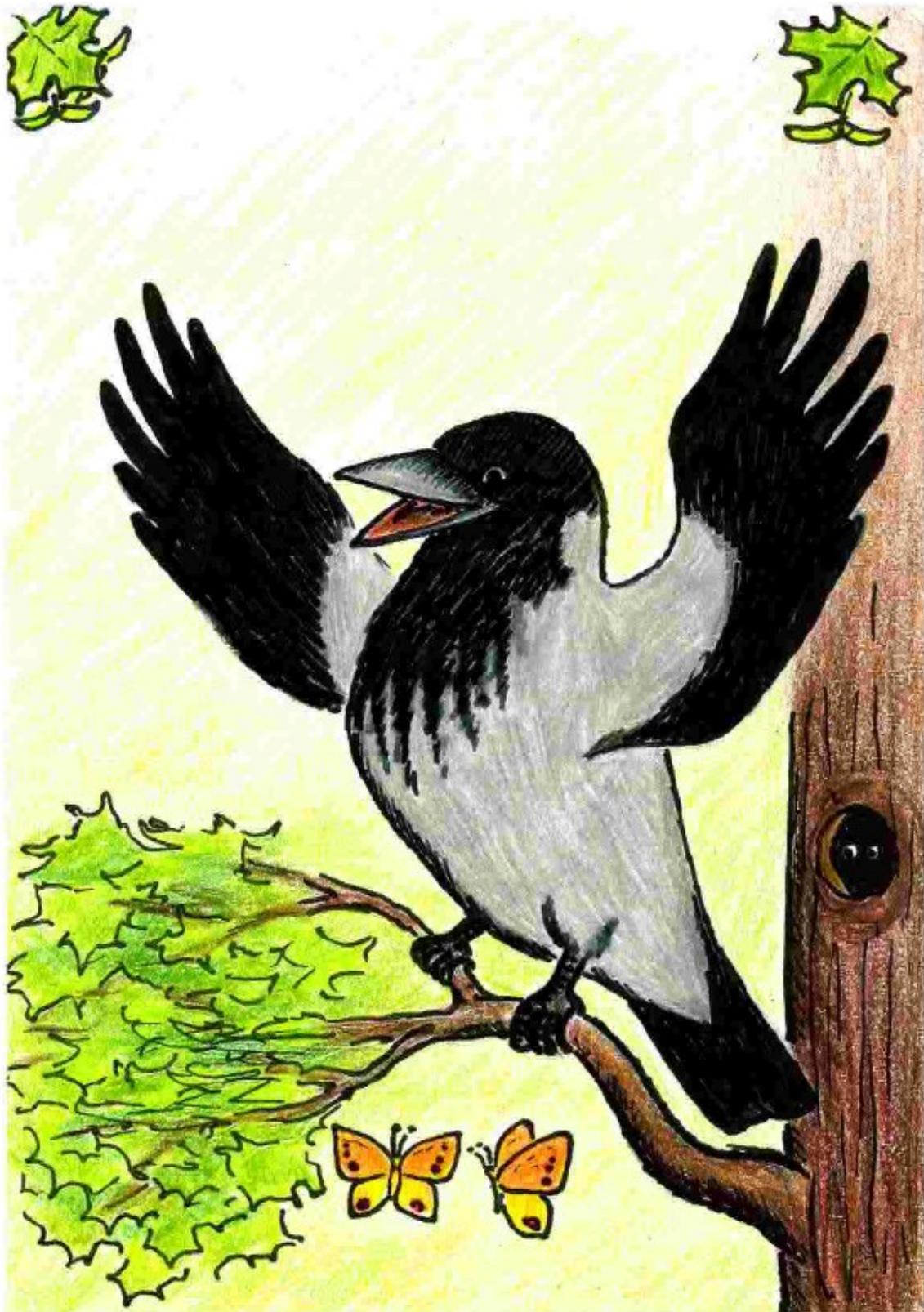


NATURE TRAIL OF VÄINÖ THE CROW



The nature trail of Väinö the crow is filled with activities that will introduce you to the life of a crow in the forest surrounding Villa Elfvik. Stories, play and sensory activities will help you learn about crows and the Laajalahti nature reserve in general. The trail is intended for children who are under 8 years of age who are accompanied by an adult.

