

Field Guide

COOPER MOUNTAIN NATURE PARK

STORY BY Ashley Conley

PHOTOGRAPHY BY C. Bruce Forster

On the southwest edge of Beaverton, nature flourishes. Nestled between farmland and neighborhoods and rising nearly 800 feet above the valley, Cooper Mountain Nature Park offers spectacular vistas, wildlife viewing opportunities and a plethora of habitats to explore.

Cooper Mountain's bedrock, formed from the Grand Ronde basalt flows, has been folded and uplifted over millions of years, giving rise to the mountain seen today. From the parking area, visitors can absorb a breathtaking view of the Tualatin River Valley and Chehalem Mountains. Even more outstanding nature awaits those who dive in and explore the 3.5 miles of hiking trails.

Hiking along the paths in the 230-acre park, one enters a mosaic of rare and unique habitats. Six acres of upland prairie, the rarest habitat in the Willamette Valley, is found here. Due to development and fire suppression, only seven percent of original upland prairie remains in the Willamette Valley.

Cooper Mountain's prairie retains several native grasses and wildflowers, including the white rock larkspur, which the state lists as endangered. The upland prairie here fosters the Willamette Valley's third largest population of this endemic wildflower.

Oregon white oak savannas and woodlands can also be found on the flanks of the mountain. Oak woodlands and savannas are used by more than 200 species of wildlife in the region, including several neotropical migrants such as warblers, vireos and flycatchers.

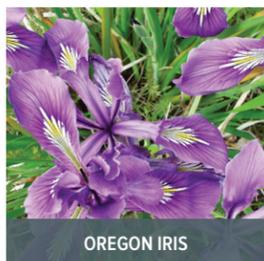
Both oak woodlands and prairies depend on fire as a critical element in their ecosystems. As such, restoration techniques at the site have involved prescribed burns to restore these rare and special natural communities. These fires mimic techniques used by native inhabitants of the Willamette Valley. The fires, for instance, "release" native oaks from fast-growing Douglas firs, which can otherwise drown the sun-loving oaks in shade.

The landscape of Cooper Mountain holds a unique and wonderful story. Put it on the list of must-see places.

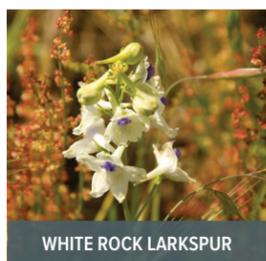
BE ON THE LOOKOUT!



WESTERN BLUEBIRD



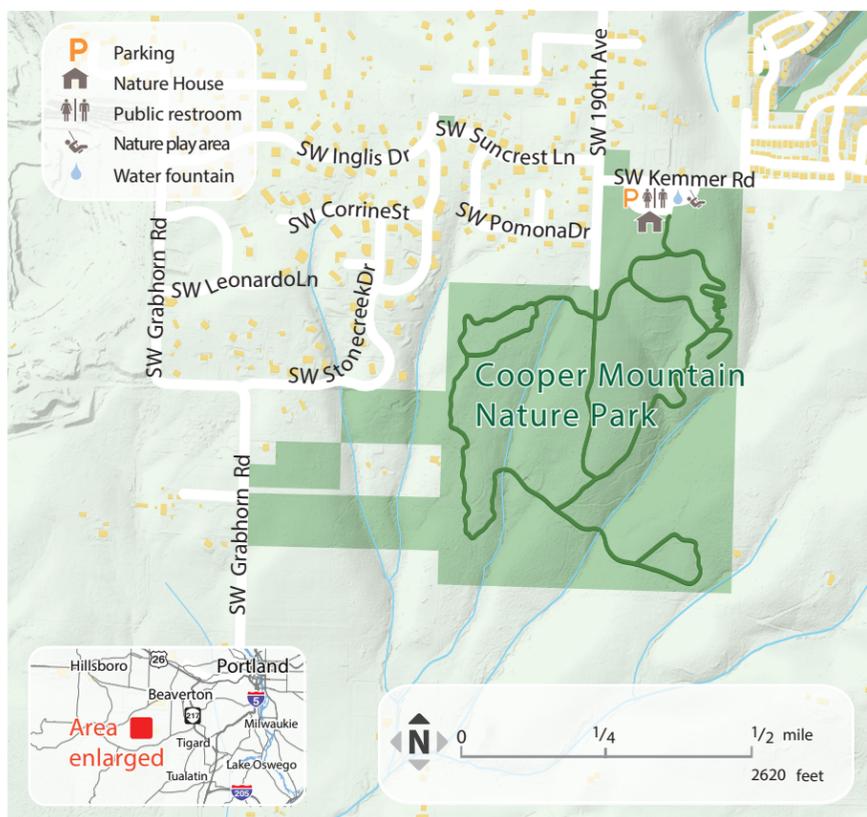
OREGON IRIS



WHITE ROCK LARKSPUR



BOBCAT



THE TUALATIN HILLS PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT PROVIDES DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT.

COOPER MOUNTAIN NATURE PARK

18892 SW KEMMER ROAD, BEAVERTON

DRIVING

From Southwest Farmington Road/Oregon 10, go south on Southwest 170th Avenue. Turn right at Southwest Rigert Road. Turn left at Southwest 175th Avenue. Make a right onto Southwest Kemmer Road. The park entrance is on the left in less than a mile.

KNOW WHEN YOU GO

Open sunrise to sunset. No pets, please.

AMENITIES

Bathrooms, nature play area, demonstration garden, new overflow parking lot, 3.5 miles of trails and a nearly 1-mile, wheelchair-accessible loop trail. The Nature House offers year-round nature classes and is available for rent by calling 503-629-6350.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Continue exploring the outdoors with a visit to the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge. Or stop by the nearby Cooper Mountain Vineyards to enjoy some wine. In the summer, pick berries or buy fresh produce at area farms, such as Baggenstos or Hoffman farms. Progress Ridge Townsquare is a short drive away with plenty of options for coffee, food, beer and shopping.

SEASON BY SEASON

SPRING: The meadows are awash with a wide variety of wildflowers. From the violet hues of the Oregon iris to the delicate white racemes of white rock larkspur, the color spectrum of the state's finest wildflowers is well represented. As the eyes search for fragile blooms, make sure to keep the ears tuned in to the songs of resident and neotropical birds. Colorful Western bluebirds can be seen perched atop the tall grasses, while common yellowthroats sing the boundaries of their territory from elevated shrubs.

SUMMER: Long days and southern exposures make Cooper Mountain a great place to feel the warmth of Oregon summers. Sparkling vistas from atop the mountain offer views in all directions. Bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the breeze while you eat at the picnic tables by the Nature House. Then take a hike into the park, descending on the trails that wind through the oak

woodlands. Keep your eyes open for signs of various animals harvesting acorns in late summer.

FALL: Listen for the calls of the early nesting great-horned owls in late November. The males begin to vocalize in late fall in an attempt to establish their nesting territory and attract a mate. Nest sites of this nocturnal hunter can be found in tree cavities or old raptor nests, such as those used by red-tailed hawks.

WINTER: Because of barren deciduous trees and a wide open landscape, raptors can be seen with relative ease as they hunt for prey. Red-tailed hawks cruise over the meadows looking for voles, while the Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks of the forest maneuver quickly through the trees in search of songbirds. Keep an eye out for rare visits by the Northern goshawk.