Chicago WILDERNESS

EXPLORING NATURE & CULTURE

FALL 2000

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PETS OR PESTS

DEVELOPERS, DEER, FIRE, AND BIRD POOP

What is *ChicagoWilderness?*

Chicago Wilderness *is some of the finest and most significant nature in the temperate world, with a core of roughly 200,000 acres of protected natural lands harboring native plant and animal communities that are more rare–and their survival more globally threatened–than the tropical rain forests.*

CHICAGO WILDERNESS *is an unprecedented alliance of 114 public and private organizations working together to study and restore, protect and manage the precious natural ecosystems of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public.*
www.chicagowilderness.org

Chicago
WILDERNESS *is a quarterly magazine that celebrates the rich natural heritage of this region and tells the inspiring stories of the people and organizations working to heal and protect local nature.*
www.chicagowildernessmag.org

At Home with Wildlife

Some years ago, while researching an article on America's national parks, I began to collect examples of Funny Questions Visitors Ask. Some examples of this genre include:

"When do you lock up the wildlife for the night?"

"When do the deer turn into elk?"

"How much of this cave is undiscovered?"

"Why were all the Civil War battles fought in national parks?"

These examples give us a chuckle. But they also reveal our ignorance–and the experience of park rangers suggests that it is widespread–of natural processes, wildlife biology, and our own history.

Photo: Gary Davis

But ignorance in this arena, as in any other, merely describes a lack of knowledge. It carries (or should carry) no shame attached. I've certainly learned as a reporter over the years to swallow my pride and ask questions, the only dumb question being the one I've neglected to ask. However, ignorance sidles up to stupidity when we refuse to learn or to change our views in the face of ample facts to the contrary.

Our widespread lack of knowledge about the history of this region is demonstrated by the near-disappearance from our cultural lexicon of Donald Culross Peattie and Louise Redfield Peattie. Once the highly popular and nationally-renowned author of books such as *An Almanac for Moderns* and *A Prairie Grove*, Peattie today is nearly forgotten and his works are out of print. Fortunately writer Peter Friederici (see page 12) has performed a fine public service in re-introducing us to this early and spirited celebrant of Chicago's wilderness.

Our ignorance about wildlife biology is reflected in Jerry Sullivan's stories of people's interactions with local wild animals (see page 4). Are they pets–objects of our affection and devotion, yet completely subject to our mastery and whim? Are they dependent, parasitic pests? Or are they truly wild creatures?

And what happens when the boundaries of dependence and independence blur as they certainly do in our urban/suburban/wild intersections? What happens when we fail to acknowledge the differences between pets and wild animals and seek to domesticate creatures that had formerly been wild (as some would have us do with the white-tailed deer)?

Even wild creatures become subject to our will and the effects of our enterprise when developers fragment habitats. When we eradicate predators or let invasive species destroy ancient ecosystems, we disrupt our wild neighbors in ways large and small. Our relationship with other animals is necessarily driven by complex feelings. But our dominance in the natural world, though unavoidable, need not be absolute and need not be hostile.

In fact, the paradigm exemplified by Chicago Wilderness suggests a new way by returning us to a place in nature not as master or subduer but, rather, in the role of caring stewards. The Chicago Wilderness paradigm recognizes that human intervention is essential if our remaining natural areas are to become healthy habitat for entire suites of birds and bees and butterflies, snakes and salamanders and savanna blazing stars.

But the Chicago Wilderness paradigm also carries with it enormous humility and respect. It acknowledges that we humans are one species with the unparalleled capacity to alter our landscape and, thus, have a solemn responsibility to use our power for good. It also means that we will need to make hard decisions and do hard things, such as cutting some trees to allow whole natural communities to thrive, or reducing the numbers of deer, or setting fires under controlled conditions. We have to do these hard things because that's part of being responsible stewards, owning up to our actions, and making amends. It's part of being fully human.

This issue features dispatches from the front–on developers, deer, fire, and bird poop. Living with nature challenges our culture. The mammals and plants and insects and fishes with which we share our metropolitan habitat are, in many respects, our distant kin. If we learn to be wise about it, we can take great joy in having these neighbors. From an affectionate and respectful distance.

Debra Shore
EDITOR

OPPOSITE: *First day's light on dune grasses at Illinois Beach State Park. Photo by Joseph Kayne.*

C O N T E N T S

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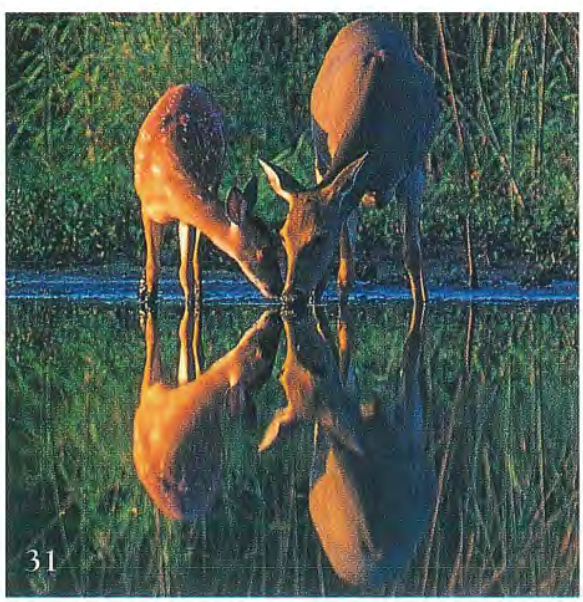
DEPARTMENTS



RIGHT: *White-tailed deer are the largest and, to many, the most beloved wild animal of Chicago Wilderness. They also try our culture's patience. In the absence of effective predators (other than the automobile), these big eaters are one of the major threats to biodiversity. Photo by Jason Lindsey.*
OPPOSITE: *Dewy web hangs from flowering big bluestem. Photo by Walter Anderson/Root Resources.*
COVER: *This baby great horned owl could be at home in wilderness or the central city. See p. 4. Photo by Joseph Kayne.*

Photo: Phyllis Cerny

Photo: Robert Shaw

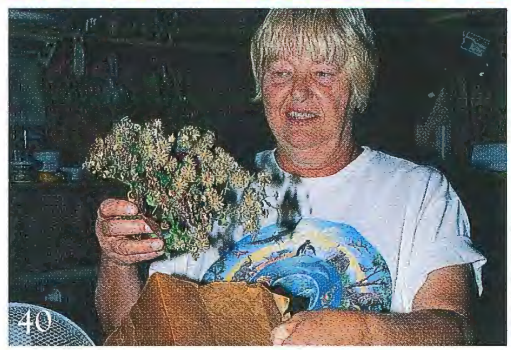


Photo: Pat Wadecki

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Pest? Pet? or just Wild?

by Jerry Sullivan

"I know it's just nature," the woman told me. "But nature is not going to take its course in front of me." I was answering phones at the Hal B. Tyrrell Trailside Museum. She was calling to report that she had rescued a pigeon from an attacking crow. Trailside is a wildlife rehabilitation facility operated by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, and she wanted us to try to nurse the pigeon back to health.

I've got nothing against pigeons, but there are only so many hours in the day. At Trailside we all do our best for everything that comes in, but what makes the long days bearable is releasing a long-eared owl or a pied-billed grebe. That's when our work has some conservation significance.

But in the year and a half I spent at Trailside, I discovered that many people share my caller's point of view both in their desire to have nature happen someplace else and in their tendency to look upon nature as a matter of individuals. It's a view that makes the suffering pigeon one sees more important than a dozen far-away California condors. It is quite different from the way those of us in conservation think, and it can create–or at least worsen–conflicts over subjects as diverse as ecological restoration and deer control.

Trailside Museum has been around since the 1930s, but it is only in the past decade that its mission has been explicitly defined as caring for injured or orphaned native wildlife. We take in more than 3,000 animals in a typical year. Our goal is to get them healthy enough for re-release into the wild.

The work is highly seasonal. Winter is pretty quiet, but in late March the baby season begins. Soon the person staffing the front desk may find herself juggling two phone calls while four people–each with a box or a pet carrier in hand–stand in the lobby waiting to turn in their animals. My understanding of what people know and how they feel about wild animals comes from talking with thousands of

callers and hundreds of visitors.

Large numbers of people evidently pay no attention to animals. If they happen to notice one, they will assume they are seeing something extraordinary. And in many cases, they feel called upon to do something about it–or to demand that someone else does something. So residents of Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood call to ask us to come get the opossum they have discovered in the alley behind their house. I first explain that we cannot come and pick up animals under any circumstances, and then I ask if the animal appears healthy.

–Yes, it looks healthy.

–Is it bothering you? Is it turning your garage into a nest?

–No. We didn't even know it was around until today.

–So why not leave it alone?

This makes sense to many callers. Those who reject it usually fit into one-or more-of three broadly defined categories.

1. It can't live here. It should be in the Forest Preserves. I explain that we have lots of opossums in the forest preserves, but this is a city opossum. It knows how to find food in an alley, but it has no idea at all about living in a forest. Capturing it and releasing it in a preserve is like getting rid of your dog by driving way out in the country and pushing it out the back door of the car.

Some people want to give us baby cottontails and fledgling birds to save them from the neighborhood cats and crows. Many see the forest preserves as places of safety. I tell them we have great horned owls and red-tailed hawks along with coyotes and two kinds of foxes. Rabbits, and virtually every other kind of wild creature, are in mortal danger every moment of their lives.

2. It can't live here. I don't like it. Nobody wants to be awakened by the sound of baby raccoons playing in the attic, but a noticeable fraction of the population regards anything that moves as a potential pest. Some residents of up-scale neighborhoods seem to think that the presence of opossums might lower their real estate values.

3. The third response is the most interesting: **What should I feed it?** Pest is at one pole in our attitudes toward animals. At the other pole is Pet.

Photo: Gary Davis

Photo: Phyllis Cerny

Caller: What shall I feed it?
Naturalist: It will feed itself.
Caller: They can do that?

Pets are animals we relate to as individuals. We give them names and hold long conversations with them. When we take family portraits we include them. We think of them as furry children, and, like children, they are dependent upon us. They can't live without us, and we know it. Our love for them makes us take very seriously our duty to protect and nurture them.

When we make pets of everything, we extend that sense of duty–and that personal affection–to wild animals. I have seen adults weeping over the death of a wild bird they first saw less than an hour before its demise. Putting the pet label on wild animals makes them lovable. And it makes

Photo: Joe Nowack

Playing 'possum. Friendly? Or just hopes to be left alone!

them–in our minds–helpless. We think we need to step in because this poor little animal cannot survive without our help. A caller who wanted to remove a fledgling from her yard to save it from cats accused me of "copping out" when I told her to leave the bird alone. Another caller discovered a goose sitting on eggs at the edge of a mall parking lot.

–What shall I feed it? he asked.

–Is this a healthy bird?

–It looks healthy.

–Don't feed it. It will feed itself.

–They can do that?

Well, yes, they can. And, yes, a classification of animals with only two categories in it is far too simple to describe reality. We certainly need to add to pet and pest a new class of creatures called wild animals. Wild animals need respect more than they need nurturing. They live on their own. They may depend on us for food, as urban raccoons do. They may depend on us for nest sites as chimney swifts and nighthawks do. But they live their lives and die their deaths separate from us. We provide for them as the bison provided for the cowbird–accidentally and with no awareness of what we are doing. They may live on what they can collect from open dumpsters, but they are independent nonetheless.

Cook County–like the rest of Chicago Wilderness–has two wildlife communities. One consists of a portion of the native fauna and a few exotics who live among people in city and suburban neighborhoods. The other includes the whole surviving native fauna and it lives in suitable habi-

tat on wild lands.

In a landscape as varied as ours, these two communities merge and blend in complicated ways. The exotics–pigeons, starlings, house mice, etc.–are more or less confined to developed areas. And some native species thrive in all sorts of situations. Killdeer can scrape a nest on bare ground inside a large preserve or they can nest on gravel at a construction site. Robins are everywhere. Many larger animals wander freely between natural areas and urban alleys. If your back yard adjoins a forest preserve, you are more likely to have deer in your garden or great horned owls in your trees, but such things are not unheard of even in the middle of Chicago. In my time at Trailside, Chicago animal control brought us two grey foxes trapped on the city's South Side and a red fox from the Northwest Side. Coyotes have been found near Lincoln Park's Bird Sanctuary and even on the steps of the Art Institute.

Photos: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

This egg-eating raccoon would be just as happy to munch nestlings. We can be humane, but we can't expect nature to be like us.

But most of our native wildlife need wild lands. Migrating scarlet tanagers may appear in your yard, but they are unlikely to nest outside a forest. And least bitterns will die out in the absence of marshes.

Conservationists take it as axiomatic that the most important group of animals in Chicago Wilderness are species that depend on wild lands for their survival. And among that group, the rarest and most closely tied to a disappearing habitat are objects of the most concern.

We intervene in nature to protect species, and we protect species by protecting populations. Our principal tool for protecting populations and species is managing wild lands to provide suitable habitat. This is easy to say, but doing it involves a continuing–and sometimes painful–learning process. Difficult as it is to achieve the goal of providing habitat for all our remaining wildlife species, it seems to us that this is the appropriate strategy. Saving the life of an individual animal may make us feel good, but in nearly all cases, it has nothing to do with conservation. Saving species one animal at a time is a desperation strategy for situations like that of the California condor. And even that strategy cannot succeed without suitable habitat where captive animals can be released.

So "save the habitat" is the most important message that conservationists have for the rest of the world. It is a complex, multi-layered message. It means creating and properly managing the county, local, state, and federal preserves and parks in Chicago Wilderness. It also means keeping air and water clean and, on the largest scale, avoiding climatic change so drastic that it wipes out the ecosystems our preserves are supposed to protect.

As I understand it, this is the core message of Chicago Wilderness and we need to spread it by every means available. We need to tell it to adults and, especially, to children. Kids need to understand how nature works, even the parts of it that Disney leaves out of its movies.

We also need to think about how we should relate to wild animals and how that relationship differs from our relationship to pets. Suppose you go to someone's house and meet his dog or cat for the first time. If you are anything like me, you will probably try to make friends. You don't want to force yourself on the animal, and you want to be cautious, but you send out whatever signals you can to encourage the animal to approach you. A successful meeting ends with you scratching the dog behind the ears or petting the cat as it curls up in your lap.

Many people try to relate in much that way to animals in zoos. They call; they wave their arms; some of them throw food, all in an effort to create some kind of relationship between themselves and the animal. This is not what you want to teach your kids.

Children need to be taught the fundamental lesson that the best way to approach wild animals is not to approach. Leave them alone. You aren't Dr. Doolittle. The animal has its own life to deal with, and it may not welcome your intrusion into it. The animal you least want to approach is one that allows you to approach. Healthy animals generally like to keep their distance. Sick animals will let you near, but you don't want to get near them.

If you want a literary figure to imitate, forget Dr.

Photo: Dave Jagodzinski

Great horned owls nest in distant wilderness–and in the central city. Even when sick they are wild and ferocious. They deserve respect.

Doolittle, the man who talked to animals. Try to be the invisible man. Millions are fascinated by wildlife documentaries that give us close-ups of the complex behaviors of wild animals. The fact is that if you are patient and willing to tolerate a little frustration, you can see that sort of thing yourself. It may gratify your sense of yourself as a compassionate individual to pluck a robin fledgling from your backyard, stick it in a box, and watch its excited gaping as you stick a wad of dog food into its mouth. But what is really exciting is to find a place where you can see a free fledgling and watch its parents feed it. This also happens to be the best thing for the animal. In spite of the very real dangers created by cats and crows, a bird raised by its parents gains wisdom that it could not learn living in even the largest and most humane cage.

This winter, watch the squirrels in your neighborhood. As mating season approaches, they will be chasing each other up and down trees, leaping from tree to tree, displaying a gloriously irrational exuberance that is an ideal counter to the gloom of winter. What you are seeing is exactly what you would see if you were in the Smokies 10 miles from the nearest road. The wilderness is indeed just outside your window.

If you are willing to let nature take its course in front of you, you open yourself to the possibility of joy. We get many phone calls at Trailside from people overwhelmed with anxiety because they discovered a robin's nest on their front porch. We tell them to try to avoid disturbing the birds, and otherwise, just enjoy their presence. Often, their response is "I can't do that. I'm too worried." But every relationship opens us to the possibility of pain. Indeed, to the inevitability of pain. The secret is to seize the joy while you can. The pain will come. Anticipating it doesn't help.

So watch them. Take joy from them. Don't intervene to protect prey from predator. Hawks have to eat too. There will be times–especially in a world overrun with automobiles–when you encounter an obviously injured animal, an animal in pain. You can't be indifferent to it, and you certainly don't want your children to be indifferent to it. For those times, places like Trailside are there to ease the animal's suffering and your own pain. For the rest, when you really pay attention to the animals around you, when you use your powers of observation to see the drama of their lives, a new richness of life opens up to you.

Jerry Sullivan is a naturalist with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

To share your own animal stories or ask questions of expert naturalists, visit the magazine's Web site at
WWW.CHICAGOWILDERNESSMAG.ORG

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Pigeons, raccoons, and other wild city creatures deserve humane treatment. You can appreciate and learn from them. But they don't need conservation programs.

Photo: Pat Wadecki

This least bittern, like most animal species in Chicago Wilderness, exists in small numbers and depends on specialized habitats. For many people, it's fun and important to learn about and help them.

The Fire This Time

Compare TV images of raging conifer crown fires with the Midwest analog. Here our ground fires invigorate the oaks, drive out invasive species, and restore health to plant and animal communities.

This summer, Americans woke up to fire. We watched on TV as uncontrolled burns raged across huge expanses of the western United States. Yet some experts claim that well-planned prescription burns could have averted or lessened many of this summer's disasters.

The notion that woods, forests, even marshes need to burn in order to be healthy is contrary to what most of us grew up believing. After all, didn't Bambi and Smokey teach us some of our bedrock values? Thus, it's still counter-intuitive, for most of us, that in order to save our woods we must burn them occasionally. Indeed, even before the large fires burned nearly half of Yellowstone National Park in 1988, the U.S. Forest Service had already concluded that the era of fire prevention and suppression needed to give way. As Timothy Egan wrote recently in the *New York Times*, "Fire is as much a part of nature as creeks and wildflowers. Most forests have a natural cycle, in which a purging burn comes through every 10, 20, 50 or 100 years. The cycle may be suppressed, foresters say, but only at the cost of more powerful fires when it re-emerges."

