

# PFEIFFER NATURE CENTER

WHERE SCIENCE, ART, AND NATURE COME TOGETHER.

## Our Old-Growth Forest

Old-growth forests are increasing rare in the United States. Our Lillibridge property provides easy access to one of the largest privately held stands of old-growth forests in the eastern United States. Just steps from the parking area, you enter a glorious mix of northern hardwoods, many well over 250 years in age. Here you can see a forest as it would have appeared to man thousands of years ago. When you walk our Lillibridge Property, take a moment to observe and enjoy these features that are characteristic of an old-growth forest.

**Forest Trees of Great Age.** For a forest to be old-growth, there should be a number of trees of great age. New York State defines an old-growth tree as one that is more than 150 years old. Our “old granddad”, the Black Tupelo off Thorton’s Way, is estimated to be several hundred years old. A tupelo’s average lifespan is approximately 100 years. Age is not necessarily translated to size. Many of our trees have height rather than girth to indicate their age, a result of growing up in a crowded forest and needing to compete for the light. Most of the trees that surround Griffin Way are older than 250 years.

**Trees of Commercial Value.** One determination that a forest is old is the prominence of a large number of commercially valuable trees. Some valuable species are Maple, Ash, and Oak. There are impressive stands of valuable Red and White Oak along Wendy’s Trail and Sally’s Alley.

**Uneven-Aged Canopy Structure.** Old-growth forests are characterized by a mix of trees of various ages and sizes. You see this along the Tapline Trail where we have giant old White Pines and Cucumber Magnolias alongside younger Beech and Chestnut.



Downed Logs

**Downed Logs.** If you look on the forest floor along The Loop and Kay’s Cove you will see it littered with much fallen wood. This debris is typical of an old-growth forest. The downed logs are of multiple sizes and at varying states of decay. The downed wood provides nutrients to the forest, helps keep it moist, and provides important habitat for wildlife, particularly salamanders.

**Standing Snags.** The Adopt A Tree forest is full of standing dead trees called snags. Some see these dead trees appear unsightly and we are often asked why they are not removed. Snags provide important vertical habitat for wildlife in the old-growth forest. Take a moment to look up at these snags and see evidence that birds, such as the Pileated Woodpecker and Barred Owl, not to mention the oodles of insects and small mammals, have made these “critter condos” home.



Standing Snag



Windfall Tree

**Windfall Trees & Treefall Gaps.** Old-growth forests will have several windfall trees. The wind moves through the high tree tops, known as the canopy, and topples trees, roots and all. You’ll see many windfalls along Pinkster. The gap created by a fallen tree allows sunlight to reach the forest floor. The sun stimulates the cycle of succession with new trees and other plant life sprouting to fill the newly created gap.

**Pit and Mound Topography.** When large old-growth trees fall, the uplifted root structure creates a pit in the forest floor. These pits collect snow melt and runoff creating temporary pools, or vernal pools, of water that are critical habitat for amphibians. Our old-growth forest is home to over 20 different species of salamanders. Downed trees become covered with forest litter, decomposing to create a mound of fertile humus.

All these features, along with undisturbed soil and little or no evidence of human activity, contribute to creating a unique and stable ecosystem that supports a diversity of plants and animals. We encourage you to visit and enjoy our old-growth forest.