About the trail

Trail

- The nature trail is about one kilometre long.
- There are six clearly indicated stops along the way.
- The first stop is outside Villa Elfvik (behind Villa Elfvik's outdoor information board). We recommend that you follow the trail when there is no snow on the ground. The trail is unfortunately not accessible for prams because it follows a narrow path through the forest.
- A map of the trail is printed on the back of this notebook.

Notebook

- The Väinö the Crow notebook contains a story and small games and tasks to accompany each stop of the trail.
- Although there are many stories and tasks that accompany the nature trail, the idea is not to go through them all in one go. Feel free to do as many or as few tasks as you like. You may even come back another time to enjoy the tasks you choose not to do this time. You can also explore other forests near your home with the help of these stories and tasks.
- We recommend that the group instructor familiarise themselves with the stories and activities in advance.
- Whenever the group reaches a stop, the instructor reads the story out loud. Then it is time to play and do other tasks related to the topic.

Equipment basket

- Some of the stops involve tasks that require equipment such as loupes, blindfolds and a beak. You may borrow an equipment basket from Villa Elfvik during its opening hours. It contains equipment for 16 children. You may also follow the trail without the basket.

A hiker's checklist

1. Every weather is a good hiking weather as long as you dress properly.
2. Also bring a sitting pad to have a comfortable time sitting and listening to the stories.
3. Eating a packed lunch outdoors is often the highlight of a trip. Please remember not to litter outdoors.
4. A section of the trail traverses the Laajalahti nature reserve. In this area, it is forbidden to pick berries, mushrooms or plants, set up camp or build a fire.
5. Please respect natural peace. Villa Elfvik is home to many animals and plants, and you are there as a visitor.



1.This is me, Väinö the Crow

A few years ago, when I already was a fully grown hooded crow, I decided to leave the area where I was born. I wandered around in the region until I arrived in Villa Elfvik. I still recall the day I first sat on its roof.

It was midday. The sun was beaming down. I landed on the villa's roof to admire the yard. I croaked and cawed, excited to see such a nice environment. Suddenly an angry croak made me jump: "Who is the wretched creature who disturbs my nap?" I was scared at first but soon calmed down when I noticed that the croak belonged to an old, frail crow.

"Good day, sir! My name is Väinö the Crow! I did not mean to wake you," I shouted back to him. The old crow flew closer and landed next to me on the ridge of the roof. "Well, good day to you, young one," he said, already sounding friendlier. "What is this place, if I may ask?" I said to the old crow. "This is Villa Elfvik," he said but did not offer an explanation. "Have you lived here for a long time?" I asked. "For sure," the old crow croaked. "For 15 years, if my memory serves me right. This is a calm place. Well, we do get some action every spring and autumn with migrating birds. Some foxes live in the forest. Elks and roe deer are shy but you can spot some of them from time to time. Mountain hares and brown hares nibble away at the willows." The old crow kept telling me stories of the area. I was enchanted. This is where I will stay, I thought.

Väinö's distinguishing features:

Length: 50 cm

Weight: 0.5 kg

Colour: black and grey

Call: hoarse croaking

Tasks

Path of silence

Walk to the next stop in a queue. Everyone needs to be as quiet as possible. The more quietly you walk, the more likely you are to see some of the animals who live in the forest. As you silently walk to the next stop, your task is to listen to the sounds of the environment and count the number of different sounds you hear. When you reach the next stop, talk about the sounds you heard. Did anyone hear Väinö croak his greetings to you?



2. Hunted by an eagle-owl

The Eurasian eagle-owl is one of the crow's worst enemies. If crows notice an eagle-owl during daylight hours, they will attack it together to drive it away from the forest. At night, a gentle swaying of a spruce branch may mean trouble for a crow, as eagle-owls hunt at night.