Today, there is no dispute among experts that fire is an essential part of many ecosystems, including most of the natural communities of Chicago Wilderness. But that fact is hardly common knowledge, neither to the average person nor to the average news writer.

In the case of one fire, that at Los Alamos, the trouble was actually caused by a botched prescribed burn. One immediate concern that needs to be dispelled is the fear that what happened out West might happen here. It can't and won't–for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost, we have different ecosystems. Out West are conifer forests and desert chaparral. These systems burn catastrophically and unavoidably, on relatively regular and long cycles–often as long as 50 to 100 years between burns. Thus, most of the areas burning in this hot, dry summer won't burn again for 50 or 100 years or more.

Here, our ecosystems are deciduous oak woods, prairie, and various wetlands. Fires in these ecosystems are naturally more frequent–and of much lower intensity. When set by trained burn crews according to strict guidelines that put a primary emphasis on safety to people and adjacent property, our prescribed burns are demonstrably less dangerous than driving a car.

Even when set by errant teenagers, most creeping woodland ground fires are harmless to people (and good for the ecosystem). They go out by themselves or are quickly extinguished by local fire departments. Of course the kids may not pay attention to who's downwind, and not one wants to breathe smoke. But the point is, this is not the West. We have neither the vast acreages, the explosive

fuels nor the levels of drought that are present in the region of fire disasters.

"Unquestionably we should learn from the experiences out West," says Jim Anderson, natural resource manager for the Lake County Forest Preserves and co-chair of the Chicago Wilderness burn task force. "One lesson is that if you suppress fire, you have more of a problem than if you manage it wisely. We have a 30-year record in the region of land management agencies conducting controlled burns without a significant problem."

Anderson points out that training of personnel and precautions taken on the day of and during a prescribed burn are critical. "Last fall we were actually burning in conditions that were extremely dry for us, so we burned in smaller units and had more people out on burn crews."

According to Anderson, the burn crews worry most about smoke management. "If the wind shifts and smoke blows across a highway stopping traffic and people are late to work," he says, "that's a disaster for us."

All burning by agencies in Illinois is done under a permit from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency as well as required local permits and is conducted according to a burn plan for the site that includes an acceptable range of parameters for wind speed and direction, humidity and temperature. If the wind is blowing the wrong direction, no burn occurs. (See Working the Wilderness, Fall 1999, p. 16.)

Why burn at all in an urban environment? Because our native ecosystems were shaped by fire and require periodic burns to remain healthy. "One of our concerns with our oak woods is that they're undergoing succession to woods dominated by sugar maple," says Roger Anderson, Distinguished Professor of Plant Ecology at Illinois State University. "The absence of fire has allowed this to happen. Now the oaks can't reproduce and we're losing a whole suite of insects and birds and butterflies that depend on oaks. Without periodic fires, we are losing biodiversity."

People sometimes worry about the effect of burns on air quality. But prescribed burns in this region are rarely conducted in the summer, when ozone action days occur, but rather in the fall and spring. "It's not like a factory that sits there 365 days a year that puts pollutants into the air," says Roger Anderson. "And if you burn the prairies and woods often, you're stimulating growth that takes more carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere than you're putting in. We know this from studies."

Prescribed burn guidelines also promote burning on days that smoke will quickly rise and dissipate rather than hang or blow at ground level.

Photo: Kim Karpeles/Life Through the Lens

A large part of this region's biodiversity survives only with fire. Fortunately for nature, our conservation agencies have a relatively easy job. They've had a record unblemished by major mishap for decades–thanks to common sense and low-risk ecosystems.

Photo: Joe Nowak

Chicago Wilderness has recently embarked on a major effort to develop a set of burn guidelines and a protocol for burn training that is specific to this region. "The basic burn training provided by the U.S. Forest Service is built on fire suppression, not on prescription burning," says Jim Anderson. "And it's geared toward Western ecosystems. So we're developing training that will incorporate some of the excellent Forest Service procedures while focussing on the particulars we deal with here: our fuel types, smoke management, fire department response, and burning in an urban environment. We're calling it the Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Training Program and it will be available to all land management agencies and volunteers."

We of Chicago Wilderness have two major tasks. One is continuing to do fire well–that is, safely and successfully. The other is to do a much better job of educating the public.

– Debra Shore

Excerpt from an interview in *The Chicago Tribune* with Stephen Pyne, author of *Vestal Fire* and nine other books on fire in human history.

Q. You call for fundamental changes in the nation's wildfire policy: Mechanically thin out forests and remove dead litter; stop the grazing of cattle so the grasses can return; tighten building and zoning codes; make officials combine fire suppression and prescribed burning in a single organized program. But all that would cost billions and take a long, long time. Why not just hire a rainmaker? It seems as plausible. Are you being realistic?

A. That depends on the extent of the current disaster. Right now, big fires are the story of the moment. Next month, it's another disaster story. But fire is not just a natural hazard but an important cultural issue, and the fire problem in public lands is actually a complex of fire problems, some easily solvable, some not.

The story in the Western landscapes that resulted in the disruption of the pattern of fire began with overgrazing and the removal of the American Indian. This began in the 1870s, long before we created the U.S. Forest Service, and many of the landscapes that today are overgrown with combustible materials were originally grasslands.

Windy City Wild

From the Foreword by Bill Kurtis:

As the city and farmland spread, the acres of forest and prairie preserved so carefully by early conservationists were left untouched. The prevailing attitude of conservation was "Don't touch it." "Don't burn it." "Leave it as nature intended." While laudable in its commitment, it lacked an understanding of how the system works. Prairies need occasional fires to cleanse themselves of intrusive species. The forests were savaged by buckthorn, an import from Great Britain that was used as a hedge in the northern suburbs. Its rapid growth blocked the sun from the understory, smothering the oaks and leaving the forest floor bare, devoid of the rich carpet of trilliums and jack-in-the-pulpits. The rapid-growing trees changed the hydrology to encourage even more invasion.

As the third millennium approached, biologists and ecologists discovered the dark side of a well-intended conservation effort. Nature's treasure of biodiversity so carefully preserved a century earlier was being consumed by alien intruders and would soon be replaced by a tangle of foreign plants and trees. Could it be saved?

This lush portfolio by photographers Robert Shaw and Jason Lindsey answers the question in the affirmative. It documents the reward for thousands of volunteers and nearly a hundred conservation organizations that searched diligently for native species and cleared the intruders away from them. They reintroduced fire into the natural equation. The result was astonishingly beautiful. Within a single season, many native plants rebounded as if they had been awakened from hibernation exclaiming, "The prairie is back!"

And so the name Chicago Wilderness was born. It describes a network task force of organizations dedicated to restoration and a new philosophy of stewardship that values our native species with the same appreciation as those Chicagoans who set out to preserve them in the first place. There is much to be done in the restoration effort. Let these pictures be our guide to what once was and what could be again.

Photo: Robert Shaw

Compass plants near sunset at Grant Creek Prairie Nature Preserve.

"I was in the midst of a prairie! A world of grass and flowers stretched around me, rising and falling in gentle undulations, as if an enchanter had struck the ocean swell, and it was at rest forever. Acres of wild flowers of every hue glowed around me, and the sun arising from the earth where it touched the horizon, was 'kissing with golden face the meadows green.'"

– Eliza R. Steele
A Summer Journey in the West, 1840

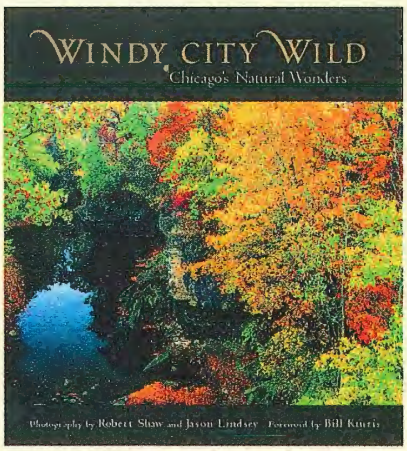
Photo: Jason Lindsey

Fox kit at den, Lake County.

Oak savanna restoration, Morton Arboretum.

"Beyond the young woods lies the crowing attraction of River Forest, the big woods...Here are elms no two of us can span, high and flourishing as any in New England; tall hickorys, with their swollen buds just waking up and pushing back the covers that have kept them snug and warm through the long winter; and huge gnarled oaks, trees that were never young, their sluggish blood still unstirred by the returning sun. They are old and wise and sleep until all the spring chills and storms are over. But they do not see the young green shoots, or the white hawthorns like great bridal bouquets, or the pink crab-apples that make the woods so dainty today. They do not feel the gentle touch of the blue phlox and the violets and the buttercups against their hard dark boles, or the caressing of the sunbeams that filter through the tree tops. The oaks are old and wise and they will outlive all the rest."

– *Louella Chapin*
Round About Chicago, *1907*



WINDY CITY WILD, with photographs by Robert Shaw and Jason Lindsey, is published by Chicago Review Press. Copies will be available for $39.95 from local bookstores or call (800) 888-4741. The 128-page book includes a foreword by Bill Kurtis and an epilogue by Bruce Boyd of The Nature Conservancy.

Photo: Jason Lindsey

Pale purple coneflowers, butterfly weed, and leadplant in a prairie restoration, Glacial Park, McHenry County Conservation District.

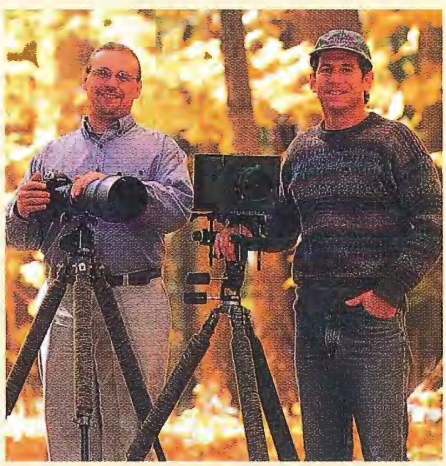


Photo: David Hessel

Jason Lindsey(left) and Robert Shaw.

Donald Culross Peattie:
Remembering an Early Prophet in Chicago Wilderness by Peter Friederici

In 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, Glenview witnessed a subdued homecoming. A couple and their three young sons returned to the state of their origin after six years in the south of France. It was early winter, and bleak; the drought of the Dust Bowl had not yet broken. Glenview was more rural than suburban. Lacking snow, the northern Illinois farmlands looked "dingy now and threadbare." The great old bur oaks of the prairie groves appeared dead.

They were both writers. Their books had found publishers but not much of an audience. Jobless, the man doubted his own ability to provide for his family. "Still to put trust in me, I thought . . . was to perform more than I ever had yet," he wrote. For what, he wondered, had they left the warm delights of the Riviera?

Such was the homecoming of Donald Culross Peattie and Louise Redfield Peattie. Luckily it would prove to be a turning point: the beginning of an important second career for Donald. Within a few years of this strained return, he was a best-selling author who introduced readers nationwide to the wonders of the natural world. He would leave a significant legacy as one of the first popular interpreters of what is today called the Chicago Wilderness. And it all began in the back yard of his wife's childhood home.

To be precise, it was a big back yard. Louise Redfield grew up at The Grove, the Glenview homestead that had been settled in the 1830s by the Kennicott family. The family patriarch, John, was a widely respected doctor, plant nurseryman, and farmer. His son Robert was the most prominent of Illinois' early naturalists, and one of the founders of the Chicago Academy of Sciences; sadly, he died young on a survey trip in Alaska.

Louise was John Kennicott's great-granddaughter. The Glenview of her childhood was far more rural than wild. The prairie chickens and bison and passenger pigeons were dim memories, but the wind still blew through the grasses and the high oak boughs, and snapping turtles still prowled the sloughs.

Chicago-born, Donald Peattie was the son of journalists. His mother reviewed books for the *Chicago Daily News* and *Chicago Tribune*. His father was in turn on staff for the *Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Born in 1898, Donald learned early on that writing was a matter of application as much as inspiration.

"The peck of my mother's typewriter sounded from her sunny room from early until late," he wrote. "In the evening my father went down to his work on the paper."

The Peatties lived close to the beach in a big house on a dirt road some nine miles south of downtown– what later became 7660 South Shore Drive. But back around the turn of the century it was a hard place to reach. "You had to drive out from Grand Crossing on the mere trace of a road, two ruts across the prairie through flowering sloughs and over deep dune sand," Peattie recalled in *The Road of a Naturalist*, his 1941 memoir that served both as autobiography and as a justification for the value of nature study as the nation prepared to enter a long war.

In that book, too, Peattie recalled how at age 16 he began to visit The Grove. He became friends with Robert Redfield, Robert Kennicott's grand-nephew, and had eyes for Robert's sister Louise.

At that time The Grove comprised a square mile of fields, "woods, hidden swamps, and fragments of virgin prairie." It was "a country kingdom in a bubble of its own," Peattie wrote. The teenagers explored the woods and wetlands and big old barn, watched frogs and warblers and red-winged blackbirds.

But this was an idyll that had to end. Donald went to college at the University of Chicago and Harvard. Though determined to be a writer, he first began to work fitfully as a botanist, initially at the Washington, D.C., office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction in the US Department of Agriculture. That office was charged with finding plants overseas that could be economically useful in this country (a bit of an irony, considering the damage that such imports as buckthorn and garlic mustard are doing today at places like The Grove).

"One longs for the days of the old biota, when the great beasts at this season were in heat and bellowing, the Indians were celebrating their harvests, the turkeys were fat and the wild pigeons going over, obese with the mast crop."

Courtesy of University of Chicago Laboratory Schools

Peattie, upper right, served as editor of the newspaper at the University of Chicago Laboratory School.

Donald and Louise married in 1923, and a year later he resigned his job and became a full-time writer. He wrote *Cargoes and Harvests*, a book about important introduced plants, and completed a study of the flora of the Indiana Dunes. He wrote a nature column for the *Washington Evening Star* about the quotidian nature of the suburbs. "It was an everyday world that I had to write of . . . transient as any newspaper work . . . but they were pages of life as I lived it."

Yet both young Peatties hungered for a more cosmopolitan life, for a place "where art is native and deep-rooted." In 1928, like so many other writers of the time, they moved to France. Both wrote novels. All but forgotten today, these early works earned them only a hardscrabble living. It proved a tough way to raise their three sons, and Donald found that he longed for what in retrospect seemed so sweet about America: its nature.

"I wanted safety in blue distance, illimitable, uninhabited. I wanted . . . the grandeur of free solitude. I wanted to smell Wisconsin north woods again."

The couple had to borrow money for ship fare, and had no job prospects in Chicago. But they settled at The Grove, living in Redfield House, and Donald found freelance work writing a brochure about trees. Louise worked on a big novel about settlers at the old homestead.

Times were hard. Louise was in poor health. The last of the novels Donald had written in France was published and soon forgotten. He was glad of but unsatisfied with the hack work he found. But out of the Depression, and out of his own doubts about writing for a living, he found a purpose.

It began with a journal.

Here are some excerpts from his unpublished notes about The Grove:

"September 9, 1936. This morning was the most beautiful of all, the early morning hours with long light in shafts between the trees, a black ground mist above the horizon, hovering over the earth that at this season always seems to breathe soft fertility, the air smelling moist and soft yet adventure-tanged. One longs for the days of the old biota, when the great beasts at this season were in heat and bellowing, the Indians were celebrating their harvests, the turkeys were fat and the wild pigeons going over, obese with the mast crop.

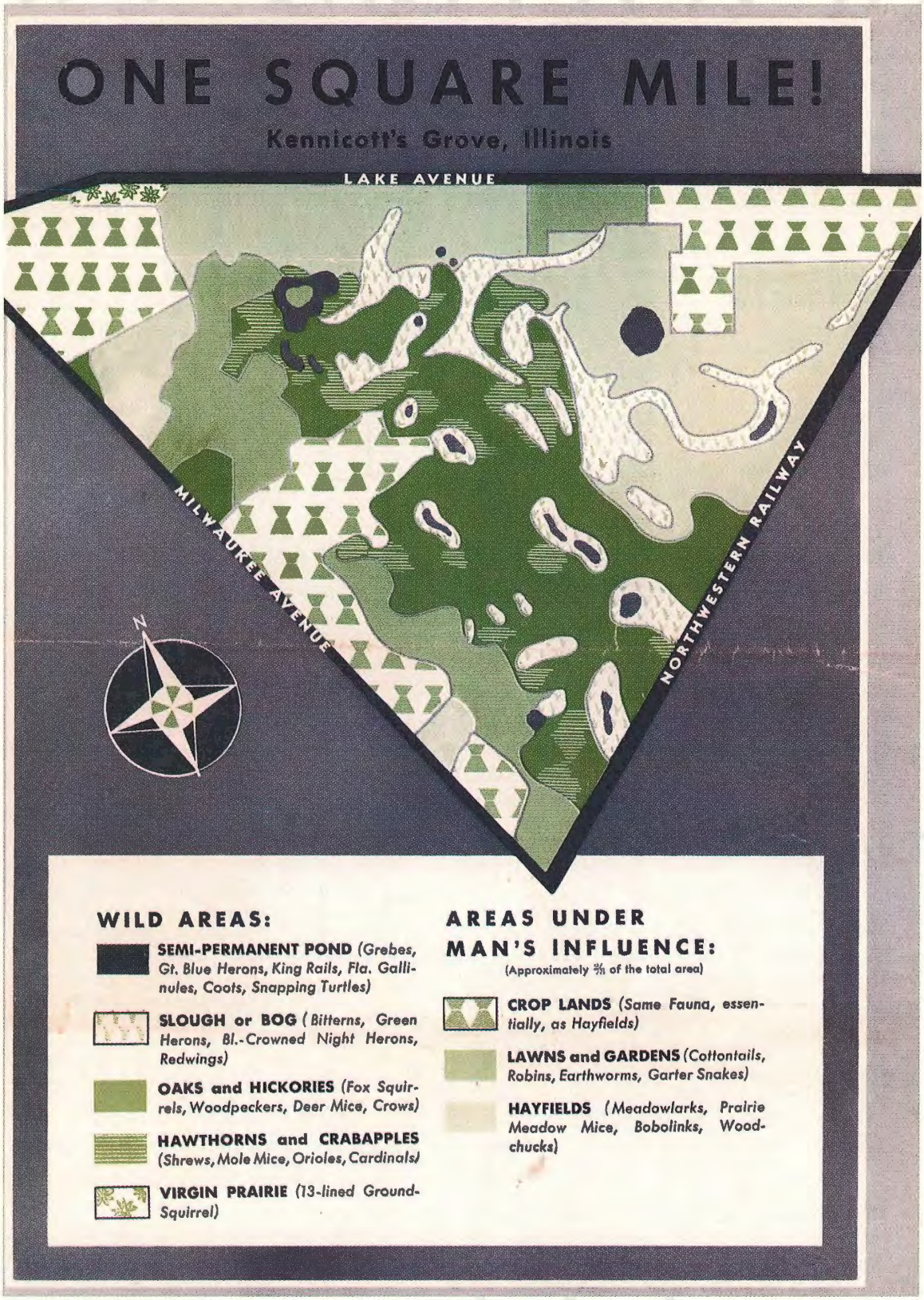
"October 26, 1935. The frogs are still heard! Midges still dancing, and a few butterflies–yellow clovers and cabbage whites–still on the wing. A phoebe is calling. Grackles go spattering through the trees, just as ready to leave now as they pretended to be in the last of August.

