

gravel prairie

CHARACTERISTICS

The different prairie types were the result of variations in soil moisture, soil composition, geological substrate, glacial history and topography. Gravel prairies occur on gravel or soil that includes a lot of gravel, and the soils usually also contain a high calcium content. Most gravel prairies are rather dry, although there are a few moist-soil gravel prairies. In Illinois, gravel prairies occur on kames (mounds or ridges of gravel left during the melting of glacial ice) and eskers (long, narrow ridge of gravel deposited by a stream flowing in an ice-walled valley or tunnel in a melting glacial ice sheet) in the northeastern part of the state. They also occur on gravel terraces along major rivers.

WHAT LIVES HERE?

Because the prairie ecosystem is recently evolved, few prairie species are restricted to the prairie habitat and may be found in other habitats as well. Plants tend to be more characteristic of specific prairie habitats than animals. Plants growing on gravel prairies include prairie buttercup, little bluestem, side-oats grama, pasque-flower, prairie smoke, fringed puccoon, white goldenrod, Hill's thistle, shooting-star, blazing-star, prairie dropseed, prairie cinquefoil, sky-blue aster, prairie gentian, purple coneflower, rattlesnake master, sand milkweed, scurf-pea, silky aster and hoary vervain. Some birds living in the gravel prairies are vesper sparrow, savanna sparrow, grasshopper sparrow and sedge wren.

RECREATION

hiking, wildlife observation, photography

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

In Illinois, gravel prairies occur on kames (mounds or ridges of gravel left during the melting of glacial ice) and eskers (long, narrow ridge of gravel deposited by a stream flowing in an ice-walled valley or tunnel in a melting glacial ice sheet) in the northeastern part of the state. They also occur on gravel terraces along major rivers. In 1992, there were approximately 148 acres of gravel prairies in Illinois. Below you will find a list of some gravel prairies still found in Illinois. For many of these prairies, you will need to call in advance to make arrangements before visiting the site. A local Illinois Department of Natural Resources' biologist can help you make the proper contacts.

Bluff Spring Fen Nature Preserve near Elgin in Cook County; Carl and Claire Marie Sands/Main Street Prairie Nature Preserve near Cary in McHenry County; Douglas E. Wade Nature Preserve near Byron in Ogle County; Harlem Hills Nature Preserve in Loves Park in Winnebago County; Lake-In-The-Hills Fen Nature Preserve near Algonquin in McHenry County; and Manito Prairie Nature Preserve near Manito in Tazewell County.

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