It was a chilly autumn's day. I had spent the day looking for food, wanting to satisfy my hunger before nightfall. I was still looking for something to eat when I ran into some of my crow friends. They looked worried. Before I had the chance to ask, one of them told me what had happened. "An eagle-owl has arrived here, in Villa Elfvik's forest," he cawed. The others nodded fearfully. "An eagle-owl," I repeated. Oh no! Our worst enemy had come to our forest! Just when life had been so calm! In the day, we would be safe because that is when eagle-owls sleep. But they hunt at night. I would not sleep a wink the next night! We had to make a plan to avoid becoming dinner to Mr Eagle-Owl. Even the slightest careless swaying on a branch could cost us our lives. So, we perched on spruce branches and tried to solve our problem.

As night started to fall, our plan was ready. We all decided to sleep in the nearby trees. One of us would stay awake and keep watch. We were all nervous. I wondered if I would be able to sleep at all. However, I was fast asleep when I heard a loud CROAK! I was immediately awake and saw the eagle-owl glide through the air towards one of my friends who was still asleep. I started croaking my warnings with the others and attacked the eagle-owl. The other crows soon followed. The eagle-owl's hunting flight was cut short, and it turned around to escape. We kept following and pecking at him to make sure that he would not bother us again. When the eagle-owl vanished into the night, we were all very relieved. What a good thing that we had worked as a team!

Tasks

Watch your surroundings. Can you find any tree branches where Väinö the Crow and his friends could sleep through the nights, sheltered from predators?

For flocking birds, staying in a group is an important means to evade predators, as some birds can keep watch and warn others if a bird of prey approaches.

The eagle-owl and the crows

One of the players is an eagle-owl. This player wears a beak. The other players are crows, and the eagle-owl hunts them. When the game begins, the eagle-owl leaves their nesting tree (a place the players have agreed on before the game begins) to chase the crows. Whenever the eagle-owl catches a crow, the crow takes the eagle-owl's place, returns to the nesting tree and starts hunting the crows.

In the next stage of the game, the players are allowed to form flocks of three. They may only stay in flock formation (hands on each other's shoulders) for the time it takes them to count to ten. Then the flock must come apart, and the crows need to find a new flock. They may not immediately form a new flock with the same crows. The eagle-owl is only able to catch a crow who is alone, not part of a flock.



Did you know? According to an old belief, crows convene to discuss their matters in a “parliament of crows”. The actual reason why crows gather is unknown.

3. Love is in the air

Some crows migrate to Southern Sweden, Denmark and the countries on the North Sea, while others end up in Poland and Germany. Their autumn migration begins in October, and they return in March or April next spring. Some persistent crows also spend the winter in Finland.

I sat on a branch of a tall spruce, enjoying the day. “How wonderful to be rid of the biting cold and darkness,” I thought. Familiar voices suddenly drew my attention. I looked south, and yes, I had heard right. Some crows who had migrated south for the winter were on their way home. I was excited. Would there be anyone I knew?

I shouted to the crow who was leading the flock: “Welcome back to Finland! Have you by any chance seen Viljo?” Viljo the Crow is my cousin who lives in the countryside. I had not seen him since the previous autumn. One of the crows said that he did not know anyone named Viljo, but then I heard Viljo himself: “Hey Väinö! You made it through the cold winter.” Viljo and some of the flock landed in the trees nearby. Their long flight across the sea was over.

Having landed, Viljo told me about his winter adventures in the south. I listened to him with one ear, but my eyes were fixated on something else. An attractive female crow sitting next to Viljo had completely charmed me. Eventually Viljo noticed my staring eyes and asked if I knew Venla the Crow. I could not think of anything clever to say. All I could do was caw gently at Venla. To my delight, Venla responded in her bright voice: “CAW!” Viljo mentioned that he and Venla had decided to fly back to Finland together. This startled me – were they going to continue their journey? “Please, would you at least spend the night here and rest,” I asked anxiously. Viljo seemed unsure but Venla said: “Oh, we would love to!”