"The introduced trees are still holding their leaves, but most of the natives are naked except oaks of the subgenus *Lepidobalanus*, some of which are still brilliant. Elms are most irregular, some holding astonishingly.

"December 12, 1935. The transition to winter is I suppose complete, but there was gentleness in this day. In the northwest hung a trailing sheet of storm, and the prairie prospect in that direction was hazed with a black ground mist."

"December 12, 1935. The transition to winter is I suppose complete, but there was gentleness in this day. In the northwest hung a trailing sheet of storm, and the prairie prospect in that direction was hazed with a black ground mist. The white-topped cottonwoods against it looked pale and awed, but lofty. The downy woodpecker now calls his winter song of *k-pick* or *pink*! Tree sparrows are here in flocks, singing softly a jumbled warble: *t'weedle, t'weeyuddle*. They also call with a tiny lisping *t'seep*. Starlings in an affected, mincing, mocking whistle call *t'swee-you* and emit a cat-like mewing.

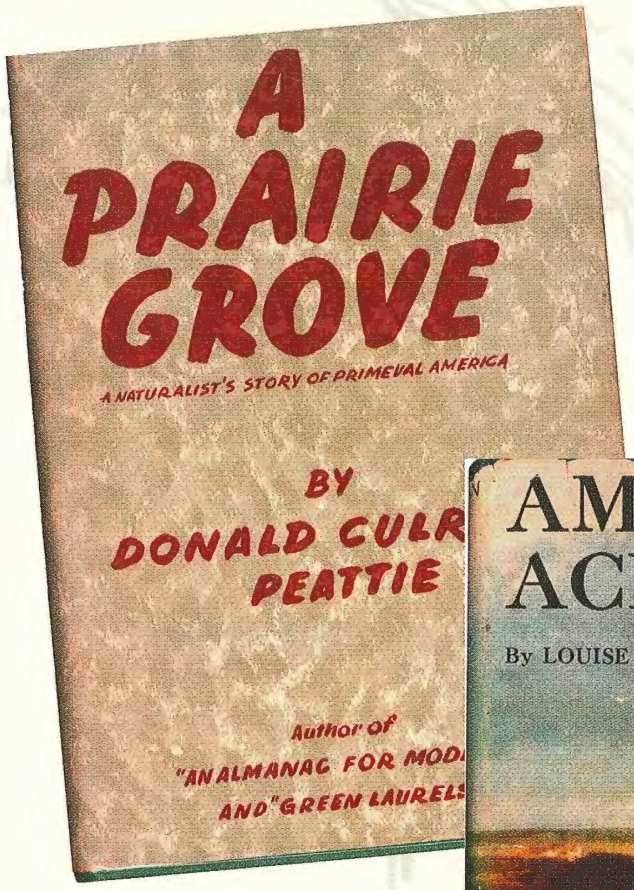
"The woods are steely–black and silver, the prairies tawny and tough, like the wind-blown hide of a dead wildcat, and the sun, low in the south, is watery. Everything subdued, meek; all

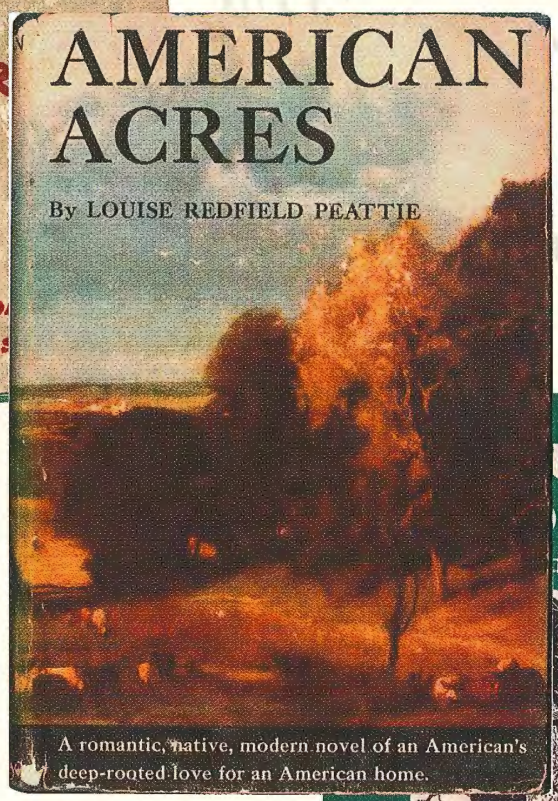


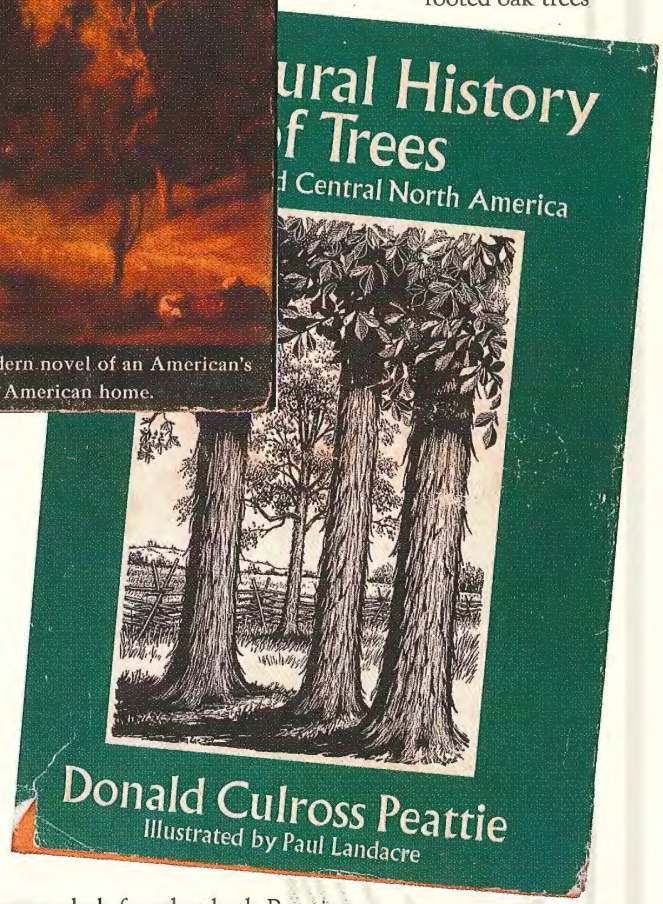
Nature so cowed that you feel it will put up no fight against the coming lash of snows."

Peattie found the key to his future success in those journal entries. In them he developed his hallmark technique: moving from well-grounded and precise observations of the natural world into larger philosophical observations. While at The Grove he worked journal entries and much of his earlier botanical research into *An Almanac for Moderns*, a daybook of musings–a paragraph or two for each day of the year. Some of the entries are pure natural history; some historical excursions into the lives and work of the pioneer naturalists whose work Peattie was wont to praise; some are

"The woods are steely–black and silver, the prairies tawny and tough, like the wind-blown hide of a dead wildcat, and the sun, low in the south, is watery."







pure philosophy.

Watching the spring migration of birds prompts Peattie to ponder whether human lives are steered by destiny or conscious decision; finding a mouse in the woodpile results in an excursus on the fragility and tenacity of all life.

All the entries are grounded on The Grove's particular acreage. In an article Peattie later wrote for *Natural History* magazine he mused, "I learned also the value of knowing some one thing, at last, with a certain degree of thoroughness, be it only my one square mile. I even began to welcome the very limitations of my problem, as a sonnet writer his fourteen lines . . . I have learned, however, that three years is utterly insufficient to make me a master of a reasonable amount of wood-wisdom concerning one square mile of Illinois land."

The *Almanac* is a book to be savored slowly, evening by evening. It is a book whose underlying affirmation of life is inherent in its first line, in the entry for March 21: "On this chill uncertain spring day, toward twilight, I have heard the first frog quaver from the marsh."

The book's 1935 publication brought Peattie's first brush with fame when it received an award from the Limited Editions Club for the book most likely to become a classic. It also resulted in further book assignments. He chronicled the life of Audubon and the Lewis and Clark expedition. He profiled the lives of past naturalists. He edited a couple of nature anthologies. He was in demand.

He and Louise continued to write quite explicitly about The Grove. Louise's contribution was *American Acres*, a 1936 novel that thinly fictionalized the lives of several Kennicott generations at the homestead. Donald's was *A Prairie Grove*, a 1938 book that is something of a hodge-podge as far as human characters are concerned; its most vivid character is the land itself, the grove whose strategic location between the lake and the river to its west (in real life it is the Des Plaines) sets the stage for the Illinois, the Jesuits, the land speculators, and the stalwart settlers.

In both books there is no firm line between natural and cultural history. The big prairie sky and the deep-rooted oak trees are symbols for what both Peatties lionized in America. The settlers who stayed and stewarded such places became model Americans. Like the slow-growing big bluestem and bur oaks, they were stalwart, conservative, unchic but tough.

The Grove had launched the Peatties' dual career, but it was not enough. In spite of their deep familial and natural groundings in the Chicago area, they did not stay. Donald wrote that they moved to California in order to be able to study western nature, but perhaps they also were recapitulating the American history they loved so well– moving west as did John Muir, as had the hopes and dreams of the nation.

"I learned also the value of knowing some one thing, at last, with a certain degree of thoroughness, be it only my one square mile."

They settled in Santa Barbara, in a house with a large yard where Donald could grow exotic plants. There he wrote two books that form his most enduring contributions to our literature: *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*, published in 1950, and its companion *A Natural History of Western Trees*, completed three years later.

These brick-sized tomes, still in print, are much more than field guides. Rather, they are detailed portrayals of trees in which the subjects have all the personality of human characters. As the contemporary nature writer Robert Finch puts it in his introduction to the two volumes, each volume is important "more for its vigorous narrative, sensuous descriptions, and contagious affection for its subject than as a source of factual information or as a field guide."

Courtesy of University of Chicago Laboratory Schools

An excerpt from the entry about the bur oak (which runs to about four pages in all, plus a lovely print by Paul Landacre) proves this to be true: "A grand old Bur Oak suggests a house in itself–for it is often broad rather than tall, and its mighty boughs, starting straight out from the trunk at right angles, extend horizontally 50, 60, 70 feet, bending with the weight of their own mass to the very ground, so that within their circle is a hollow room, its grassy floor littered with acorns, with the sloughed-off corky bark of the boughs, with a deep bed of leaves, and the birds' nests of many a summer, and the gold of many a flicker's wing. "No child who ever played beneath a Bur Oak will forget it."

This is a portrait that Donald began writing, in a sense, during his teenage visits to The Grove. It demonstrates a salient fact about the influences upon him: like many nature writers, he was most powerfully affected by the landscapes he experienced as a child. He was able to continue to write so evocatively because he took those early impressions with him. He left the Midwest, but it never left him; its traces linger throughout his books.

From *A Natural History of Trees*. Illustration by Paul Landacre.

Upon his death in 1964, I imagine him still hearing the keening of mourning doves and the particular way a summer breeze moves through the leaves of ancient oaks. When I visit The Grove and study those thick-trunked oaks, I think of Louise and Donald, teenagers in love with one another and with their surroundings, learning anew as every generation must that there is no such thing as human beings separated from nature.

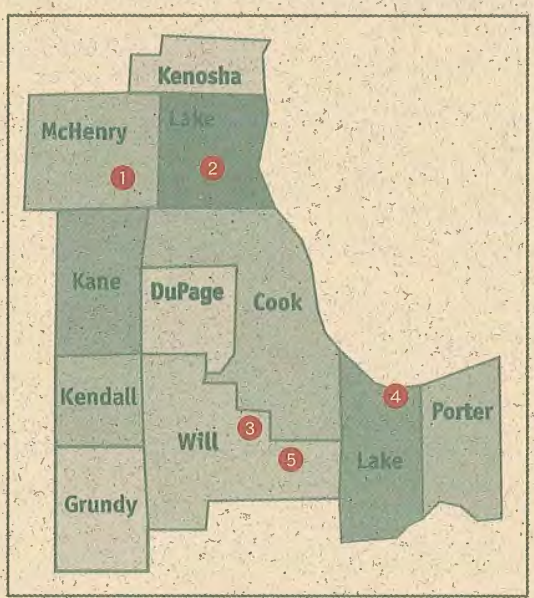
Peter Friederici is the author of The Suburban Wild *(University of Georgia Press, 1999), a collection of essays about nature in the Chicago suburbs. He is distantly related to Louise Redfield.*

A list of Peattie's and Redfield's works and information on obtaining copies can be found on the magazine's Web site: **WWW.CHICAGOWILDERNESSMAG.ORG**

Into the Wild

OUR GUIDE TO THE WILD SIDE

Photo: Betsy Axley



1. CARY SANDS MAIN STREET PRAIRIE - McHenry County
2. HALF DAY AND WRIGHT WOODS FOREST PRESERVES - Lake County
3. HICKORY CREEK - Will County
4. MILLER WOODS - Lake County, IN
5. THORN CREEK WOODS - Will County

Maps: Lynda Wallis

Burning In the Rain

by Joe Neumann

8:30 AM. The phone rings. It's Forest Preserve District ecologist Steve Thomas. He and a district crew are en route to Zanders Woods for a prescribed burn. "We could use another person," Steve tells me. A prescribed burn, today? There's patchy fog and a damp breeze off of the lake. "We need an east wind," Steve says. I-394 runs due east of the preserve. So wind from the east will push the smoke away from the expressway. As for the damp conditions, Steve assures me: "This site burns hot."

"Zanders Woods Prairie" a district sign at the site declares. Sedge meadow and prairie pockets mingle among the dominant oaks. Fire maintains this diverse landscape. Just as at the Indiana Dunes to the east, sand rules here. This site is one of the three best sand savannas in the Cook County Forest Preserves.

Today's crew consists of six district personnel and three volunteers. The first order of business is to make a fire break around the burn area. We rake a path clear of oak leaves. Without oak leaves to fuel it, the fire will die at this break.

Photo: Carol Freeman

The weather radio reports 89 percent relative humidity. We eat our lunch and hope that somehow the humidity will drop in the afternoon. You can see your breath. The tree trunks are damp on their east side, After lunch, we hike into the old field south of the burn area. We light a test fire in a clump of Eurasian grasses. The flames fizzle. Now we ignite a stray clump of prairie grass. It burns without difficulty. Maybe there's hope for a burn today after all. Even as I think this, drizzle begins to fall.

We gather at the middle of the western fire break. Thankfully, the drizzle has passed quickly. The time has come to see what kind of burn we are going to get. With an east wind, the west break is the first one that needs to be secured. We will light the fire along this break, allowing it to move east against the wind while using our break to halt any advance to the west.

We split into two crews. One will go south and one north. I am assigned to the north crew headed by Mary who works at the district's Salt Creek Nursery. Some of the volunteers call her "Seed" Mary because she grows native seedlings for restoration projects. Mary assigns me the drip-torch. Barbara, another volunteer, has a flapper. A flapper is a stick with a slab of flat rubber on the end. It is used to smother minor flames. Mary has a water pack. I light a line of oak leaves along the break. They burn most acceptably. I head north with the torch, igniting as I go, but keeping an eye behind me. We pause at the northwest corner. Mary uses her radio to inform Restoration Forester John Raudenbush, who is in charge of the burn, about our location.

As we await John's permission to begin burning along the north break, a visitor appears. A man in a blue suit tramps up the trail in galoshes. He is Cook County Commissioner William Moran. Zanders Woods is in his district.

While we ignite the north break, the other crew ignites the south break. Now both crews make their way along the east break, a minor street that parallels the expressway. With the other breaks secure, we can safely light the head fire that will push forward with the support of the wind. The head fire, orange and active, gobbles up the dried native grasses and then sets off rapidly into the interior crackling and smoking as it goes. Damn the humidity, full speed ahead!

Late in the afternoon, while the flames are still milling about in the interior, the rain that has threatened all day finally begins to fall. In the end, eight of the 12 acres targeted by the burn plan have actually burned. When you work with fire, you must always be on the lookout for lessons. Today's lesson is that soil conditions as well as atmospheric conditions affect fire. Porous, sandy soil wicks away moisture. 0.2" of rain fell two days ago. After today's experience, I almost believe that one day I might witness a sandy area burning in the rain.

In 1986, Claire Marie and Carl Sands donated their 80-acre farm to the Cary Park District in an effort to preserve something special–one of the few remaining dry gravel hill prairies in northern Illinois. Of the 16 acres originally dedicated as a state nature preserve (later expanded to 75), only eight are considered virgin prairie. However spirited volunteers and park district staff are working together to meet the ecological challenge of restoring this site with a full complement of native plants.

Visitors to Cary Sands Main Street Prairie are greeted by a sea of tall, sweeping grasses. Small children will be the first to notice the chunky gravel and rocks on the trails. Some are remnants of the glaciers that formed this gently undulating morainal landscape. One trail loop, approximately .2 mile, circles the original Main Street Prairie. A northeast loop rambles about .6 mile.

Big snags (dead trees) along the way create a great place for birds to rest during their fall migration and "there has been a real success story in the return of the bluebird," noted former prairie steward Lynda Wallis. "The savannah sparrow has come back, the Henslow's sparrow [and] a number of birds that need large open grasslands have returned."

"During October, we would really like to do large-scale seed collecting and seeding into the prairie itself," says Dave Raica, director of Parks and Planning for the Cary Park District. "We have re-created 60 acres and will be collecting seed on-site that we hope to disperse to other areas." To help this process, steward Jim Alwill has developed seed collection boxes that allow volunteers to "comb the seed off" at a rate of 5 pounds in 20 minutes.

