

# Pembroke Township, Illinois, USA

## A Day in Pembroke

Jacob Campbell<sup>1</sup>, Johari Cole-Kweli, Aster Hasle<sup>1</sup>, Clyde Johnson, Jumana Malik, Soledad Maristany<sup>1</sup>, Valerie Masutier<sup>1</sup>, Diane McDonald, Dolly Oleghe, Reginald Stewart Sr., Reginald Stewart Jr., & Douglas Stotz<sup>1</sup>  
Field Museum

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Learn more



“I don’t have feet. I have roots that are in this ground.” — John Thurman

**Pembroke, Then and Now:** Few places harbor the ecosystems of black oak trees and tall grasses like those that thrive on the dunes of Pembroke. The region’s savannas have remained intact for so long because of the relationships humans have forged with this environment for generations. For Indigenous tribes like the Bodéwadmiké (Potawatomi), the area now called Pembroke Township was a cherished home. They maintained the landscape with fire to attract game, one of the many local practices that nurtured Pembroke’s people, animals, and plants alike.

These sustainable practices grew new roots when ancestors of Pembroke’s current inhabitants settled there. In 1862, Joseph “Pap” Tetter, a previously enslaved man, bought land in Pembroke. His land provided refuge and support for others moving North. In the twentieth century, many Black families moved to Pembroke during the Great Migration to avoid segregation and urban violence and were charmed by a peaceful place south of Chicago resembling southern farmland.

In the ensuing years, the residents of Pembroke cultivated a thriving township of farms and ranches co-mingling with rare plants

and wildlife. Their deep roots in the land created a community of stewards with wisdom about local ecosystems. Pembroke offers important lessons to the world on how to create sustainable livelihoods for future generations.

**How to use this field guide:** The guide takes you through a Pembroke summer’s day. It pauses to consider 20 animals and plants you might encounter at a particular time of day. Pembroke community members and Field Museum staff collaborated to co-create this field guide, highlighting memories, local knowledge, and life lessons of Pembroke’s thriving people and land.

**Land Acknowledgement:** Pembroke Township resides on the traditional homelands of the Bodéwadmiké (Potawatomi) people. We express respect and gratitude to the present-day Indigenous communities who call this area home and who have nurtured the land. Their cultural heritage and sustainable practices have imprinted themselves on this place, shaping its history, and protecting these lands throughout generations. We commit to listening, learning, and working toward reconciliation, standing in solidarity with Indigenous aspirations and cultural preservation.



**Agriculture & Community:** Pembroke is an example of thriving community-centered conservation, an approach intended to carry on through the future and in everyday living. Landowners, through the management of their properties, foster sustainable practices on private land across their community and in other places. On small parcels with a mix of soil types, farmers produce a wide variety of crops that provide healthy food locally and to regional markets. Sandy dunes support livelihoods built around small-scale organic agriculture, animal husbandry, wild food gathering, and hunting in the black oak savannas.

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**The Early Morning in Pembroke:** Well before dawn in spring and summer, robins and mockingbirds start singing. As dawn approaches, more species add their voices to the chorus of bird songs. In the hour immediately after sunrise, bird song is at its peak. Some flowers also respond to the arrival of daylight.

Spiderwort is common throughout Pembroke. Each of its flowers is open for only a single day. A few on each plant open in the early morning and close in the heat of the day. The next day, new flowers on each plant will be open for pollination. This continues daily from mid-May through the end of June.

### Animals and Plants You May Encounter



1 **American Robin**  
*Turdus migratorius*



2 **Bobwhite Quail**  
*Colinus virginianus*



3 **Chicory Root**  
*Cichorium intybus*



4 **Spiderwort**  
*Tradescantia ohiensis*

### Pembroke Knowledge & Experiences: Early Rise



As the residents of Pembroke rise in the early morning, bird song fills the air. There is little other noise. Roosters (*Gallus domesticus*, left photo) crowing around farmhouses signal that the day is beginning. Many birds join to herald the coming day. Northern mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*, right photo) sing their complex song mimicking other birds. The sharp



“bob-white” of the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) alerts us. Dozens of other birds start singing as the sun rises. Later, song will decrease as birds focus on finding food. People finish up their morning coffee or tea (perhaps made from the roots of chicory, a common roadside plant in Pembroke) and start their day’s work.

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**The Morning in Pembroke:** Farmland and farming practices in Pembroke are noticeably different from the surrounding areas. While large farms blanket the rest of Kankakee County, Pembroke farms tend to be small and contain a mix of food

crops and some animals. Pembroke farmers care deeply about the long-term health of the land and the community. They demonstrate their land ethic by letting uncultivated sections grow wild by using organic practices that build soil fertility.