By the next morning it was clear that Venla was going to stay. She would settle down in Villa Elfvik’s forest. Venla and I were cawing gently to each other as Viljo prepared to leave. “Have a nice rest of your flight, cousin,” I said to Viljo. Viljo winked and took to the sky. “Have fun building your nest!” he shouted.

Tasks

Something beautiful

The beautiful Venla caught Väinö's crow heart. Can you find something beautiful in the environment around you? Form pairs. Find something beautiful for your pair, for example a spot or an item. Do not take it with you. Instead, bring your pair to it to take a look.

Crow's nest

The crow uses dry twigs to build a nest near the top of an evergreen tree. Do you know what evergreens, also called coniferous trees, are? Find a spruce and a pine. Can you spot their differences?

Future father crows, just like Väinö, are a bit lazy when it comes to building a nest. The mother crow has to build it. Find a suitable spruce or pine nearby where Venla the Crow could build a nest.



The crows' cosy home

In the tallest spruce, there lies a nest,
sheltered well against rough weathers.
It's built of twigs and lined with feathers,
a place for five small eggs to rest.

4. Five eggs in a crow's nest

The crow builds an open nest of twigs near the top of a coniferous tree. In April of May, it lays 3–6 green eggs with brown speckles. The female crow spends more than two weeks incubating the eggs. The parents feed the nestlings for about a month.

The nest was finally ready. It was a sturdy home near the top of a tall spruce. I had tried to help but Venla had shooed me away, saying I would not do as good a job as she did. One morning, there was an egg. Then another, third, fourth and fifth by the next day. I was overjoyed. "Five eggs!" I exclaimed. Venla was smiling contentedly, too. The eggs were a lovely shade of green with brown spots. Venla sat on the eggs to incubate them. I kept a close watch around the nest and drove all uninvited guests away.

A week passed, and then another. I was starting to get restless. Then we heard sounds coming from the first egg! The next day, the egg started to move. Venla and I watched as a crack appeared on its surface, then another and a third one. Soon a tiny hatchling was trying to push its head through a small hole in the egg. Venla and I exchanged a nervous look. Soon the baby bird had hatched. It immediately started to chirp loudly. I was still flabbergasted, but Venla was already croaking out instructions. "The baby is already very hungry. You must go and find food for it," Venla said. I was hardly able to leave.

On the following days, the remaining four eggs hatched. Now we had five hungry hatchlings in the nest. Venla started to help me gather food for them. We tirelessly carried food to the little ones in our beaks, and they grew bigger day by day. After a month, they had grown so much that the nest was getting cramped. The nestlings started stretching their wings and soon had the courage to glide down from the nest. Venla and I looked at each other, satisfied. The biggest job was now behind us. Every little bird had survived. Now they would learn to find their own food. They would no longer depend so much on us.

Tasks

Finding food

Number of players: 10

Name four people among you to form two crow couples. Select a nesting tree for both couples. The trees should not be immediately next to each other. The rest of the participants are insect larvae that the crows want to feed to their young ones. The crows close their eyes while the larvae hide nearby. When the larvae are out of sight, the instructor tells the crows to start looking for them. The crows take the larvae back to their nesting trees one by one. The larvae cannot run from the crows, and they are not allowed to change hiding places. The more food a crow couple finds, the higher number of nestlings will survive. To conclude the game, count the larvae to find out which crow couple found more food. Did any larvae manage to stay alive?

Väinö and Venla's nestlings learn to fly

The instructor tells the participants about life in a crow's nest, and the participants act the story out.

Every participant now turns into a crow's egg. Pretend to be an egg by crouching down in the shape of an egg. Close your eyes. You can all huddle close to each other. You are in a crow's nest.