High school students, scouts, and church youth groups work with Alwill to collect seeds, plant plugs, clear encroaching non-natives, and occasionally rescue plants. "We have large tracts of Indian grass, big bluestem, and switch grass, and we have put in prairie forbs like compass plant, prairie dock, rosinweed, [and] blazing star. They seem to compete with the existing prairie turf," said Alwill.

Visitors in spring and summer will see shooting stars (the plant), leadplant, hoary puccoon, prairie smoke, violet wood sorrel, birdsfoot and prairie violets, prairie dropseed, little bluestem, rough blazing star, and sky blue aster.

Altogether Cary has five such high quality sites situated within minutes of each other, providing visitors and residents alike with a glimpse of how life once was and providing priceless habitat for native plants and animals. Self-guided trail maps should be available at the trailhead on the south side of the barn, but may also be obtained by visiting the park district's administrative office.

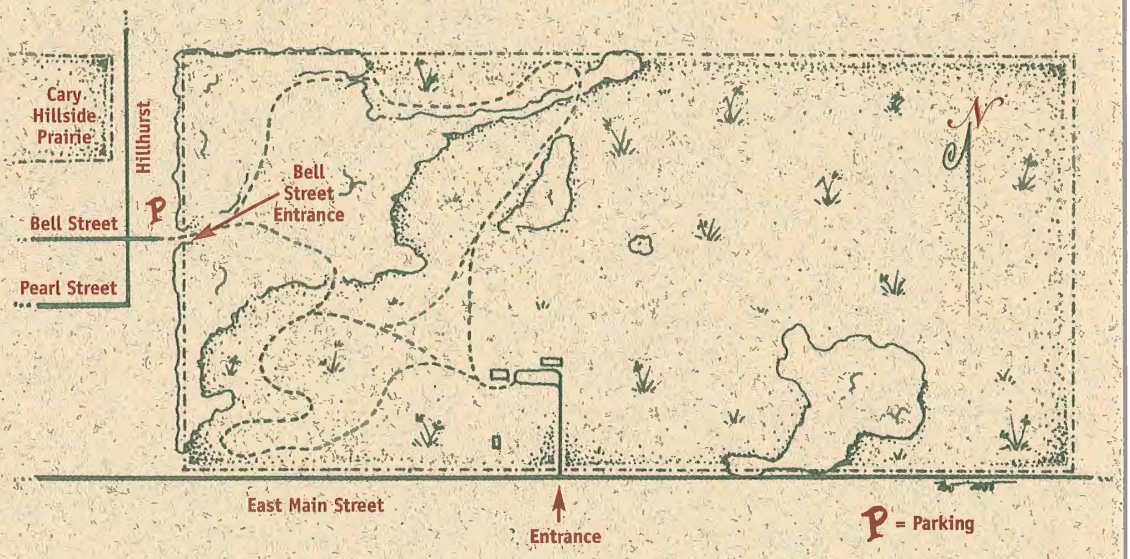
Prairiefest 2000, hosted by Cary Grove Historical Society and Cary Park District, will take place on-site, Sunday, Sept. 24 from 12:30 to 4:00 p.m. Guided nature hikes, hayrides, music, craft demonstrations, old fashioned children's games, a pie-eating contest and auction are among the highlights of the day. For more information about this event, please call (847) 639-6100.

Workday Schedule: Sat., Oct. 21, 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. Bring a sack lunch and dress appropriately (long pants, long sleeves, comfortable boots and a pair of work gloves).

– April Anderson

Directions

From I-90, take Rte. 53 north to Rte. 14 west. Follow Rte. 14 to Cary and turn right on Main Street. Sands Main Street Prairie is a few miles down on the left (before Hewbold Drive).



DIRECTIONS

Take I-94 north. The entrance to Half Day is near Vernon Hills on Rte. 21 (Milwaukee Ave.), two miles south of Rte. 60. The entrance to Wright Woods is near Lincolnshire on St. Mary's Rd., 1 1/2 miles south of Rte. 60.

With prairies and savannas to the west and deep woods to the east, Half Day and Wright Woods Forest Preserves provide a clear window to the past, when raging wildfires pushed by westerly winds were stopped by the Des Plaines River. Visitors to Half Day can see the muted autumn colors of prairie flowers and oak trees, while at Wright Woods people are more likely to see the fiery autumn reds and yellows of sugar maples in full glory.

To the west of the Des Plaines River, tall grasses of restored prairie and savanna testify to the frequent fires that historically swept eastward across Lake County. Rich oak and maple woodlands dominate the land east of the river, the plush branches of red and white oak, sugar maple, and ironwood trees hovering over Wright Woods' looping trails. Purchased in the early 1960s, this parcel was among the first of Lake County's forest preserves. The land to the east of the river is named after Captain Daniel Wright, one of Lake County's first settlers. The land west of the river was uncultivated farmland up until the late 1980s. It is named for Chief Half Day of the Potawatomi Indians.

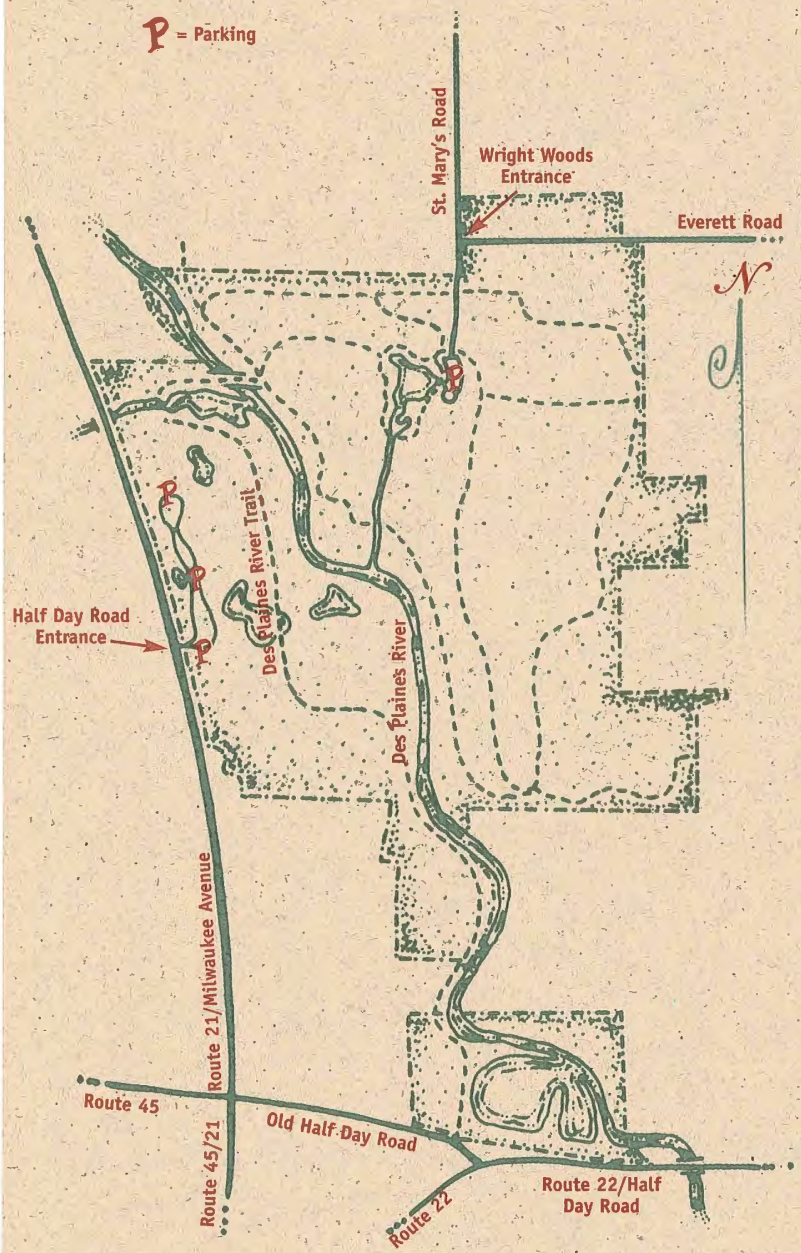
Together, the two preserves encompass more than 500 acres, providing a natural habitat for 135 native plant species. Among the many plants common to this area are wild bergamot, large trillium, bloodroot, and wild geranium. The preserve has also seeded the restored prairies with native grasses like bluestem, cord grass, and yellow coneflower.

The riverbank provides a corridor for migrating birds, making it a prime site to see fall warblers as they head south. Redheaded woodpeckers and bluebirds are seen in the open woods; bobolinks and eastern meadowlarks are seen in the grasslands. The flatwoods provide an excellent habitat for amphibian reproduction and a variety of butterflies.

Thirteen miles of the Des Plaines River Trail (DPRT) run through these two preserves, providing ample opportunity for a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders, and skiers share the wide gravel trail as it winds its way down through the 201 acres of Half Day preserve. Other trails branch off of the DPRT and Wright Woods provides four more miles of looped trails open to hikers, bikers, skiers, and horses. Each preserve contains a three-acre pond stocked with bluegill, largemouth bass, and channel catfish (state fishing regulations apply).

Next volunteer restoration workday is scheduled for Saturday, November 4 at 2:00 p.m.

– Cassandra Profita



Historically, Hickory Creek has been recognized as the gem of the Des Plaines River system. Scientists have studied the creek for more than 100 years. The late University of Chicago ecologist Victor Shelford formulated an essential theory of stream succession based on observations made at Hickory Creek in the early 1900s. "Hickory Creek has attained the status of a classic biological study area," wrote University of Illinois professor David Bardack in a 1982 letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Hickory Creek flows southwestward for approximately 21 miles, feeding into the Des Plaines River at Joliet. It runs through Higinbotham Woods, Pilcher Park, and the beautiful 1800-acre Hickory Creek Preserve. There are a number of trails that lead to the creek within the preserve. A nice one is found to the left behind the Frankfort township public pool, located on U.S. 30. Go for the creek, stay for the preserve with multiple nice picnic areas, and miles of paved trails, open to hiking, biking, in-line skating, and skiing.

The Hickory Creek Preserve offers access to a total of 22.8 miles of trail, including the 19.9 mile Old Plank Road trail that runs from Park Forest to Joliet. Pilcher Park provides numerous hiking trails and an outdoor education center with large aquariums and a turtle pond. Day trips to the Frankfort area are perfect for those seeking alternatives to chain restaurant fare, as the area is home to multiple shops featuring traditional American food and handmade ice cream.

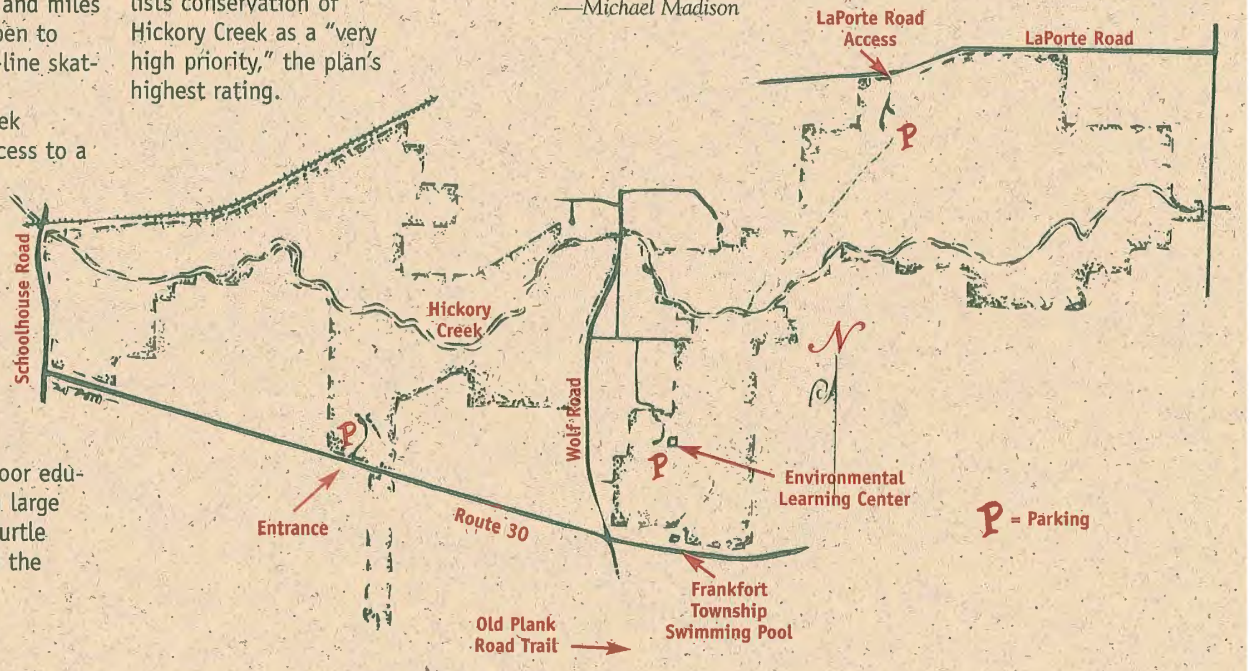
Of the 64 species of fish cataloged in the Des Plaines River drainage, a full 57 have been recorded at Hickory Creek. Species of note include the Northern hogsucker, mottled sculpin, smallmouth bass, 10 species of darter, and the state-endangered slippershell mussel. The blacknose shiner, also on the Illinois list of rare or endangered species, was found in Hickory Creek by Loren Woods of the Field Museum in 1955, but has not appeared on species lists since, and is assumed to have disappeared from the Des Plaines watershed. According to James Bland, director of Integrated Lakes Management and an authority on Hickory Creek, the Creek also provides habitat for many invertebrate species not found elsewhere in the region. The 1999 Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan lists conservation of Hickory Creek as a "very high priority," the plan's highest rating.

Sadly, Hickory Creek has paid a high price for its region's development. As swamps and marshes have given way to parking lots, paved roads, and buildings, the flow level and flood rhythms of the creek have been disrupted. Moreover, as low points in the landscape, waterways are susceptible to environmental disturbances across the entire watershed. A one-time spill of gas or any hazardous material anywhere in the area can have catastrophic consequences for a creek. While the precise causes of Hickory Creek's environmental degradation are complex and unclear as of yet, the Illinois Biological Stream Characterization Work Group recently placed Hickory Creek in the middling "C" class due to a decline in the variety of species found there. Today, Hickory Creek's historical significance and the continued presence of the slippershell mussel remind us that this stream is worth appreciating and worth restoring to good health.

—Michael Madison

Directions

Take I-94 to I-57, south to Rte. 30. Go west 7.5 miles to the Frankfort township public pool, where you'll find parking. Other Hickory Creek access points include Hickory Creek Junction, about a mile past the pool on Rte. 30, and the LaPorte Road Access. For LaPorte Road Access take Rte. 30 a block past the pool to Wolf Road. Make a right on Wolf and the first stoplight will be LaPorte Road. Take a right on LaPorte, and the access will be on your right after a minute or two.



Directions

From I-90 (the Skyway) take U.S. 12/20. Go east on 12/20 until Lake Street (you'll see a McDonald's). Go north (left) about a half mile on Lake and park at the Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education. There are picnic benches and tables near the trailhead behind the Center.

Adjacent to Gary, Indiana's giant U.S. Steel complex lies a testament to the beauty and resiliency of nature in the Chicago area—the Miller Woods, a 75-acre site within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, comprised primarily of oak savanna. Beautiful black oaks preside over the woods, standing on ridges that separate numerous wetland ponds. In addition to the shadow-casting oaks, at least 287 species of flora and fauna have been identified at Miller Woods, including the Karner blue butterfly, listed as a federally endangered species in December 1992.

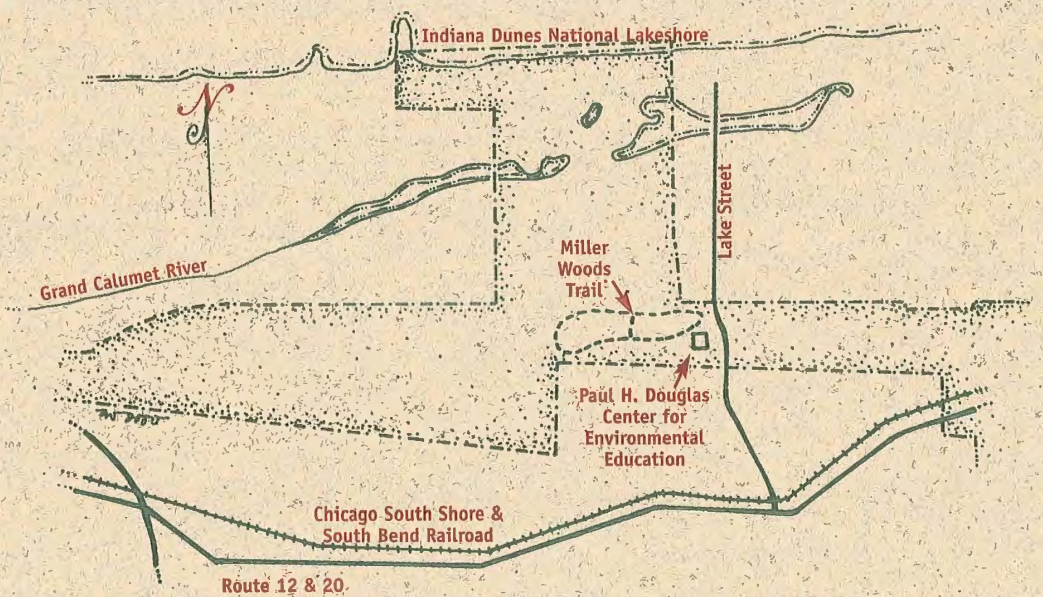
The mile-long Miller Woods Trail is ideal for either hiking or, when snow is ample, cross-country skiing. About one-third of the way along the trail's loop, hikers and skiers will come upon a marsh overlook boardwalk that allows for close examination of the teeming wetland at the woods' center. Those visitors who are both patient and lucky may spot a rare blue spotted salamander or western chorus frog. Fall visitors to the Miller Woods will see bracken ferns turning gold with the coming of autumn, asters, goldenrod, fringed gentian, sunflowers, grapevines, and Virginia creeper.

Aside from being a place of great natural beauty and ecological diversity, the Miller Woods is also site of one of the more ambitious reclamation endeavors in the Chicago region. Its proximity to industry and resident train tracks made the Woods an attractive place for junk dumpers in the middle 1900s. A year ago visitors would have seen old refrigerators and rusting automobiles among the oaks and ponds. On November 9, 1999, in an operation that had all the planning and orchestration of a military campaign (complete with photo ops for the press corps) and coordinated by the National Park Service, more than 14,000 pounds of refuse were airlifted from the site by helicopter.

