx thoreyi*), which breeds in the shallow seeps located where the crystalline rock of the Piedmont meets the flat sediments of the Triassic Basin.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Portions have been acquired for open space protection by the Town of Chapel Hill. These bottomlands should be protected from development under the Floodplain Protection Ordinance of the Town of Chapel Hill. Care needs to be taken, however, that development on the adjoining slopes does not spill over, especially where the grayback seeps occur. A conservation easement should be negotiated with the landowners for the protection of the forest.

OWNERSHIP: Town of Chapel Hill; Private

REFERENCES: Sather, D. and S. Hall. 1988. Inventory of the Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats of Orange County, North Carolina, Appendix B: Biological Documentation of Sites. N.C. Natural Heritage Program, DENR, Raleigh, NC.