The mother crow has laid its eggs in the nest. A week passes and nothing happens. The mother just keeps on incubating the eggs. Finally, tiny chirping can be heard from inside the eggs. The eggs start to move slightly. The little birds start breaking their eggs with their beaks. Soon each bird has made a hole large enough to push through. Now the freshly hatched baby crows beg for food with their beaks open. It has been a month since the baby crows hatched. They have grown, and the nest is becoming cramped. It is time to leave the nest. The birds flap their wings and finally find the courage to jump out of the nest and let their wings carry them.

You can now practise flying on your way to the next stop!

5. The hiding treecreeper

The Eurasian treecreeper is a small, brown bird with a white chest and abdomen. It spends summers hiding in the shade of old spruce forests. It climbs up tree trunks and uses its beak to reach for insects in tree bark. This habit has earned the bird its name.

I had just settled down for a nap in the forest by the brook when I heard sobbing. I looked around but saw nothing. I flew towards the sound and landed in a large spruce. From there I could see a small, brown bird. She was sitting on a tree trunk, crying. The tiny bird was a treecreeper! I had seen treecreepers in my forest from time to time, but as they are very timid, I had never spoken with one before.

I cleared my throat and asked: “What is the matter, little one?” The treecreeper turned around, startled. With a miserable look on her face she told me what had happened. “One of the large trees in the forest fell, and my nest was destroyed.” I was confused. “Why don’t you simply build a new nest somewhere else?” I asked. The treecreeper started crying even louder. “I cannot build in just any tree. The tree has to be large because I build my nest in a gap behind the bark of an old tree. There are not so many gaps left.” The crying treecreeper went on: “All other old forests have been felled around here. I was so lucky to find Villa Elfvik’s forest.” Trying to comfort the treecreeper, I asked whether she had looked for a suitable nesting place in the other old trees in Villa Elfvik’s forest. She miserably revealed that she had not been able to find a suitable gap that was still free. “There are so many treecreepers living here that all good spots are already taken,” she explained.

Then something curious happened. The large spruce, on whose branch I was perched, interrupted us. “Excuse me, esteemed birds. May I help you?” it asked in a booming voice. We nodded in wonder. Could trees talk, too? The spruce went on: “Last winter, some humans put up bird boxes. I wonder if you could nest in one of those,” he suggested. “One of the bird boxes is quite near, although it is a strange one,” the friendly spruce said. The treecreeper already looked more hopeful. She could not live in an ordinary bird box, but perhaps this box would suit her. We went to see it together. And how happy we were to find it – it was exactly what the tiny treecreeper needed!

Tasks

Observe the bird boxes that are visible to the path. Can you spot the treecreeper's box? Please remember not to go near bird boxes during nesting season.

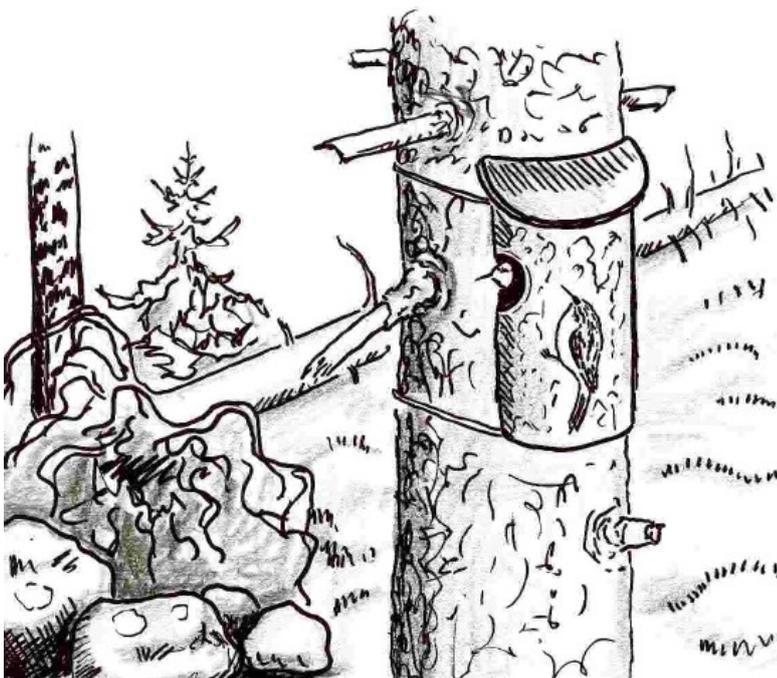
Which tree told Väinö and the treecreeper about the new bird box?