For the historically minded, it is relevant to note here that pioneer ecologist Henry Cowles made the Miller Woods his living laboratory almost 100 years ago. At this site and surrounding areas–where distinct stages of plant succession can be observed together with tremendous species diversity–Cowles made important observations that helped lay the foundation for modern ecological science.

Whether you're a family hiker or ecological historian, the Miller Woods is well worth a day trip. Get there in the morning and take plenty of time to explore the magnificent lakeshore dunes close by. Climbing dunes are located at West Beach near Miller Woods and at Mt. Baldy at the Lakeshore's northeast end, about 16 miles up US 12. There are more than 15,000 protected acres in the Indiana Dunes area.

– Michael Madison



This tranquil, oak-hickory forest of nearly 900 acres is a gem among nature preserves. Rustic, gravel trails encircle an expansive interior full of myriad wildlife. The absence of bicycles, pets, and large groups of visitors make Thorn Creek's 2.5 miles of trail ideal for hikers, bird watchers, photographers, and naturalists. Autumn colors ranging from bronzy purples to vibrant oranges to rosy reds illustrate the rich variety of growth in the woodlands.

The terrain of the preserve rises from the creek valley to the upland forest of oak and shagbark hickory, with winding ravines that drain spring rains into Thorn Creek. Steep ravines create lookouts over the sugar maple, elm, and black walnut trees rooted in the floodplain. A shallow pan-like depression in the upland forest has allowed a wide array of vegetation to grow in marshy areas. Among the 330 different plant species at Thorn Creek are a variety of shrubs including sumac, maple-leafed viburnum, witch hazel, nannyberry, and blue beech. False indigo, milkweed, and wild bergamot are among the long list of species of the forest floor.

As the serene trails of Thorn Creek ascend into the woodlands, the plush undergrowth of herbaceous plants thins abruptly, revealing the boundaries of last year's unexpected wildfire. (This year a major project will be repairing the boardwalk damaged by that fire.) Visitors can observe a new generation of tree growth sprouting up from the ashes.

Hawthorn trees, for which the site was named, line the forefront of the woods. Also found at Thorn Creek are white ash, basswood and swamp white oak. Wood thrushes, which are sparse in the Chicago region, are interspersed throughout this area. An offshoot of the woodland trail offers a dramatic change in scenery, as red and white oaks give way to jack, Austrian, and white pine trees that guide the trail out to Owl Lake, at the far east end of the preserve. Here live spotted and blue-spotted salamanders, central newts, green, bull leopard, chorus and tree frogs, and American toads.

American goldfinch, chickadee, the white-breasted nuthatch, and the tufted titmouse are just a few of the many birds seen and heard throughout Thorn Creek. Great horned and screech owls, as well as turkey vultures, Cooper's hawks, and red-tailed hawks also nest in the woods. A small heron rookery is found there.

Several small prairies adorn the outskirts of the preserve. The Thorn Creek Nature Center, housed in a 120-year old church, is equipped with a bird-watching window, a children's area, and many educational displays. Naturalists lead regular night hikes during the fall and Woodsfest, an annual celebration, takes place on Oct. 29 from 1:00-4:00 p.m. For further information and a list of programs, call the nature center at (708)747-6320, open 12:00-4:00 p.m., Thursday-Saturday. The preserve is open year round from 8:00 a.m. until dark.

Events and Workdays:

Fall Trail and Nature Center Work Day, Sun., Oct. 8, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

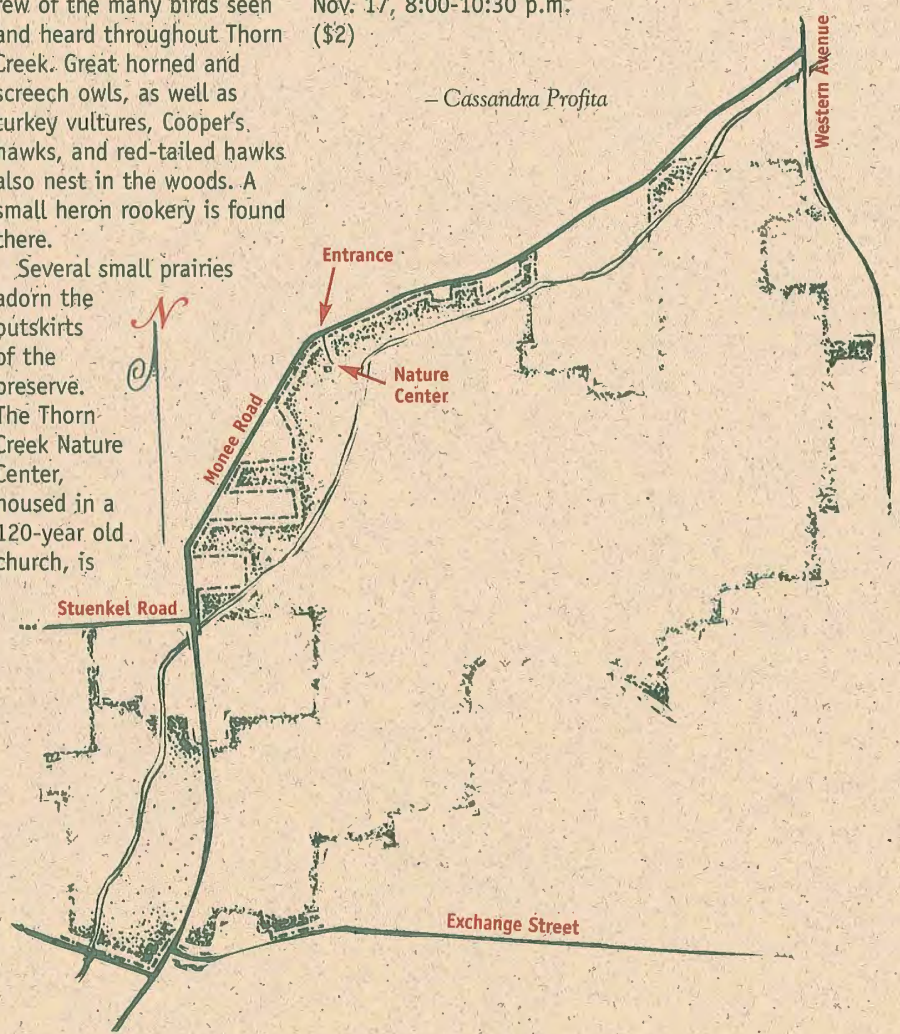
Walk the Woods Walkathon, Sat. and Sun., Oct. 28-29, 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Fall Astronomy Night, Fri., Nov. 17, 8:00-10:30 p.m. ($2)

– Cassandra Profita

Directions

Take I-57 to Sauk Trail. Take Sauk Trail east to Rte. 50 and turn right. Take a left onto Stuenkel Road and when it comes to a T with Monee Rd, take another left. The Thorn Creek sign and nature center will be on the right.



Natural Events CALENDAR

Here's what's debuting on nature's stage in Chicago Wilderness by Jack MacRae

FALL 2000

September – October

No Flight Delays

The marshes in the region are as bustling as a suburban Metra station at rush hour. Thousands of water birds are arriving and departing daily. Some of the departees, such as the blue winged teal, have been here all summer raising their families. Other ducks, such as the northern shovelers and pintails, are merely here for a short layover on their flight south. Get out to your local wetland in the early morning or at dusk to watch the air traffic. Do it soon, most birds will have left by mid-November. Last year at Springbrook Prairie in DuPage County, one of the fine birders in the area told me how to recognize far-off, fast-moving flocks of blue winged teal by their tight, compact flocks. Thanks Joe! And to any politicians who might be reading this publication, I vote and I'm pro-wetland!

Note of Caution

Note: Watch for wasp nests, especially in the fall. Last year a large group of 4th grade students trampled a nest of yellow jackets while collecting Joe Pye seeds. Over a dozen children were stung and it was an unhappy situation for everyone involved, although the sight of well-groomed newscasters bumbling though the woods in search of The Big Story was enjoyable. The students were part of a field trip that examined the value of biodiversity. The good news is that their teacher has signed up for the same program this year. Bless her!

October – November

Smashingly Handsome Pumpkins

People have been growing pumpkins in the gardens of Chicago Wilderness for thousands of years. Called *ogwissimaun* in the Algonquin language, pumpkins were baked, made into soup, or dried for long-term storage. Originally a wild perennial of the squash family and native to climates slightly warmer than ours, pumpkins and other gourds have been cultivated into hundreds of varieties over the centuries.

Rodent Insulation

Our aquatic mammals are bulking up for the winter. Beaver, muskrats, and otter are eating more than ever to create a nice, warm layer of fat to help keep them warm. They're also adding a few million new hairs to their oily coats as further protection against their ice-water winter homes. The French traders of the 17th century said the early winter pelts had the most value due to the density of the fur.

Two Toads

There are only two species of toads in our area, both getting ready to dig in for the winter. The uncommon Fowler's toad will go underground first; the ultra-common American toad will be out a while longer, seemingly able to tolerate cooler temperatures. Superficially similar, their distribution shows they're not. American toads are habitat generalists and found throughout the region. Fowler's are specialists, limited to areas with the proper soil type and temperature. They are found in the Indiana Dunes and the sandy areas adjacent to the Kankakee River.

November – December

Hearing Aids

I knew a kid in junior high who had one ear lower than the other. Did you know that asymmetrical ear openings are actually the rule in owls? Scientists believe this adaptation permits these birds to simultaneously locate sounds on the vertical plane (up and down) as well as the horizontal plane (right and left). This would be important for nocturnal hunters who rely heavily on sound to locate their prey.

November is a great time for owl aficionados. Our resident screech owls and great horned owls are house hunting and making a general commotion, while northern species such as snowy, long-eared, and short-eared owls are entering our area as well.

One northern forest species of owl making the trip south is the diminutive saw-whet owl. This bird may be more common in our area than Christmas Bird Counts indicate. Thousands of northern saw-whets use the long western shore of Lake Michigan as a navigational aid. But once they find a place to roost for the winter, they are highly inconspicuous. They don't call or flush easily from their secretive hideouts amongst the dense conifer branches. They just sit there, un-noticed and un-counted.

Invasion of the Cone Eaters

Every year, around the time of the winter solstice, a few white-winged crossbills enter our area. With their specialized beaks, they're able to manipulate their tongues in a way to extract the high calorie seeds from between the scales of pine cones. They need to eat a lot to keep their bodies warm. Crossbills are one of a group of northern finches who make the upper Midwest their winter home. Pine grosbeaks, pine siskins, and redpolls will all be hanging out in various parks and neighborhoods. Finch fest.

Illustration of scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*) by Paul Landacre from *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America.*

Hazel: the nuttier the better

Finding hazel today is a challenge, though the American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*) was the single most prominent shrub in the region before European settlement according to Marlin Bowles, plant conservation ecologist at the Morton Arboretum. This region's natural open savannas, nourished in the past by frequent fires lit by local natives, provided an ideal habitat for hazel, which requires a lot of light to thrive. The fire suppression that accompanied European settlement, by encouraging overgrowth by brush, has fundamentally altered the composition of open-canopied savanna throughout the Midwest, and the American hazelnut has lost its sweet Chicago home.

Hazel shrubs are leafy, small-branched plants that grow approximately three to five feet tall in open-canopied environments. Hazel flowers early, showing golden blossoms in late March. In addition to reproducing through their nutrient-rich nuts–highly sought commodities in the world of woodland squirrels and blue jays–the American hazelnut spreads by root sprouts. Reproduction through root sprouts ensures that healthy hazels are generally found in colonies, rarely as single bushes standing alone. Sprouts fortunate enough to find themselves in an area receiving intense sun exposure can reach heights of up to ten feet. Excellent specimens of this size are quite rare today.

Hazel bushes thrive in open environments because of increased light exposure, but they generally do not establish themselves in prairies because of competition from the grasses. Hazels will thrive principally on forest borders and in savanna environments, of which the vast majority have disappeared from our region.

Recently, hazel has become the focus of interest of many area botanists and restorationists, who strive to revive the ecological diversity that once characterized the Chicago area. In their efforts to nurse our natural areas back to health, restorationists must rely on early descriptions of the region to decide which seeds to plant at restoration sites. Descriptions from the first Chicago area Public Land Survey, conducted in the early 1800s by the United States government, show that hazel was the most abundant shrub here. So the American hazelnut, overlooked and abused for more than a century, but duly noted in early documentary literature, has begun a comeback of sorts. Hazel restorations have been underway since the early '90s at Fermilab, the Morton Arboretum, and Hickory Creek Barrens among other sites. The news is good. Hazel has, as predicted, established a foothold under savanna canopies around the region.

Photo: Kitty Kohout/Root Resources

Even successful restorations have been hard fought. Newly planted hazelnuts are magnets for hungry woodland mammals, and many are devoured before they can grow. Indeed, it is difficult even to find nuts to plant, so thorough are animals in their collecting practices. Another obstacle is that fires kill hazel seedlings, but are necessary for the maintenance of the open-canopy habitat that is certainly essential. As a result of this fragility, restorationists must delay burns of areas where hazel has been introduced until the shrubs have reached a maturity that allows for regeneration after fire.

Hazel, not surprisingly in face of its ubiquity, has a place in American folklore. *Folklore of Trees and Shrubs* by Laura C. Martin reports that both Europeans and Native Americans believed that hairs from the twigs of the species were "thought to expel worms." Various Native American tribes used hazel in medicines. Hazel bark was used both in brewing tea to treat hives and fevers, and as an ingredient in a poultice for cuts and sores.

Will American hazelnut shrubs become abundant in the region once again? Most likely, not anytime soon. However, hazel's darkest day is almost certainly behind us. As open savanna restoration projects grow more and more established with every passing year, the prospects for the long overdue return of one of this region's rightful inheritors grows stronger.

For more information on the American hazelnut, see Marlin Bowles' and Michael Spravka's "American Hazelnut: An Overlooked Shrub in Northeastern Illinois" in the Autumn 1994 issue of *The Morton Arboretum Quarterly*.

– Michael Madison

Kirtland's Snake: seldom seen

Residents of the Chicago Region are fortunate that some rare biological "treasures" have managed to survive in the suburbs better than they have in the intensive agricultural desert outside the metropolitan area. Among the rarest animals in the Midwest is a small reptile called Kirtland's snake (*Clonophis kirtlandii*).

Photo: Michael Redmer

Kirtland's snake individuals usually are less than 18 inches long. They sport a reddish to purplish body covered with a black "checkerboard" pattern, and a salmon-red belly bordered by black spots. The head is mostly black with a white upper lip.

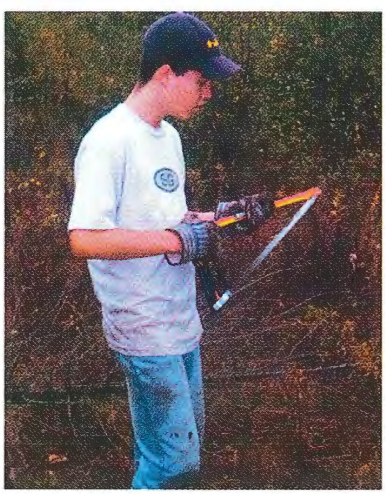
Kirtland's snake is member of the widespread and successful group known as "natracine" snakes. Besides the Kirtland's snake, this group includes garter snakes, water snakes, and the midland brown or "DeKay's" snake. Most of these species spend a great deal of their time in or near moist or aquatic habitats, where they feed variously on fish, frogs, worms, or crayfish. Throughout its range, Kirtland's snake has been spotted at a variety of moist terrestrial habitats where large populations of burrowing crayfishes occur. The Kirtland's is highly fossorial (meaning it spends most of its time underground), and frequents the crayfish burrows year-round, making it among the most specialized of North American snakes (see Summer '00, p. 25). Indeed, Kirtland's snakes are so rarely found above ground that even at known localities it is difficult to predictably and repeatedly find them. In the Chicago region, there is little quantified information on their habitat, though most reports have been from moist prairies ranging from open to shrubby. Other local records include vacant lots, some of which have remnant populations of prairie plants. In these habitats, individuals usually are found under boards or other man-made debris. Like other local natracine snakes, Kirtland's snake bears its young alive instead of laying eggs.

There are scattered records of Kirtland's snake from several of the counties included in the Chicago Wilderness region, with a notable exception being southeast Wisconsin. Kirtland's snake is a species of conservation concern throughout its entire range, and has been considered a candidate for listing as a federally threatened species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Locally, this interesting little snake is now listed as threatened by the state of Illinois and endangered by the states of Indiana and Michigan. Several of the best-known Chicago-region localities are on private land threatened with development. Local efforts to conserve Kirtland's snake will require additional information on the snake's localities, as well as attempts to acquire and preserve those sites not already held by conservation organizations. If you are lucky enough to find one of these snakes, report it immediately to your county or state conservation agency so that their biologists can help you document the location.

– Michael Redmer

Photo: Michael Redmer

Charlie Tucker: brush pile badger



On several chilly fall weekends in 1999, while other teenagers were sleeping late, Charles Tucker was piling on lots of layers of clothing and putting on sturdy shoes and work gloves. He was headed from his home in Wheaton to Mayslake Forest Preserve in Oak Brook to work on a prairie restoration project in order to qualify to become an Eagle Scout.

Tucker, who was 14 at the time, isn't the first teen to venture out to Mayslake, but the others had a different goal: ghostbusting. In 1919 the property was purchased by a wealthy coal magnate, Francis Peabody. He built a 39-room mansion there and called the estate Mayslake in honor of his wife and daughter who both bore the name. Peabody died suddenly in 1922 and the property was eventually sold to Franciscan monks. A legend grew up that Peabody's ghost still haunted his former estate. "I can't tell you how many volunteers at the site have told me that they snuck in here when they were 16 or 17 because they had heard that the body of Peabody was floating in a glass casket on the

Prickly ash, or "toothache tree," is our only native member of the citrus family. Its little aromatic fruits numb the mouth. Today this spiny tree is often plentiful in woods that were once used for pasture.

pond," says preserve steward Conrad Fialkowski. "But the trick was that you had to get past four seven-foot tall monks that guarded the coffin."

The previous summer, Tucker fell in love with the prairie when Fialkowski took him on a walk through Mayslake. "I saw the pretty flowers in all different colors," recalls Tucker, "and the little bugs on the underside of their leaves and the butterflies, and I knew that I wanted to allow the prairie to expand so that other people could see how it used to be."

