

Read the leaflet about a national preserve in America, and then answer the questions on the next page.

INSECT EATERS OF BIG THICKET

Big Thicket is a heavily forested area in Texas, USA. It has been described as one of the most bio diverse areas in the world outside the tropics. The Big Thicket National Preserve (BITH) was established in 1974 in an attempt to protect the many plant and animal species within and it was authorized by United States Congress in the same year. Big Thicket was also designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1981.



Plants that Eat meat!

Carnivorous plants in the park attract too many students and visitors. Four of the five types of insect-eating plants in the US are found in the Big Thicket. Two short trails will take you to the locations of sundews and pitcher plants in the preserve. Butterworts and bladderworts have more specialized habitat needs and are much harder to find.

Sundew trail

This one-mile loop trail is a great place to see birds, wildflowers, and the bright red sundew plant. The fully accessible 0.3 mile inner loop goes round past a small group of sundew plants and through a wooded area that has abundant summer wildflowers. The outer path of this trail passes through a landscape of longleaf pine. Look for the red rosettes of the sundew plant along boardwalks and in other disturbed areas along the trail.

This area is closely managed by the preserve's fire management team. Prescribed burns every 2 to 3 years play an important role in maintaining a healthy longleaf pine ecosystem. A detailed interpretive trail guide is available, but for purchase at the preserve visitor center. However, visitors can get basic information from a brochure which will be given to all who want to explore the preserve.

Pitcher Plant Trail

This is also a one-mile loop trail leading visitors through a longleaf pine forest into the largest pitcher plant bog in the preserve. Following the paved trail and elevated boardwalk into the wetland open area, we can see hundreds of these funnel-shaped plants. Lured by the plant's nectar glands, insects fall into the pitcher, where digestive fluids and bacteria break down their bodies for absorption.

The first quarter mile of this trail, from the parking lot to the pitcher plant bog, is fully accessible. The trail continues past the bog into a mixed hardwood/pine forest.

Some special facts

- While the soil here supports lush plant growth, it is actually very poor in nutrients, particularly nitrogen. Insects provide the missing nutrients these plants need.
- Some species of spiders, praying mantis, and frogs hunt insects at pitcher plants and eat them before they fall in.
- The most well-known carnivorous plants, the Venus flytrap, do not grow in the Big Thicket. It is native only to North and South Carolina.

- (a)** What was the purpose of founding big thicket?
.....[1]
- (b)** When did big thicket get legal approval of the nation?
.....[1]
- (c)** Why is it difficult for visitors to see butterworts and bladderworts?
.....[1]
- (d)** Give two details of things the explorers can find in the sundew trail?
.....[1]
- (e)** Which plant can one see in the outer way of sundew trail?
.....[1]
- (f)** What serves a significant role in keeping a healthy longleaf pine ecosystem?
.....[1]
- (g)** How can visitors get free information about the preserve?
.....[1]
- (h)** How are insects tempted by the plant to fall into the pitcher?
.....[1]
- (i)** Which insect eating plant is not in the preserve?
.....[1]

[Total: 9]

ANSWER KEY

- a. To protect plants and animal species
- b. 1974
- c. Have more specialized habitat
- d. Birds/ wildflowers /bright red sundew plants (any two)
- e. (longleaf)pine
- f. Prescribed burns every 2 to 3 years
- g. Brochure
- h. By nectar glands
- i. Venus flytrap