

**History:** Cast a quick glance to the right as you drive into Cambridge on Route 2, before the Alewife garage cutoff, and you will see a large, shaggy forest of silver maples on high ground, the very image of reforested New England agricultural land.

Today, the “mother” silver maple, surrounded by fallen branches, still broadcasts her seeds to the wind and saplings extend forest succession. The silver maple monoculture forest also contains ash, beech, birch, black cherry, willow and cottonwood that whitens like snow in the spring. The forest is surrounded by marshes and vernal areas, and is the keystone that holds together these two Alewife Reservation ecosystems. Once the Reservation near Little Pond, formerly Cambridge land, now Belmont, was a 100 year working market farm of prize-winning pigs and strawberries, owned by the Heustis family. The woodlands at the edge of marshland is historically part of The Great Swamp of Native American and colonial times, familiar today to residents of Cambridge, Belmont and Arlington by cellar-filling floods.



**Floodplain:** High floodwaters of Little Pond and Little River inundate the publically owned Reservation with rich organics. Over time, the stand of maple trees has evolved into a small river flood plain forest. The silver maple, red or swamp maple, willow and cottonwoods are adapted to growing on riverbanks, soaking up water and filtering pollutants through dense root systems, creating a deeply intricate web of life.

**Science Instruction:** The Friends of Alewife (FAR) envisions this piece of Reservation land as a place for outdoor classrooms, open to the sky, available for students from local schools to study far away from concrete street corners, traffic lights, and all aspects of city life. Harvard owns a forest and runs it as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for a world wide group of graduate students. We can also open nature to the public with the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s management of the Alewife Reservation and its core buffer, the silver maple forest.

**Young Seekers:** Ecologically trained students are our future and safety net in an uncertain environmental world. When guided by science instruction in the study of natural resources, they will learn of the multiple connections between living organisms, their habitats, and themselves. The recent emergence of endangered species has brought state attention to Alewife’s newly discovered sky blue, bottle gentian (*Gentiana Andrewsii*). Students and wildlife seekers can observe the wild world of coyote dens and bedding areas, winter rabbit-chewed twigs, animal tracks, tiny crystals around a hole in snow, the sign of an animal within. Young visitors may find hibernating dens in the forest and riverbank, over-wintering birds such as crows, catbirds, cedar wax wings, juncos, and white-throated and melodious song sparrows.



**Seasons Point the Way:** With the Audubon Guidebook to New England in hand, eager youth can soon identify birds, search for insects, and find coyote signs and deer tracks in winter. They learn about food webs by observing tiny fungi on decomposing maple logs. Predator and prey are seen in a pile of feathers by a woods trail, a small skeleton caught in the ice, the swoop of red tailed hawk on a ground feeding bird, robins scratching in leaves, and the dissection of fox scat that shows signs of fur, feathers and berries.

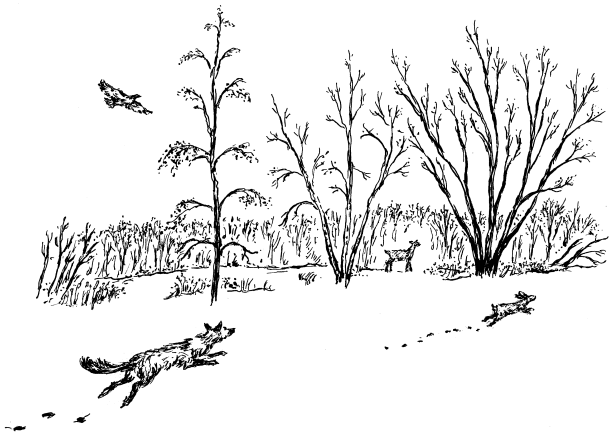


Seasons are charted with bird migration, willow branches changing from yellow to green, fattened by rising sap and the increase of sunlight. Sumacs flower into brushy red heads for deep winter nurture of birds and rabbits. A still child may observe an otter emerge from a nearby river bank and see a flash of orange and black by the Baltimore oriole, listen to the soft coo of the morning dove, and the sharp rat-a-tat of the woodpecker drilling for bugs in dead birch limbs. A sharp eye follows the silent flight of the tiny saw whet owl through Alewife woods.

## Witness and Discovery

*“It is the field experience that helps children sense and understand the relationships of living things and ecosystems,” noted a third grade science teacher in the FAR wildlife assessment book, Biodiversity of the Alewife Reservation.*

*“I was so amazed and I couldn’t believe that there was a forest right beside my apartment that I had never visited!” remarked a 2010 local high school student at the fourth annual FAR Ecology Camp, who spent the summer adventuring through the Alewife woodlands.*



## Envisioning the Silver Maple Forest

An Alewife Reservation Gem  
Cambridge, Belmont and Arlington

### Our New England Challenge



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*In Wildness is the Preservation of the World,  
Henry David Thoreau 1851*