Forget the ghosts. Tucker now would tackle another kind of villain. When the monks stopped planting corn, buckthorn moved in.

Tucker was undaunted by the task even though some of the buckthorns had trunks that were 10–12 inches in diameter. But Tucker wasn't alone in seeking to eliminate the enemy. Scout requirements meant that he had to organize a team of people who would spend 100 hours working on the project. Tucker himself was only allowed to do 25 hours of the work.

He recruited family and friends, including a lot of Scouts. As a result, about one-half an acre of land was cleared so that native seeds could be planted. "I learned that some nature has to be sacrificed to allow other plants to grow," says Tucker. "It's pretty hard to cut down a lot of trees just so that some little plants can grow, but it's worth it." In a ceremony on Memorial Day weekend, Tucker was named an Eagle Scout.

– Nancy Maes

Margaret Murley: inspirer of wonder

Photo: Courtesy of North Park Village Nature Center, City of Chicago

If you've been lucky enough to go on a bird walk with Margaret Murley, you probably did a lot more than just stare up at the trees. Maybe you learned to identify a bumblebee by its markings, or a plant by its seeds. Or perhaps you dug up a chunk of earth to see how many different plants and animals live together in a single small space. Murley's workshops and field trips are legendary.

"When she leads a trip, she points out something about everything," says Alan Anderson, a former president of the Chicago Audubon Society. "Margaret has had an impact on so many different people. She has really expanded our horizons." Murley, a retired Northwestern University botany professor, stepped down as president of the Illinois Audubon Society's Ft. Dearborn Chapter.

Under her 20-year leadership, the chapter established a butterfly garden at the North Park Village Nature Center on Chicago's North Side, contributed shrubs to the Magic Hedge at Montrose Point, and labeled trees and shrubs at the Paul Douglas Sanctuary in Chicago's Jackson Park. The chapter also started annual butterfly and dragonfly counts at the North Park Village Nature Center, and a bird count–now in its 23rd year–at the Lincoln Park Zoo.

"Margaret is an amazing person," says Wayne Svoboda, a professor at Northeastern Illinois University. "Most birding groups are single-minded: it's all birding and nothing else." But with Murley, that just isn't possible. "As the guiding spirit of Ft. Dearborn for so many years, Margaret exposed members to many other parts of natural history," Svoboda explains.

For years Murley typed a lengthy newsletter listing plants and animals seen on chapter outings. Nowadays, a hip ailment prevents her from going on long walks now, but it doesn't keep her from staying abreast of scientific news and regularly corresponding with researchers. (She recently moved to a nursing home in Iowa.) Her latest passion is for the plight of pollinators that make plant growth possible–especially, the oft-overlooked bumblebee. Her message is simple. "Don't step on them!" she says. "They are very important pollinators, and I want to make people aware of them."

Margaret Reba Murley grew up on a farm in Iowa and began her career as a 7th-grade teacher in Iowa. She later earned a Ph.D. in botany at Northwestern University, specializing in seeds and their use for plant identification. When she lived in Evanston, she grew more than 50 species of native plants in her little garden, a small strip along the alley behind her apartment building, and donated their seeds to local restoration projects.

In 1994, the Chicago Audubon Society named Murley "Protector of the Environment"; in 1998, they gave her a Silver Anniversary Honor; and in the fall of 1999, two red oak trees were planted in Murley's name at Montrose Point. But of all the rewards she has received, one stands out clearly. In a letter printed by *The Des Moines Register* in 1996, a former student wrote: "On her own time, she took us on numerous field trips. On frosty winter nights, she led us to a golf course to gaze at the beauty of the heavens. Because of her, I still wonder at the marvels of nature: the jeweled colors of a dragonfly, the silken-winged seeds of a milkweed, the whistle of a cardinal."

– Carolyn Arden Malkin

A ROOKERY REBOUNDS

by Gail Goldberger

The great blue herons started landing in late February, swooping into the highest levels of the almost completed rookery. As pairs passed twigs back and forth in an elaborate mating ritual, workers feverishly erected the final structures designed for this year's throng of migrating wading birds. Throughout February and early March, they labored in shifts, men by day, birds by twilight.

On a raw, cold March morning, volunteers lined up to help staff from the Forest Preserve District of Cook County finish construction. Armed with evergreens and logs for ground cover, and bracket mountings for carved-out Christmas trees, they completed the project. And what a project it is!

Stop at the gravel driveway on the north end of Baker's Lake in northwest Cook County and you will see an incongruous configuration rising out of the lake, a towering manmade aerie of nests, poles, beams, wings, beaks, and fuzzy heads. You will be looking at perhaps the most comprehensive heronry reconstruction ever.

The restored rookery holds 315 nesting pairs of birds, up from 200 last year, including eight black-crowned night heron pairs. With an average of two juveniles per nest (one for the night herons), there are a total of 1,300 birds on the island. By anyone's count, a success story.

More than 20 years of care have been poured into Baker's Lake, and the list of those responsible is as jam-packed as the rookery. Success is a testament to what happens when natural resource agencies and concerned and supportive citizens work together for wildlife.

The story began in the early 70s, when the Forest Preserve District of Cook County bought the lake, island, and buffer zone. Staff of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board conducted first surveys in 1978-79. Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation staff secured grants from Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board in early 1980s to conduct more extensive surveys. In 1984, the lake and surrounding area were dedicated as a state nature preserve because the heron colony supported a nesting population of the state endangered black-crowned night heron.

Photo: Robert Sliwinski

Telephone poles, Christmas trees, and 1,300 birds at Baker's Lake.

The first artificial nesting structures on the island were designed by Max McGraw staff and were erected with the help of staff of the Forest Preserve District in March 1986. From 1986-1990, the black-crowned night herons occupied the highest, best nests, and their numbers routinely exceeded 200 pairs. Other larger birds–great egrets, great

The black maple of our prairie groves looks much like sugar maple, the commoner tree today. The black maple has droopy, hairy leaves and is said to have produced better maple syrup.

Photo: Joe Milosevich

Black-crowned night heron.

blue herons, double crested cormorants–discovered the island and took over the higher spots, forcing the smaller heron to lower, less desirable nests. Nest count for the smaller black-crowns plummeted from 220 to 11. Last year, counters weren't sure there was even one black-crowned nest left on the island.

Over time, the acidity of fecal droppings on rookeries depletes vegetation. Put bluntly, bird poop kills the trees the birds require for their nests. Where suitable, isolated nesting locations exist, birds move to new areas to nest and breed, often returning to the original rookery once it has restored itself. Not surprisingly, these birds are sensitive to human disturbance and typically colonize isolated locations (such as islands) that are also secure from predation. In the Barrington area, however, despite plentiful marshes for feeding, the only protected spot the herons had for nesting is this one little island, 150 feet long and 50 feet wide.

The first artificial structures proved successful, and the birds readily used them. Year after year, blue herons, egrets, night herons, and cormorants left the Gulf of Mexico and Florida, and returned to Baker's Lake. Their attachment to this island is profound and demonstrates their resiliency to changing conditions. The attachment goes both ways–Barrington residents and area naturalists also love and value these birds.

In recent years, as the island eroded to a sliver and the last tree blew over, a local conservation group–Citizens for Conservation (CFC)–played an important role, advocating for nesting structures. The prime mover and shaker, Patsy Mortimer, helped gather the relevant parties and kept them focused on the birds.

"There has rarely been an engineered solution to a habitat problem as extensive as this one," says Dave Kircher of the Cook County Forest Preserve District. He ought to know. The District paid $250,000 to restore the rookery. They hired Christopher B. Burke Engineering to design a nesting structure and Landscape Resources to install the structures.

"We looked at what worked in the past," said Robert Sliwinski, Senior Environmental Resource Specialist at Burke Engineering and project manager for the heronry reconstruction. "A lot of science went into this." They designed 25-foot tall nesting structures with longer, more angular arms–"watchtowers"–to more closely resemble the crooks of trees. They put a 10-foot fly zone between nests for the great blue's wing span, and widened their nests to five feet. They shortened the arms on lower-level structures for smaller birds. The final blueprint contained four levels of nests, with enough space in between to reduce the stress of congestion. Evergreens with carved-out nest bases were mounted on poles, as well as stockpiled on the ground to provide shelter for black-crowned night herons.

Six different structures comprised the new rookery: two modified from those used by Will County FPD's Lake Renwick heronry and four used by Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources. Pole mounts were set in cement for stability. Commonwealth Edison donated the 40 paired telephone poles, and Barrington's Citizens for Conservation donated 300 Christmas trees and the lumber and labor for nest structure building. "I held my breath until they started to land," said Sliwinski.

"From the District's standpoint, we poured a lot of money into something untried. We hoped we wouldn't see a drop in numbers," said Kircher. "We weren't even sure the birds would recognize the island, and thought the construction workers would scare them away."

Apprehensions notwithstanding, the birds returned, accommodated the workers, and survived a strenuous spring that included baseball-sized hail and 60 m.p.h. windstorms. (The great blues stretched out flat across the tops of their nests.)

With 1,300 birds and babies, life is zestful here. The noisy compacted throng attracts many onlookers, who themselves swarm to gaze at the crosshatching that supports 315 nesting pairs. Birders have been overheard saying, "We feel so fortunate to have something like this right here!"

Even this extensively researched project is a work in progress. Birds didn't go where anticipated. Egrets preferred lower-level structures and carved-out evergreens. Cormorants nested anywhere they could, cramming the crossbraces and junctures with twigs and grasses.

Black-crowned's went to the brush cover. Robert Sliwinski confirms eight nests with eight nesting pairs. Two sets of nests had three juveniles, and two more juveniles were sighted. He thinks there are probably more black-crown nesting sites that he couldn't see, buried inside the brush cover.

"Next year," said Steve Byers of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, "we'll pack in more evergreens to attract more black-crowneds. They prefer nesting in tight places that provide some protection from their larger neighbors. The Christmas trees provide that cover."

In late June, at the height of breeding season, CFC's Patsy Mortimer organized a celebration for all involved in this unusual project. As the western horizon turned a dusty orange, a tree on the east bank of the lake began to fill with black-crowned night herons. When the sun disappeared, they flew out across the lake to fish. As partygoers looked out from a deck with a view, the night herons flew overhead, sealing the night with a benediction of sorts, the bond between avians and humans secured.

PHIL PETERS
1939–2000

Phillip D. Peters, 61, executive director of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) from 1992 to 1998, and chair of the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council (Chicago Wilderness) in 1998, died April 18 at his home in Evanston.

"Long before the phrase Chicago Wilderness was coined, Phil recognized the richness of nature in the Chicago region and its contribution to the quality of life we enjoy here," said current Chicago Wilderness Chair John Rogner. "His efforts helped make NIPC a leader in the development of tools for sustaining nature through the development process. He did not hesitate when asked to step up and lead the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council, and I was in absolute awe of his continued focus and leadership even after falling ill. He was one of those remarkable people who could lead from behind. Phil was a true gentleman who was held in the highest regard by everyone on the Council."

Following his retirement, NIPC established the Phillip D. Peters Planning Fellowship to be awarded annually to a graduate student in regional planning or a related field.

Keith Sbiral, a graduate student in the Urban and Regional Planning Department of the University of Iowa in Iowa City, has been awarded the first fellowship and will work for three months as a member of a NIPC staff project team. In May, Sbiral was assigned to NIPC's Natural Resources Department and his projects include working on the Strategic Plan for Water Resource Management and providing assistance to the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership on environmentally sensitive planning techniques for local government officials.

JOHN HUSAR
1937–2000

John Husar, 63, longtime outdoor columnist and sportswriter for the *Chicago Tribune*, hunter, hiker, and champion of all things wild and wonderful, died on July 20 of liver disease. Husar was an environmentalist who happened to be a fine writer. He was an explorer who communicated the large and small joys of his discoveries. He was a visionary who understood the importance of our past, particularly our overlooked and forgotten local history. Husar called the Des Plaines River valley "Our Hidden Wilderness" and promoted the nation's first Heritage Corridor, the Illinois and Michigan Canal. He called the Chicago Portage National Historic Site "our sacred ground" and wrote some of his last published words about it.

"When I met John Husar, and later got to know him, it wasn't because I was out there with him angling for smallies or hiking through forest preserves," recalls Gary Mechanic of the Des Plaines River Alliance. "It was because he was an 'outdoor writer' who showed up inside rooms where the plans and decisions for our natural resources are made. He understood that our ecosystem includes politicians, bureaucrats, and taxpayers. He knew the natural world includes the best values and ignorance of the species at the top of the food chain. He understood that what happens in those rooms can make more of a difference than the weather in determining which of his beloved fish and birds flourish or vanish."

Some years ago Husar wrote a column praising the citizens volunteering to restore native prairies in this region. "And now and then," he wrote, "you'll [meet] a very high grade of human, some of the best you'll find in chance encounters. These are the self-appointed stewards of these special pockets of nature. . . . To them, stewardship is as legitimate an outdoor activity as fishing or hunting or hiking or biking, albeit much more vital."

FLOYD SWINK
1921–2000

Floyd Swink, 70, a genius at identifying plants and perhaps the foremost botanist and plant taxonomist in this region died on August 2 at his home in Wheaton (see Summer '99, pp. 25-7). Swink will be forever identified with the plants of the Chicago region. He made it his life's work to get to know them and to record their distribution, habitats, and plant associates–and to make that information public and accessible in four editions of *Plants of the Chicago Region*, considered one of the most comprehensive floras in existence. In it, Swink and junior author Gerould Wilhelm prepared a system of identification keys and devised a way to assess the quality of various natural communities. This work has aided immeasurably in the conservation of biodiversity in the region.

Swink was a man of ardent enthusiams: ice cream, speed typing, birds, plants. A dedicated teacher, he motivated his students with his mastery of many subjects while he delighted them with droll botanical puns. He was unfailingly generous with his time, always ready to answer "What is this plant?" or to explain how to tell the difficult woodland sunflowers apart.

From 1957 to 1960 he worked as a naturalist for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, then joined the Morton Arboretum as a teacher of botany and natural history. In 1963 he became the Arboretum's plant taxonomist and helped to identify more than half of the woody species on the Arboretum's 1,700 acres. Swink played a crucial role in helping to save some of the finest prairie remnants in the region, including Santa Fe Prairie in Hodgkins.

Swink is remembered by legions of nature lovers throughout Chicago Wilderness who had the good fortune to walk through the prairies or woods and listen to him reel off Latin names and tell sweet stories.

Floyd Swink personally identified 28,000 of the 40,000 woody plants on the grounds of the Morton Arboretum.

Forest, deer, and democracy

LINCOLNSHIRE REFERENDUM

by Steve Frankel

A confusingly worded referendum in a Lake County suburb means a big education job for conservationists there.

It all started when the Village of Lincolnshire acquired a 48-acre gem, a mix of ancient woodland, prairie and wetland. The land was rich, but needed brush control, weeding, fire, and other stewardship. The rare plants and animals responded gloriously, but a hunting ban soon reversed the process, as the rare plants and young trees began to vanish down the throats of white-tailed deer. When research confirmed that deer control was needed, an "animal rights" group mounted opposition. Their latest tactic is the referendum.

Florsheim Woods is home to a plant that is on the federal threatened list, the prairie white-fringed orchid, and many other rare species. But the individual species are less significant than the high-quality ecosystems that harbor them. Because of its quality the site was legally dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1996, giving it maximum protection under state law.

Photo: Susanne Masi

Florsheim Nature Preserve faces threats from invasive species and overabundant white-tailed deer.

Florsheim Nature Preserve contains two types of woods, a sedge meadow, and prairie. The upland woods contain a mix of white oak, red oak, and hickory, and the wetter areas feature swamp white oak. According to Village Trustee Ann Maine, also a lecturer in biology at Lake Forest College, "Everything currently in the preserve was there when we started our stewardship. We have done no planting–merely removed the invasive species that had prevented the natural community from flourishing."

Former Village Forester Sara Utter reported that deer hunting was allowed on property adjacent to the preserve until 1997. "When the hunting was banned," Utter explained, "there was a noticeable increase in the deer population in the preserve area." In the words of botanist Susanne Masi, contracted by the Village of Lincolnshire to study the vegetation, "We have observed deer browse on more than 40 species, including cardinal flower, turk's cap lily, turtlehead–even tall goldenrod, common buckthorn, and green ash."

In nearby Ryerson Woods, the Lake County Forest Preserves began the culling of deer by sharpshooters in 1995. Since then, the initially contentious issue has been widely discussed and a general consensus in support of the program has emerged in Lake County. "We had to get over this impression that every deer is Bambi's mother," says Della Hamburg, president of Lake County Audubon Society.

The wording of the advisory referendum, as drafted by the protest group, would replace lethal deer control with cages on the rare plants. That might sound practical to some people at first, but Steve Byers of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission says it misses the point: "Sure we could put cages over the orchids and maybe a few other species too. But the purpose of deer control is to protect the whole ecosystem, not just a few rare plants. Ultimately, balance is good for the deer, the trees, the butterflies, the whole ecosystem."

Lincolnshire resident Joan Palincsar puts it this way, "We're trying to get the word out so people will vote 'no' on that referendum. Then a smaller number of deer can eat healthy plants in a healthy ecosystem."

Photo: Steve Byers

Though surrounded by homes and athletic fields, the preserve is a last bastion for hundreds of species that need "good stewardship."

Photo: Steve Byers

A confusingly worded referendum–does it make sense to put the rare plants in cages while sacrificing the health of the larger woods?

1 GOOD BEETLES

Purple loosestrife populations are declining in two Lake County Forest Preserves, thanks to special leaf-eating beetles that were introduced to control the invasive weed. Recent monitoring at the Fox River and Grassy Lake Forest Preserves, both near Barrington, revealed that the biological control program using beetles had nearly eradicated the non-native plant.

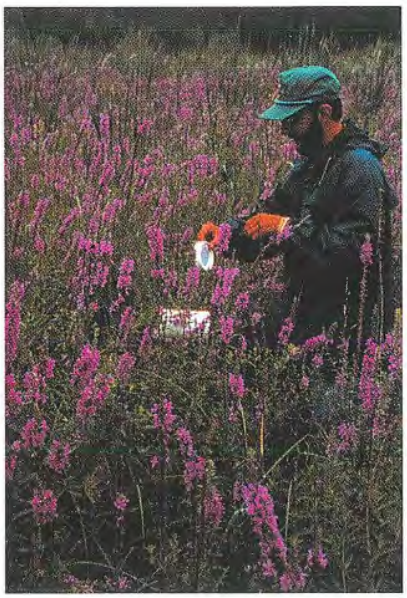


Photo: Lake County Forest Preserves

Through a partnership with the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Lake County Forest Preserves have introduced two European species of beetles to wetland areas in 12 forest preserves that were overrun with purple loosestrife, which displaces native plants and animals. Since 1994, more than 245,000 beetles have been released.

