“Currents of rushing waters carve the landscape and fill the air with soothing sounds at Black Partridge Forest Preserve in southern Cook County.”

Amelia Taylor, Chicago Wilderness, Into the Wild
The first thing you notice at Black Partridge Woods Nature Preserve is the light. It changes by the minute, refocusing your perspective and highlighting something new in the forest with each moment. A single sun ray strikes a sheer ravine wall and a plant 50 feet overhead that went unnoticed moments ago. Light beams cut though the canopy like lasers to the deep, winding ravine bottom, flickering and dancing upon the quiet stream surface. An array of niches and habitats is found in this 80-acre preserve. In the cool, rich coves stands a forest with a superbly defined overstory, mid-story, and understory. This classic “old-growth” feature is only found in the most mature forests. Groundwater seep areas are dominated by skunk cabbage and marsh marigold. Floodplain forests are carpeted with bluebells and wild ginger. Rich, well-drained soils on the ravine slopes are dominated by sugar maple, hepatica, zig-zag goldenrod, bellwort, dolls eyes, and the endangered Thomas’s elm. More arid upland stands feature Hill’s oak, May apple, American bellflower,
and woodland sunflower. The artesian water emerging from the valley walls originates from underground aquifers. They feed a particularly pristine, cold, clear stream that meanders through the heart of the preserve. It provides habitat for uncommon stream fish like the strange looking mottled sculpin that only lives in clean, oxygen-rich waters. The multilayered forests harbor a multitude of woodland warblers and woodpeckers. Northern water snakes, American toads, and northern leopard frogs are especially common around the stream and seeps. Trails here can be challenging with rocks, slopes, and bluffs that are slippery when wet, but this seldom visited area is well worth the challenge. The wetland and prairie restorations across the street from Black Partridge should also not be missed—with their spectacular valley vistas and a rare fen wetland that harbors common dragonflies, and one of the rarest dragonflies in the world, the Hine’s emerald dragonfly.
Directions

Take Lemont Rd south. Then head west (right) on 111th St. (Bluff Rd.) for one mile. The preserve’s parking lot is on the right.

GPS: N 41.6814, W -88.0271            All photos by INHS staff.