### Animals and Plants You May Encounter



5 **American Pokeweed**  
*Phytolacca americana*



6 **Cabbage**  
*Brassica oleracea*



7 **Goat**  
*Capra hircus*



8 **Chicken of the Woods**  
*Laetiporus sulphureus*

### Pembroke Knowledge & Experiences: **Farming**



Farming in Pembroke is intergenerational with youngsters raising animals and growing hay for feed. Families pass on the skills of caring for a farm and working without pesticides or large equipment. Investing in the soil for generations means

that farmers often rely on natural pest deterrents like cayenne pepper or dish soap. Many elders want to pass along the peace of the landscape as an escape from cities to future generations.

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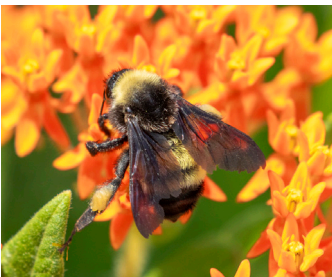
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**The Midday in Pembroke:** As temperatures rise in the middle of the day, warm-blooded birds and mammals rest in the shade of oak trees; some mammals even retreat into underground burrows. Midday is primetime for insects, including pollinators like bees and

butterflies. Pembroke is home to a robust population of the state-threatened Regal Fritillary butterfly, which uses bird's foot violet as its only host plant. The heat of the day is also a wonderful time to see native bumble bees pollinating both crops and native flowers such as low bush blueberry.

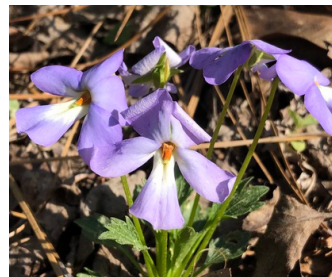
### Animals and Plants You May Encounter



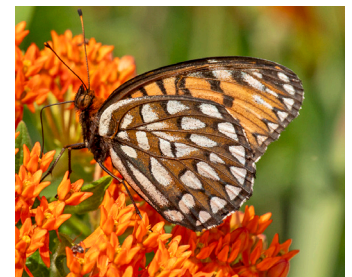
9 **American Bumble Bee**  
*Bombus pensylvanicus*



10 **Black Oak**  
*Quercus velutina*

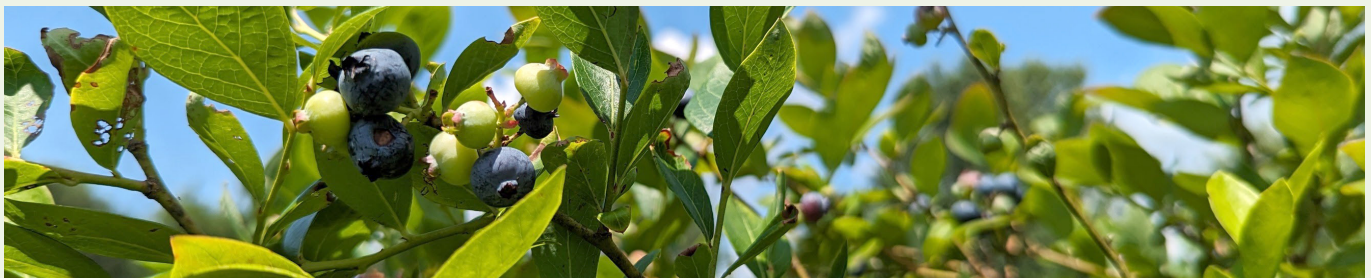


11 **Bird's Foot Violet**  
*Viola pedata*



12 **Regal Fritillary Butterfly**  
*Speyeria idalia*

### Pembroke Knowledge & Experiences: Food



Sitting with a jug of sun-brewed tea is a nice break from the heat of the day for kids and adults. Although tea recipes vary, families often incorporate herbs from around the farm. Locally-grown blueberries are another summer favorite. The

sweet berries are baked into muffins and pancakes and eaten on salads. But the best recipe is to eat them directly off the bush while picking with good friends and neighbors.