Exploring trees by touch

Form pairs. One member of each pair covers their eyes with a blindfold. The seeing member safely leads them to a tree. The blindfolded one then uses their hands to feel the tree and the surroundings until they think they will be able to tell the tree apart from all other trees. You may for example touch the bark, try to find branches, use your hands and arms to measure the thickness of the tree trunk, and try to reach around the tree to see if any other trees grow right next to it. The seeing member of the pair then leads the blindfolded one back to the starting point. The blindfold can now be removed. The previously blindfolded person should now try to find the tree again using their eyes. Their pair may give them hints as to the right direction, for example. After the correct tree has been found, the pair may switch roles.

Tree stories

Find a tree with your pair and go sit under it. Think about the things the tree has seen and heard in its lifetime. What kind of stories would it tell if it could?



6. Splinters in the tongue

Crows take care of nature's waste disposal. They are not picky eaters and will eat both plants and other animals. Their beaks are indeed suitable for eating insects, larvae, cereals, grains, bird eggs, small rodents and carrion.

My morning started out nicely. One of my friends, a great spotted woodpecker, invited me over to share a meal with her. We were supposed to meet by the stream, and I arrived there in good time. The woodpecker had mentioned that it was a great place to eat. There would be plenty of food for both of us. I could not see her yet. To pass the time, I started imagining all the delicacies she might have planned for us: thick larvae, crunchy spiders and sweet berries for dessert. The thought of it made my mouth water.

My thoughts were interrupted by rapid drumming. I peered up. What could be the source of that noise? Then I heard the great spotted woodpecker's call from above me: "Hey Väinö, you're here!" And there the woodpecker was, sitting on a tree trunk, pecking it with her beak. "Come up here," she said. I flew up and perched on a nearby branch to see what she was up to. "Well? Isn't this a great place to eat?" she asked. I looked around, not understanding what she meant. I saw no delicacies anywhere. She noticed my confusion. "This decaying tree is teeming with tasty larvae. Simply chisel a hole in the tree using your beak. Then push your tongue in the hole. When you pull your tongue back, it will catch a nice mouthful of yummy bugs along the way," the woodpecker said, advising me. She stuck her tongue out to demonstrate how to catch all those delicious larvae. I was astonished to see the woodpecker's tongue. It was incredibly long. Mine would never stretch out that far. I could not even chisel holes in the wood like a great spotted woodpecker.

The woodpecker noticed my sad look and asked if everything was alright. I explained that I could not eat the same way she did. Now it was her turn to look sad. She had thought she was going to offer a delicious meal to her friend. But suddenly she saw something out of the corner of her eye, something that could fill a crow's belly after all.

Later that evening when I had satisfied my hunger, I wondered if the woodpecker's tongue ever caught splinters while it was hunting for all those bugs hiding in the wood.

Tasks

The woodpecker found something for Väinö the Crow to eat. What do you think it was? Search the forest for things that a crow could eat. A crow's menu includes bugs, larvae, grains, berries, bird eggs, mice, moles and carrion.