"This is a long-term control measure that will perhaps not entirely eliminate purple loosestrife, but it will reduce its cover and allow native plants and animals the ability to reclaim their former niches," said Ken Klick, restoration ecologist and project manager. "The beetles have been so successful at these sites, you can already see rare gentians, ladies' tresses, and other wetland plants take advantage of the new sunlight and freedom they're experiencing."

A perennial plant, purple loosestrife can grow as tall as eight feet, and individual plants can produce more than two million seeds the size of ground pepper each year. Purple loosestrife plants defy most control efforts, such as hand-pulling, burns or flooding. Herbicides can be used to treat small areas but are impractical in large areas, so the beetles are considered the best method to control large, heavily infested areas of purple loosestrife.

Educating the public about loosestrife and other exotic plants is also contributing to the program's success. Since 1998, students from 15 Lake County schools have assisted the Lake County Forest Preserves and local property owners in on-site rearing programs to help increase the population of beetles. Schools interested in more information about the program for beetles should contact the Illinois Natural History Survey's Beetle Hotline at (217) 333-1005.

2 ILLINOIS SPRAWL CONTROL?

In a meeting that was noteworthy for its public consensus on general growth principles, approximately 30 speakers addressed a Chicago-area public meeting on July 6. The meeting was convened by the Growth Task Force, which was recently established by the Illinois legislature. The task force is composed of six state senators, six state representatives, and 12 business and community leaders from across the state. Chaired by Sen. William Maitland, the group includes representatives from Chicago Wilderness organizations such as the Center for Neighborhood Technology, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, and the Openlands Project.

Common themes that emerged from the meeting were: consistent support for open space protection; watershed protection; agricultural preservation; maintenance of existing infrastructure; smart growth incentives; and, decreasing the state's subsidy of sprawl.

A critical factor to controlling sprawl is recognition of the state's role in encouraging it. According to the Illinois Department of Agriculture, 30 percent of farmland loss is directly attributable to state action, and a significant but unquantified amount of agricultural conversion is indirectly caused by state action. One example of the potential for a good state program to have unintended consequences in Illinois FIRST, a program whose principal purpose is to direct public infrastructure spending. If through this program existing state infrastructure is improved to accommodate future growth, open space can be preserved. But if Illinois FIRST is used to build roads, sewers, and schools in undeveloped areas, sprawl will be fueled and biodiversity further threatened.

The task force does not have a specific deadline or reporting requirement, though some members have expressed the wish to submit smart growth legislation as soon as February 2001. Comments to the Growth Task Force can be sent to Sen. William Maitland, 627 State House, Springfield, IL 62706.

–Stephen Perkins

3 SUSTAINABLE CALUMET

On June 2, Mayor Richard M. Daley and Illinois Governor George H. Ryan presented a joint proposal for the Calumet area. The proposal addresses the future needs of the ecology and industry in the 20-square mile region. "The Calumet area is unique in that it will be a region where passive open space and productive industry coexist," Mayor Daley said. "We know these uses are compatible, and with careful planning and management, we can bring back Calumet's natural beauty and indus-

The black willow can grow up to 90 feet tall. Native Americans used its bark as a cure for headaches; its active ingredient is today sold as aspirin.

trial strength."

Conservationists are hopeful about this plan as well. Chicago Wilderness Chair John Rogner states, "Nowhere has the old attitude of 'wetlands as wastelands' left a more prominent legacy than in the Calumet region of Illinois and Indiana. The challenge is enormous, but the energy and passion seem to be there," Rogner said.

The State of Illinois is committing more than $20 million to the Calumet area, and the city is committing $14 million. It is hoped these contributions will encourage additional resources from corporations and foundations. Mardi Klevs of the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) views the city and state commitment to the Calumet area as the right way to do economic development: holistically. "This plan uses natural resources as an anchor for development. For 20 years the environmental community has had a vision for the Calumet area that has now been adopted by government," she said. "That's really powerful."

The Calumet Area Land Use Plan includes creation of a Calumet Open Space Reserve that will preserve about 3,000 acres of wetlands, marshes, and streams. This collection of wetlands is home to abundant wildlife, including the black-crowned night heron and the yellow-headed blackbird, both on the Illinois endangered species list. The list of sites that environmentalists hope will be purchased, saved, and managed include Big Marsh, Indian Ridge Marsh north and south, Hyde Lake wetland, Hegewisch Marsh, Dead Stick Pond, Van Vlissingen Prairie, Burnham Prairie, and Heron Pond.

The public open space will be managed collectively to improve water quality, habitat, and recreational opportunities. Walter Marcisz, local Calumet bird conservationist, is pleased. "The proposal has potential to correct a lot of bad situations we have in Calumet area now," he said. "The wetlands are so fragmented by roads and other development that the hydrology is chaotic." For example, he noted, this year the black-crowned night heron nesting areas are being drowned out by water that is much too deep, but in some years the water drops to nothing. "The hydrology needs to be controlled and regulated."

The plans also call for building a new Calumet Area Environmental Center and an energy farm that would produce electricity from methane collected from landfills and solar panels. "The environmental center will provide wonderful educational opportunities for everyone in the area," noted Marion Byrnes, public affairs director for the Calumet Ecological Park Association. Byrnes added, "The city and state have been very receptive to community input."

Over the past year, the city and state have been meeting with local industrial, environmental, and neighborhood groups to help develop the Calumet Area Land Use Plan. The City has been working closely with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and suburban municipalities to enact the plan. The plan was funded through a grant from the US EPA, and is one of the largest study areas of its kind. Other partner agencies providing financial assistance for planning and development include the IDNR, IEPA, US Army Corps of Engineers, and the USDA Forest Service.

In the coming months, the mayor and the governor will be appointing an advisory committee of local government, business, and conservation group representatives to ensure that industrial development and retention, natural area conservation and environmental cleanup projects are implemented. A number of roundtable discussions began in August and will continue to meet throughout the fall. A great deal of research, discussion, and planning will be done before the end of the year. Chicago Audubon's Alan Anderson summed up the feeling, "It's been a long time . . . a couple of decades since Jim Landing founded the Lake Calumet Study Committee–but it looks like something good is finally coming!"

– Nicole Kamins and Alison Carney Brown

4 LAKE COUNTY REFERENDA

Lake County voters will have the chance to acquire and restore land, protect rare species, and create more trails and other outdoor recreation and education opportunities by voting YES for two referenda on the November 7 general election ballot.

The first bond referendum would provide $85 million for Forest Preserve land preservation, acquisition, and improvements. (Up to $70 million is allocated for land preservation and acquisition and up to $15 million is earmarked for trails, restoration, and public access improvements.)

The second referendum proposes a change in the District's corporate tax rate, which has not increased since August 1986, and would fund public safety, maintenance and operation of new Forest Preserve lands, trails and facilities. The Forest Preserve District has acquired more than 2,830 acres since1993 and several improvement and public access projects are already underway at these sites.

A recent countywide poll showed that Lake County residents overwhelmingly continue to enjoy and support their forest preserves. Most people agreed that the District should preserve more land, restore habitat for rare plants and animals, create more trails, and improve access to new and existing preserves. Respondents also were willing to pay to keep the current high standards of public safety, maintenance and operations in their Forest Preserves. "To balance rapid growth in Lake County, significantly more forest preserve land is required to accommodate need and demand," said Carol Calabresa, President of the Lake County Forest Preserves. "We only have a few years left to preserve our county's remaining open space as forest preserves, and the time to act is now."

This fall, the Lake County Forest Preserves will mail information about the November 7 referenda to registered voters. For additional information, Lake County voters can call (847) 367-6640 and ask for Andrew Kimmel or Susan Hawkins.

5 SKOKIE RIVER PARTNERSHIP

The Skokie River will benefit from restoration thanks to a partnership between the Park District of Highland Park (PDHP) and the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (LCSMC).

The Skokie River passes through significant public and private open space in Highland Park. The PDHP saw the array of landowners as an opportunity for collaborative restoration efforts and set about to develop a vision for the watershed. In January, the PDHP and LCSMC secured a Watershed Management Board Grant to launch the Skokie River Partnership and in July the partnership retained environmental consulting firm Hey and Associates. The partnership, still growing, also includes the East Skokie Drainage District, Bob-o-Link Golf Course, Old Elm Club, Birchwood Country Club, and the City of Highland Park.

This fall, the Skokie River Partnership will consider projects such as wetland restoration, pond improvements, and detention basin retrofits–all using native vegetation and sustainable practices. Recently, the PDHP has secured a grant to do streambank stabilization with native vegetation at the Sunset Valley Golf Course.

For more information on the Skokie River Partnership, please contact Natural Areas Supervisor Tim Girmscheid at the PDHP at (847) 681-2189 or pdhpplan@aol.com.

6 RECOVERY FELLOW

Dennis Dreher was recently awarded the first Chicago Wilderness Smith Family Fellowship for 2000-2001. The primary responsibility of the Smith Fellow is the implementation of programs and projects that enhance the conservation objectives of Chicago Wilderness as outlined in the Biodiversity Recovery Plan. As Smith Fellow, Dreher will work with local governments and government agencies to develop model programs that work to conserve and restore natural areas. He will also serve as a principal point of contact between Chicago Wilderness and other regional initiatives, such as the Campaign for Sensible Growth and the Metropolis 2020 project. The Fellowship is funded, in part, through a generous grant from the Hermon Dunlap and Ellen T. Smith Fund of the Chicago Community Trust.

"The Smith Fellowship is an excellent opportunity for Chicago Wilderness to have experienced natural resource professionals tackle the challenges of implementing the recovery plan," said Tim Sullivan, chair, Department of Conservation Biology at the Brookfield Zoo. "Having Dennis's services for a year will be a tremendous asset for Chicago Wilderness members and for local governments trying to work on biodiversity conservation,"

Dreher has a master's degree in environmental engineering with an emphasis on water resource management and aquatic ecology. He has worked for NIPC for over 20 years, providing assistance to local governments and development professionals on techniques and programs to improve land and water resource management in the region. Dreher also does volunteer stewardship work with the North Branch Restoration Project and the Friends of the Chicago River.

7 WHAT A RUSH

Last fall, as Leslie Borns walked along Montrose Beach in Chicago, she noticed some striking green stems, bright red at the base, emerging from the sand near shoreline. Borns, a volunteer for the Bird Conservation Network, knew that round, hollow stems are indicative of a rush, but it wasn't until the plants flowered this May that she identified it as lakeshore rush (*Juncus balticus*). It was the first time this plant had been found on Chicago's lakefront since 1946! The plants, similar to grasses and sedges, reach about two feet in height. Their chestnut brown flowers grow out of the side of the stems, about halfway up.

The lakeshore rush inhabits the shallow dune or "panne" region of a dune formation. One of the first plants to colonize a sandy area, it grows with other foredune plants, including sea-rocket (*Cakile edentula*), a Great Lakes coastal plant on the Illinois threatened list. Borns has counted

Photo: John Pursell

65 clumps of the rush thus far on Montrose Beach. The rushes bind sand, which forms ridges and swales and leads to further dune development.

According to the Lake Michigan Federation, the lakeshore rush appeared again in Chicago after more than 50 years due to a number of factors: (1) The Chicago Park District's (CPD) heightened awareness of the importance of natural habitats, and a practice of allowing areas of parkland to exist in a natural state; and (2) lake levels are at an historic low, creating wider beaches and the shallow dune habitat the lakeshore rush needs to thrive. The plant cannot survive in areas where it is submerged or flooded too often and requires a habitat that receives water periodically and drains quickly. Floyd Swink (see pp. 30), co-author of *Plants of the Chicago Region*, agreed that the rush's presence is probably temporary. Still, he said, "The lakeshore rush has been absent from the area for so long, it is an exciting find."

8 DES PLAINES COALITION

In February, volunteers founded the Des Plaines River Restoration Coalition (DRRC) in an effort to improve the natural areas adjacent to the river in the villages of Lyons, Riverside, and North Riverside. On their first workday (April 7), it snowed. Undaunted, more than 50 volunteers wielded loppers and hand saws to clear Tartarian honeysuckle, buckthorn, and vines visible above the snow, opening vistas to the river that hadn't been seen in years. Another group of 15 volunteers cleared out enough debris to fill six dump trucks.

This summer some 200 volunteers helped out. On May 6, they joined the Hoffman Dam River Rats for the spring Des Plaines River cleanup and collected about ten 55-gallon drums of garbage in addition to old pallets, tires, grocery carts, and a hot water heater.

Future DRRC events include: Sept. 30–vegetation management 9:00 a.m.–noon; Oct. 14–garbage clean up 9:00 a.m.–noon; and Oct. 28–vegetation management 9:00 a.m.–noon. For more information about the Des Plaines River Restoration Coalition, contact Cindy Gustafson, (708) 442-7782 or GustafsonC@pbworld.com.

9 WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS

The May 18 storm that brought prolonged power outages to the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago brought new light to forest floors when winds up to 84 m.p.h. downed hundreds of trees. *The Chicago Tribune* described the storm as a microburst–"jets of air that smash against the ground and spread outward as damaging straight-line winds." While the resulting damage seemed catastrophic, in the long run natural communities will adjust and adapt as they do in the wake of most natural events.

John Elliott, Director of the River Trail Nature Center (RTNC) in Northbrook, noted, "Storm damage, like fire, is the normal scheme of things. The downed trees have opened the canopy and let in a lot of light, which encourages plant growth and oak reproduction." A dramatic account of the storm, with photographs, is posted on the RTNC Web site at http://home.flash.net/~johnrtnc/storm.htm.

Reed-Turner Woodland Nature Preserve in the village of Long Grove was closed for more than five weeks; trails became unsafe when roughly 60 trees sustained damage from the May 18 storm. At the Chicago Botanic Garden's (CBG) McDonald Woods, more than 50 mature trees came down during the storm, most of them oaks. "It was the worst storm damage that I've seen in the 10 years I've been here, but it's part of the disturbance regime that has occurred in habitats throughout time," remarked CBG Ecologist Jim Steffen.

Photo: John Elliott, Forest Preserve District of Cook County

Owls can hunt in pitch black. They locate prey by sound, using their asymmetrically placed ears.

"With new openings in the canopy, the butterfly community will benefit," he added. "They like sunny areas for basking and the sunlight encourages the herbaceous growth that butterflies feed on."

– Alison Carney Brown

⑩ GRASSLAND BIRDS

While the decline of grassland birds is well documented, how to manage their prairie habitat to help reverse the birds' decline is the subject of important new research. Under the auspices of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Charles H. O'Leary and Dennis W. Nyberg have recently completed a study on land management for area-sensitive grassland birds. Their paper, "Treelines Between Fields Reduce the Density of Grassland Birds," was published in the July issue of *Natural Areas Journal*.

Conducted in five fields dominated by pasture grasses within Cook County's Poplar Creek Forest Preserve, the study evaluated grassland bird use among them. The area ranged from 2.2, to 16.3 hectares. All species with singing males in each of the fields were counted at least once a week from April 15 to July 15 between 5:30 and 10:30 a.m. in 1995 and 1996. The grassland species identified were: savannah sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, Henslow's sparrow, eastern meadowlark, bobolink, and sedge wren. Grassland bird usage within fields was evaluated by mapping their territory and nest locations. Usage patterns in relation to the field edge were also examined.

O'Leary and Nyberg note, "Within complexes of fields, our study documents that these birds chose larger fields over smaller ones. At Poplar Creek, each bird of the five area-sensitive species probably had knowledge of all five fields, but only the larger ones were chosen."

Observations such as these led O'Leary and Nyberg to make the following management recommendations for Poplar Creek: (1) reduce woody vegetation within fields, (2) reduce woody vegetation separating small fields from large fields, and (3) connect large fields to one another to reduce edge and increase nesting (interior) area.

These recommendations lend support to the green paper "Conserving Local Habitat for Declining Grassland Birds," published in April by the Chicago region's Bird Conservation Network (BCN). The paper, by Duane Heaton, builds the case for improving grassland bird habitat: "In grasslands, the impact of nest predation near woody edges has been shown to extend at least 50 yards into some habitat blocks (Johnson and Temple, 1990). It is not uncommon for more than 80 percent of nests (near edges) to fail to produce young birds (Herkert, et al., 1993)." The BCN paper also includes a 14-point management guideline for enhancing habitat for grassland birds and is available at the BCN Web site, www.iit.edu/~cos/BCN/gpgrassland.html.

⑪ NAMING TYNER

On March 7, the Glenview Village Board voted to name the 31-acre prairie at the redeveloped Glenview Naval Air Station "Air Station Prairie" in recognition of the role played by the Navy in inadvertently protecting it. The Board also recognized the work of Glenview resident Evelyn Pease Tyner by naming Air Station Prairie's future interpretive center after her.

Through her photography and environmental advocacy, Tyner was instrumental in protecting The Grove National Historic Landmark and the James Woodsworth Prairie Preserve in Glenview. Tyner is a former professor at Harold Washington College with a Ph.D. in biochemistry.

The Village hasn't developed plans for the interpretive center yet. "When the planning process begins, we will have to give input to be sure the center doesn't encroach on the prairie," Tyner noted. After four years of management, including three prescribed burns, Air Station Prairie currently boasts 156 native plants species, including the state-endangered mountain blue-eyed grass and golden sedge.

– Alison Carney Brown

⑫ WHO YA GONNA CALL?

You awake one morning to find a Cooper's hawk tangled in your rose bush, barely alive and too weak to fly. Who ya gonna call? For the citizens of DuPage County the answer is simple: the Willowbrook Wildlife Center.

By June of this year, the center had taken in more than 2,000 animals. Of these, 673 were returned to the wild after

examination or released after treatment, including two amphibians, 14 reptiles, 291 mammals, and 366 birds. Only native species are accepted at the center; others are referred to private citizens who rehabilitate non-native species.