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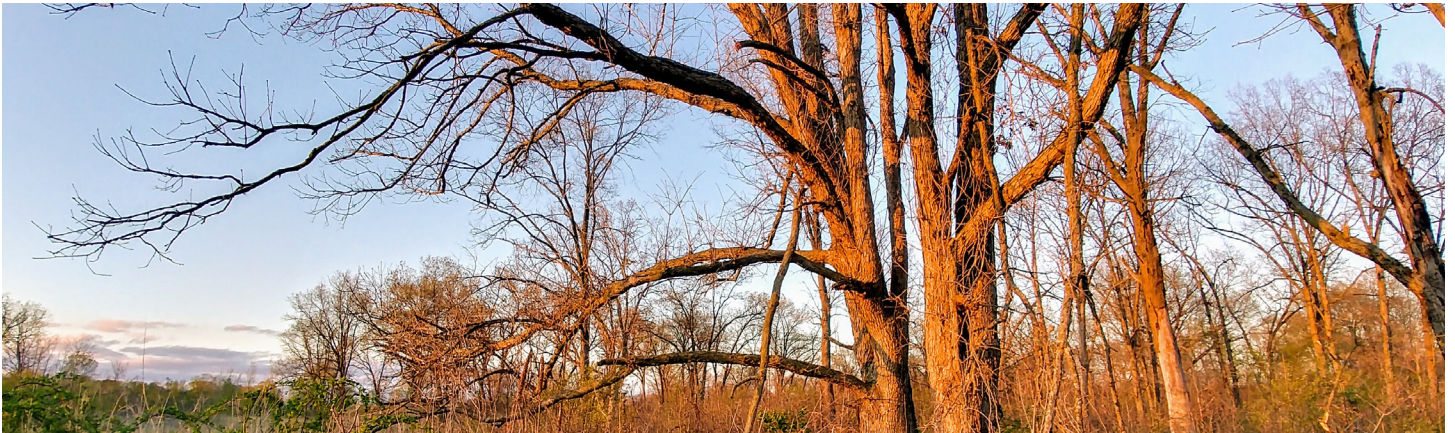
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**The Evening in Pembroke:** As the day's heat dissipates, the daytime insects become quieter and mammals start to step out from the cooling shadows. Sundown breezes move through the savannas, bending the large expanses of grasses and

flowering plants and rustling oak leaves. The cooling of the evening can also trigger the opening or closing of some flowers like the evening primrose.

### Animals and Plants You May Encounter



13 **Common Evening Primrose**  
*Oenothera biennis*



14 **Deer**  
*Odocoileus virginianus*



15 **Little Bluestem**  
*Schizachyrium scoparium*



16 **Sassafras**  
*Sassafras albidum*

### Pembroke Knowledge & Experiences: Rodeo



Horses are important in Pembroke. Riding trails crisscross much of the land and an evening ride through tall grasses is a wonderful way to fall in love with the landscape. Once a year the community's horse culture becomes much more competitive at the Pembroke Rodeo. Riders young and old

compete for prizes and bragging rights at this long-running community event. The Rodeo also serves as one of the important community festivals bringing Pembrokers who have moved away back to town to reconnect with old friends and long-running traditions.

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**The Night in Pembroke:** When night falls in Pembroke, the animals that are active change dramatically from the daytime. On a rainy night, every pocket of water will have the deafening sound of dozens of frogs or toads trying to attract mates. Meanwhile, most birds are resting, but several species of owls

are actively hunting, and Whip-poor-wills call incessantly from the savannas. Bats flutter overhead, searching for night-flying moths via echolocation, their version of sonar, while fireflies send their coded messages to other fireflies via lights coming from their abdomens. Predators like foxes, coyotes and skunks also roam the landscape at night searching for food.

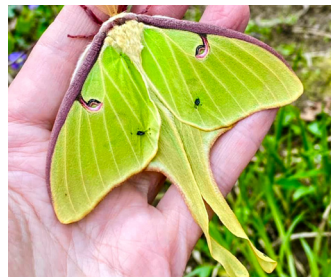
### Animals and Plants You May Encounter



17 **American Toad**  
*Anaxyrus americanus*



18 **Eastern Whip-poor-will**  
*Antrostomus vociferans*

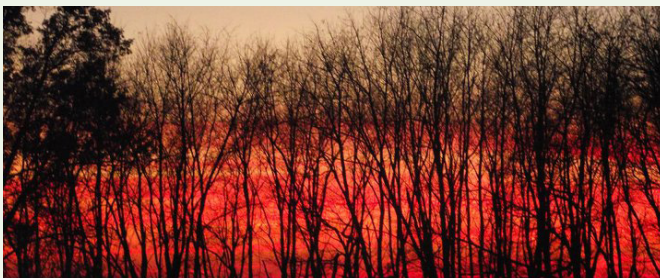


19 **Luna Moth**  
*Actias luna*



20 **Barred Owl**  
*Strix varia*

### Pembroke Knowledge & Experiences: Campfires and Nightskies



When darkness falls in Pembroke, residents and visitors are dazzled by the incredible, star-filled night sky. Instead of a handful of the brightest stars being all you can see, the sky is crowded with stars as the Milky Way sweeps across the sky.



Most of the landowners in Pembroke have a firepit that people gather around to enjoy the nighttime sounds, the night sky and conversation with family and neighbors.

**Learn More About Pembroke Township:** 1. Baron, David M. Pembroke: A Rural, Black Community on the Illinois Dunes. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2016. 2. [bit.ly/451hnWw](https://bit.ly/451hnWw), 3. [bit.ly/3DLD297](https://bit.ly/3DLD297) 4. [bit.ly/47PNcDw](https://bit.ly/47PNcDw)