Magnifying eyes

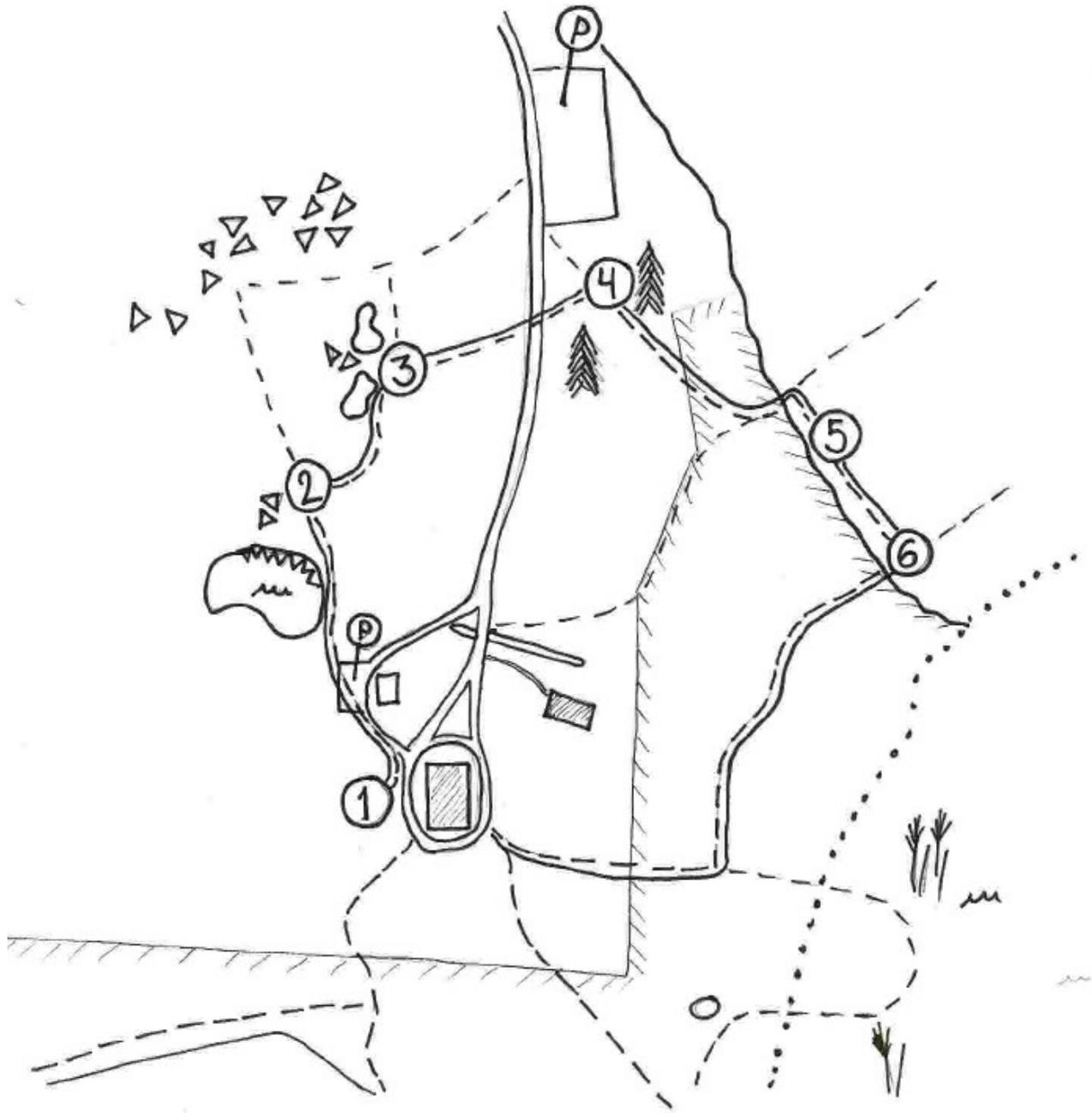
A loupe enables you to take a closer look at tree trunks. You may even discover small insects or seeds. Can you find a tree that a woodpecker has pecked? You can use the loupe to look into the hole that the woodpecker has made.

Wear the loupe around your neck. Place it on the tree with the black part pointing towards you. Look inside to see what the tree trunk looks like.



Did you know? A great spotted woodpecker can extend its tongue out four times as far as its beak. It uses its tongue to reach for insects that are up to 10 centimetres deep in the cracks below the surface of the wood. The tongue is covered in bristles that catch insects when the woodpecker pulls the tongue back.

Map





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