According to Carl Strang, naturalist at the 50-acre center for 18 years, Willowbrook staff members cannot make house calls, so they rely on concerned people to bring the animals in for treatment. Once admitted, patients are examined by staff veterinarian Dr. Katie Brown and her staff of several student interns and 14 rotating volunteers (who must have at least a year's experience in wild animal care in other parts of the Center before working in the clinic). Each animal is provided care and medical treatment and is, if possible, rehabilitated and reintroduced into its native habitat. "I get personal gratification from helping individual animals, which many times have been injured through interactions with the public," Dr. Brown says, "but also from helping educate the public on how to improve their relationship with wild animals."

Strang explained that rehabilitation is sometimes not possible, as in the case of the great horned owl injured when an excavator it was hiding in started up. The construction crew brought it to the clinic but its shoulder was so damaged it had to be euthanized.

According to Willowbrook Curator Marcy Rogge, "The impact the center has on animal populations is secondary. What's most important is our impact on humans. Our goal is to become mediators between people and animals, to have a long-term impact on people's attitude toward nature." Located in Glen Ellyn, the Center is open seven days a week, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Telephone assistance is available daily, 9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Call the center before attempting to help or touch wildlife (630) 942-6200.

– Jennifer Tang

13 CARA PASSES A HURDLE

In late July, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) successfully passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. As this issue goes to press, the bill must still pass the full Senate, and then a conference committee must resolve minor differences with the previously passed House bill. The administration has already indicated its support.

Many people consider this bill one of the most important pieces of conservation legislation in decades. It will provide major funding for wildlife, land and water conservation, parks and recreation, and coastal rehabilitation-paid for by federal revenues from oil lease drilling on the outer-continental shelf. Calling for annual appropriations of almost $3 billion nationwide, the bill could mean as much as $53 million per year for Illinois.

Senator Peter Fitzgerald, who aided CARA's passage, told *Chicago WILDERNESS* that "Our country's pristine forests, parks, and wetlands belong to every U.S. citizen. They are our national treasures. This legislation will help protect these lands in Illinois and across the United States."

"This is a big step towards a major win for conservation," said Steve Packard, National Audubon Society director for the Chicago region. "Thanks go to good leadership from Senator Fitzgerald and a variety of conservation groups. Locally, the Bird Conservation Network gets special credit. This is a good example of democracy working. We can expect to see great habitats acquired and great public education programs from this substantial funding."

Consider what CARA could mean to this region in the coming years:

$800,000 - $1,000,000/yr for beach management at Illinois Beach State Park and to protect, manage, and restore this unique dune and swale community.

Acquision of key in-holdings at Shawnee National Forest (to reduce forest fragmention).

– Donald R. Dann

14 EVERYONE WINS

Friends of the Chicago River (FCR) and the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (LCSMC) were recently awarded the 1999 CF Industries' National

DISPATCHES FROM THE WESTERN FRONT

Dear Alison, March 2000

Home Depot wants to construct a big-box store on a lot at the northwest corner of Roosevelt Road and County Farm Road on Wheaton's border with Winfield, atop an oak-hickory remnant woodland community and wetland habitat within the riparian corridor of Winfield Creek, which itself more closely resembles a wooded wetland than a well-defined creek. Among those voicing their opposition to the proposed development were some downstream Winfield residents for whom stormwater levels are much more than a passing interest, as development within the watershed can easily lead to increased flood risk. Plus, the section of Winfield Creek that runs through Belleau Woods Forest Preserve is among the four highest rated streams in DuPage County according to fish surveys.

The development would require a change in the subject property zoning from R-1 residential to C-5 commercial. It would be up to the Wheaton Plan Commission to make such a recommendation to the Zoning Board. Last week, in the face of vocal public opposition (largely from Winfield residents), the Plan Commission voted to continue further discussion to the meeting of last night, and allow attorneys from Home Depot to address the problems the community had with their plan. Last night the motion on behalf of Home Depot to recommend the change in the subject property zoning was defeated in a unanimous decision.

My own mood ended up better than it started. Entering the chandeliered foyer of the new Wheaton municipal building, it felt like we were coming to petition the Viceroy from the rugged, unwashed provinces of Winfield and beyond.

But I became increasingly less cynical last night as the Plan Commission entertained public comments until well past 11:00 p.m. After the gentlemen and lady from Home Depot had the opportunity to address our concerns in the public comment period, and the commissioners got a motion made, seconded and soundly defeated, we didn't leave until 12:15 a.m. Half the crowd remained throughout the public comment period and the final motion and roll call, and many of those who'd trickled out seemed to be burdened with children. In an age of "voter apathy," it was great to be a part of a motivated citizenry. At times it even felt like a Frank Capra film (colorized, of course).

I got the chance to do a little song and dance for wildlife habitat, and put in a plug for the Conservation Foundation and our watershed implementation plan at the same time. And of course, it's nice to win one every now and again.

Huzzah!
Barry Dredze
Winfield

Note: As this issue went to press, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County has expressed an interest in acquiring the property proposed for the Home Depot store.

Most every town in Illinois had barn owls through the 1960, nesting in barns and belfries. They were appreciated as effective rat control. Today the barn owl is endangered, a victim of pesticides.

Watershed Award for their North Branch of the Chicago River Watershed Project. The award, administered by The Conservation Fund, recognizes innovative, nonregulatory approaches to improving water quality and emphasizes local partnerships that demonstrate successful economic incentives, voluntary initiatives, and education.

In 1996, FCR and LCSMC joined to develop strategy and implement best management practices and programs to address nonpoint source pollution and flooding; to protect and restore natural resources; and to educate and involve citizens and community leaders in the watershed planning process and river stewardship. The partnership has since accomplished: the North Branch Chicago River Watershed Plan; Voices of the Watershed; Chicago Rivers School Network; Mellody Farm Floodplain Restoration, and the North Chicago Multi-purpose Detention Basin demonstration projects; numerous other ongoing initiatives.

In the "Runoff Report," FCR and the LCSMC said they realized long ago that the only way to solve the Northeastern Illinois watershed's mushrooming problem was to enlist everybody who lived and worked there–from homeowners to teachers to businesses to local governments –to voluntarily work together to protect their watershed.

To get involved in this award-winning vision call Cynthia at FCR (312) 939-0490. ext. 13, and Sean Wiedel, LCSMC Watershed Planner, (847) 918-7693.

15 THE QUALITY OF NATURE

What better way to assess the natural quality of open land than to take a closer look at the plant species that live there? One such method–commonly referred to as Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA)–does exactly that and is now available in a Windows-based software program. Two databases are currently available: one for the State of Illinois and another for the Chicago region. Future databases will likely include Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, northeastern Ohio, the northern Great Plains, and southern Ontario.

FQA is a method designed to assess the quality of open land using existing plant species. It allows landowners, conservation organizations, volunteer stewards, and other practitioners to make standardized comparisons between natural areas and facilitates the development of conservation programs by tracking and analyzing site monitoring and restoration activities. For additional information about the FQA Program and its use, contact Conservation Design Forum at (630) 758-0355. All profits from the sale of the program sup-

port the work of the Conservation Research Institute.

16 HAPPY SURPRISES

Wildlife biologists were recently surprised to discover a new large heron rookery in the Lake County Forest Preserves (LCFP) during an annual survey of cranes, herons, and other large waterbirds. Made up of 24 great blue heron nests, the rookery was spotted from a helicopter by biologists for the LCFP and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

The biologists spotted the natural rookery while checking manmade platforms at another forest preserve site. "Herons traditionally nest in the same area for a number of years and it's unusual to see them choose a new nesting site," said Frank Drummond, LCFP wildlife biologist. "Apparently, they were attracted to suitable nest trees near a large wetland, which provides ideal feeding grounds for herons and a variety of other wildlife and waterfowl." This discovery brings the total number of great blue heron nests located within four Lake County preserves to 104.

The annual survey, known as the crane count, has been conducted throughout Illinois for over 10 years by the IDNR. It focuses primarily on sandhill cranes, a rare species, but also counts more common wading birds such as herons, egrets, and cormorants.

In addition to the heron count, biologists observed three nesting pairs of sandhill cranes at three Lake County preserves. Approximately 175 great egret nests and 60 double-crested cormorant nests were also identified.

To participate in the crane count and other volunteer efforts to help wildlife in LCFP, call Tom Smith, volunteer stewardship coordinator, at (847) 968-3329.

17 SEVEN NEW MEMBERS

Seven new members were voted into Chicago Wilderness at the July 11 Council meeting, expanding the coalition to 114 members. The mission of **Lake Bluff Opens Lands Association** is to protect, preserve, and restore open space and natural areas in and around the Village of Lake Bluff. The association is currently working on restoring native flora to a large area of ravine, as well as the restoration of a sand community at Lake Bluff beach. The **Northwestern University Environmental Council** serves to support, coordinate, and stimulate a wide range of environmental university research and educational programs. Many of these programs involve work that supports biodiversity in the Chicago area. **Pringle Nature Center** in Bristol, Wisconsin, provides a place where the Kenosha County community can appreciate nature, experience recreational opportunities, and be inspired to become responsible stewards of the environment. The **Village of Glenview** is currently involved in the preservation and restoration of the 31-acre Glenview Air Station Prairie, and is the owner of a variety of natural areas. The **Village of Lincolnshire** is committed to the protection and thoughtful management of the natural resources that exist within the community. Current activities include the restoration of a portion of the headwaters of the West Fork of the North Branch of the Chicago River and management of the Florsheim Nature Preserve. The Village also provides environmental programs for the public. The goal of the **Wayne Park District** is to maintain natural areas as they were before European settlement and to preserve woods, prairies, and wetlands. The Park District also seeks to engage residents and school children in supporting land acquisition and protection.

The great-horned owl is still common in cities, towns, and forest preserves. A fierce protector of its nest, this owl does not hesitate to attack a person who gets too close. Typical prey include crows, rats, opossums, raccoons, woodchucks, and domestic cats.

The **Wheaton Park District** seeks to enrich the quality of community life through a diversity of healthy leisure pursuits and a heightened appreciation for the natural world. The District owns more than 800 acres of land, and is currently restoring more than 100 acres of wetlands, prairies, and oak woodlands. The district provides environmental education and outdoor adventure programs to more than 17,000 participants annually.

18 MIDEWIN TOURS

Bask in the natural history of the 19,000-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Tours of the site continue throughout October. To register for workdays, call volunteer coordinator Chris Adamson at (815) 423-6370

Oct. 7: Birds of the Prairie, 7:30 a.m.
East Side Introductory Tour, 9:30 a.m.
October 14: Birds of the Prairie, 7:30 a.m.
East Side Introductory Tour, 10:30 a.m.
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, near Joliet
Fee: $2.00 per person
Information: Call Midewin's "tour line" at (815) 423-6370 ext. 14 or visit the Web site at www.fs.fed.us/mntp.

19 SCIENCE FAIR SUCCESS

It's science fair season! Are you struggling to find a topic? Wondering what the scientific method is? Come to the Science Fairs for Families workshop at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and get the answer to your most pressing questions. The Museum also offers a wide variety of exciting and educational activities for nature lovers of all ages.

Session I:
Saturday, Oct. 14, 1:00-2:30 p.m.
Session II: Saturday, Nov. 11, 10:30 a.m.-noon
Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago
Fee: $10 child and $2 adult members, $12 child and $2 adult non-members
(Plus $2 material fee)
Information and to register: (773) 755-5111

20 FROM PRAIRIE TO PAGE

A new organization called the Midewin Writers Society, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and the Midewin Alliance, is sponsoring the first in a series of nature-writing workshops at the 19,000-acre tallgrass prairie near Joliet.

Arthur Pearson, a local writer and conservationist, has convened a group of area writers and environmentalists to develop the not-for-profit project into what they ultimately hope will include educational programs for inner-city children as well as a regional journal for nature writers.

The first workshop, on October 21, will be taught by James Ballowe, an award-winning writer and educator who specializes in links between environment, culture, and the landscape of Illinois. The initial workshop will be for both novice and advanced writers and will involve practice in nature writing in various genres.

Saturdays-Oct. 21, 28, Nov. 4, 11
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie near Joliet
Fee: $100 for Midewin Alliance Members, $110 for non-members
Information: Alf Sewers (217) 328-7410 or siewers@uiuc.edu

21 SEED HARVEST AT FERMILAB

Volunteers are invited to collect precious prairie seeds at Fermilab at the annual Prairie Seed Harvest. Wear field clothes and gloves; bring pruning shears and paper grocery bags

Oct. 28, 10:00 a.m.
Fermilab, Batavia
Information: Large groups call (630) 840-3303. Information, call (630) 840-3000.

For help with the news, thanks to Kent Fuller.

If you know of news leads or would like to volunteer as a news writer, contact editor Alison Carney Brown at news@chicagowildernessmag.org or P.O. Box 101, Wilmette, IL 60091.

For current events see:
www.chicagowildernessmag.org

Handling the Future

In suburban back yards, on the fire escapes of city six-flats, and among advancing buckthorns in untended wilds, fall finds people tinkering with rare seed. Hundreds of thousands of live embryos filter through the fingers of people, who are often lost in thought about something else. It's peaceful work. A time to meditate, while little packages of the future are prepared for broadcast in wildlands under restoration.

See that homemade box with a screen bottom? That's become a standard item at these events. Blocks of wood, sandpaper, Waring blenders, jury-rigged leaf mulchers, and all those bags filled with the product of seed foragers who scour the countryside for the dwindling islands of ancient nature, where the rare seed lurks. A seed source tucked between a highway and a railroad track; it may be cement next year.

These are the plants that had been dying out. These are the plants of the ecosystems that rare animals depend on. If the ancient plants come back, then the animals–from butterflies and beetles to hummingbirds and Cooper's hawks–can continue this journey, on this planet, with us. Thanks to this work, in scores of sites throughout the region, the ancient natural ecosystem is coming back.

The prairies to grow from these seeds, with our help, will take the place of brush. The woodland understories they restore will crowd out invasive buckthorn and box elder (given that these restoration areas get occasional fire and some predation on the deer). Some individual plants will die in the competition with these seeds, and some will live because these seeds are planted.

In "Pests? Pets? or Just Wild?" on page 4, Jerry Sullivan encourages our natural love and compassion for animals to reach a higher plane. Yes, love the individual, and also love the species, the community, the habitat. Yes, love our families, and ethnic groups, and religious communities, and at the same time love all humankind. We can do that. Yes, love America, and at the same time be an impassioned patriot of the planet.

Seed stewards have taken that next step for the local wilds. Yes, they can love individual plants. They also love whole and healthy woods, wetlands, and prairies. The evolving discipline of conservation biology challenges our emotions and ethics. Sometimes there must be tradeoffs. Individuals will be lost to predation, fire, flood, hail, drought, and competition. Yes, protect those individuals when we can, but don't close off the natural processes on which the larger communities depend. Yes, plant the seeds that will out-compete some other seeds. Yes, be stewards of the future. The emerging land ethic of Chicago Wilderness.

Photos by Dave Jagodzinski. Words by Stephen Packard. Work by volunteers everywhere. Would you or someone you know like to help gather the seeds of orchids, oaks, and bluestems –and thus, indirectly, the seeds of butterflies, tadpoles, and flying squirrels? Work parties are scheduled every weekend this fall. See **www.chicagowildernessmag.org** *for contacts.)*

***OPPOSITE:** Fallen oak leaf and frost on sand ripples signal the season at Illinois Beach State Park. Photo by Joseph Kayne.*

The short-eared owl, a prairie bird, was once the commonest owl in Illinois. It nests on the ground among the grasses. Today these owls summer in Illinois only rarely, because our grasslands are mostly too small to support the raising of an owl family.

CHICAGO WILDERNESS MEMBERS:

Bird Conservation Network
Brookfield Zoo
Butterfield Creek Steering Committee
Calumet Ecological Park Association
Calumet Environmental Resource Center
Campaign for Sensible Growth
Campton Historic Agricultural Lands, Inc.
Canal Corridor Association
Cary Park District
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicago Academy of Sciences
Chicago Audubon Society
Chicago Botanic Garden
Chicago Ornithological Society
Chicago Park District
Chicagoland Bird Observatory
Citizens for Conservation
City of Chicago, Department of Environment
College of DuPage
The Conservation Fund
The Conservation Foundation
Conservation Research Institute
Crystal Lake Park District
DePaul University Environmental Science Program
Downers Grove Park District
Ducks Unlimited
DuPage Audubon Society
Emily Oaks Nature Center
Environmental Law and Policy Center of the Midwest
The Field Museum
Forest Preserve District of Cook County
Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
Forest Preserve District of Kane County
Forest Preserve District of Will County
Fort Dearborn Chapter, Illinois Audubon Society
Fox Valley Land Foundation
Friends of the Chicago River
Friends of the Parks
Friends of Ryerson Woods
Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance
Geneva Park District
Glenview Prairie Preservation Project
The Grove National Historic Landmark
Hammond Environmental Education Center
Illinois Audubon Society
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program
Illinois Natural History Survey
Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Indiana Dunes Environmental Learning Center
Indiana University Northwest
Irons Oaks Environmental Learning Center
Jurica Nature Museum
Kane-DuPage Soil & Water Conservation District
Lake Bluff Open Lands Association
Lake County Forest Preserves
Lake County Stormwater Management Commission
Lake Forest Open Lands Association
Lake Michigan Federation
Lake View Nature Center
Liberty Prairie Conservancy
Lincoln Park Zoo
Long Grove Park District
Loyola University, Environmental Studies Program
Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation
McHenry County Conservation District
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
Morton Arboretum
National Audubon Society
The Nature Conservancy
NiSource Environmental Challenge Fund
North Cook County Soil & Water Conservation District
Northbrook Park District
Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission
Northeastern Illinois University
Northwest Indiana Forum Foundation, Inc.
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
Northwestern University Environmental Council
Openlands Project
Palos-Orland Conservation Committee
Palos Park Tree Foundation
Park District of Highland Park
Prairie Woods Audubon Society
Pringle Nature Center
River Forest Park District
Save the Dunes Conservation Fund
Save the Prairie Society
Schaumburg Park District
John G. Shedd Aquarium
Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund
Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter
St. Charles Park District
Sustain, The Environmental Information Group
Thorn Creek Audubon Society
The Trust for Public Land
Town Square Condominium Association
Urban Resources Partnership
US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District
US Dept. of Energy, Argonne National Laboratory
US Dept. of Energy, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory
US Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5
US EPA Great Lakes National Program Office
USDA Forest Service
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDI Fish & Wildlife Service
USDI National Park Service
Village of Glenview
Village of Linconshire
Village of Riverside
Wayne Park District
The Wetlands Initiative
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd.
Wheaton Park District

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What's up? Photo by Joe Nowak.

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