

hill prairie



CHARACTERISTICS

The different prairie types were the result of variations in soil moisture, soil composition, geological substrate, glacial history and topography. Hill prairies formed on dry, southwest-facing hill tops above the floodplains of rivers, especially the Illinois and Mississippi rivers.

Erosion in these areas carved steep hillsides. Hill prairie soils contain loess (fine-grained, wind-blown soil). Because they are hard to access, some Illinois hill prairies have been saved from agricultural development. The majority of Illinois hill prairies today are less than five acres in size and about half of these sites are smaller than one acre.

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. Hill prairie plants are of three types: those typical of the western plains of the United States; those typical of the prairies; and those adapted to hill prairies. Plants growing in Illinois hill prairies include little bluestem, daisy fleabane, side-oats grama, leadplant, green milkweed, silky aster, pale coneflower, prickly pear cactus, heath aster, horsemint, June grass and lousewort. The coachwhip snake, ring-necked snake, Great Plains ratsnake, prairie kingsnake and ornate box turtle are all animal inhabitants of hill prairies.

RECREATION

hiking, wildlife observation, photography

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

Hill prairies in Illinois may be most commonly found along the Mississippi River, along the Illinois River from its junction with the Mississippi River to Putnam County and along the Sangamon River. They are also present in Coles and Vermilion counties and at scattered other locations throughout the state. Hill prairies develop on southwest-facing steep slopes where hot summer sun, dry winds and periodic fires keep forest species from growing there. Illinois currently has about 90 sites with good-quality hill prairies. There are about 530 acres of hill prairies (good and poor quality) in the state. Below you will find a list of some hill prairies still found in Illinois. For many of these prairies, you will need to call in advance to make arrangements before visiting the site.

Crevecoeur Nature Preserve near Creve Coeur in Tazewell County; Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve near Fults in Monroe County; Grubb Hollow Prairie Nature Preserve near New Canton in Pike County; Meredosia Hill Prairie Nature Preserve near Meredosia in Morgan County; Pere Marquette Nature Preserve near Grafton in Jersey County; and Revis Hill Prairie Nature Preserve near Kilbourne in Mason County.