

# Chicago EXPLORING NATURE & CULTURE WILDERNESS

W I N T E R 2 0 0 0



BAMBI, BEAVERS AND BOB • BIRD COUNTERS



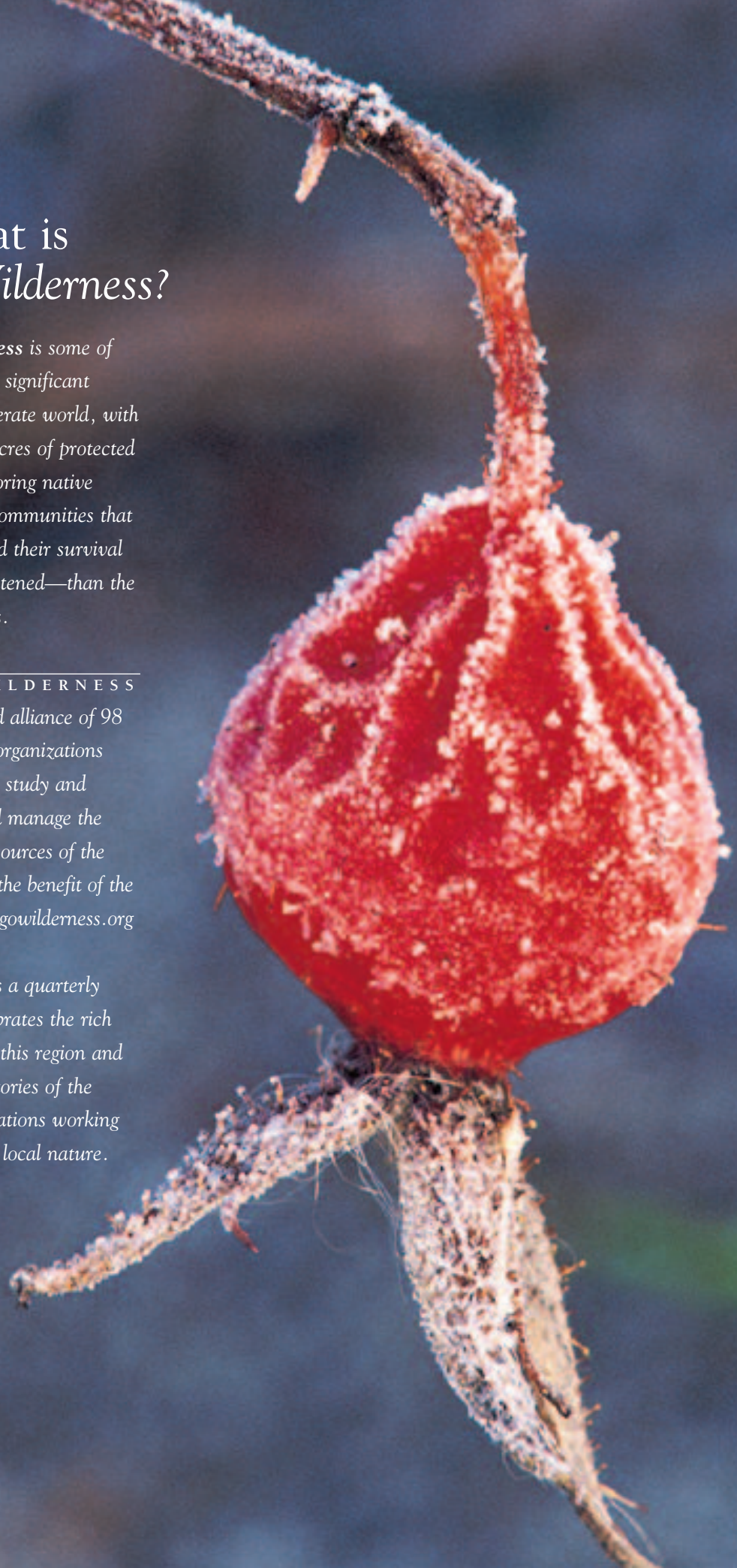
# What is Chicago Wilderness?

*Chicago Wilderness is some of the finest and most significant nature in the temperate world, with 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 98 public and private organizations working together to study and restore, protect and manage the precious natural resources of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public. [www.chicagowilderness.org](http://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.





## CHICAGO WILDERNESS

*A Regional Nature Reserve*

# Bambi, Beavers and Bob

Who among us doesn't feel a thrill at the sight of deer? We come upon them in Chicago Wilderness, heads lifted, suddenly alert from grazing in the woods, or emerging at the edges of suburban lawns. Unlike a mushroom or a butterfly, they're flesh and blood like us. We're neighbors.

Who among us doesn't feel delight and yearning at the howl of a coyote or the slap of a beaver tail? These big mammals force us again and again into a collision between science and sensibility. A photo out a friend's window in Northbrook shows one neighbor's air conditioner and a four-legged neighbor gawking at the camera.

On the first day our friend moved in, neighbor Bob told him that the whole street had essentially abandoned gardening and otherwise suffered grievously when the deer population exploded. And, with an ironic laugh, he said he also puts out bushels of apples to help the deer through the winter. Talk about a love-hate relationship!

Chicago WILDERNESS invited a quintet of land managers, advocates, and policy makers from around the region to talk about deer. In a candid, wide-ranging discussion (page 4), these folks described the dilemma of deer—namely, how can we incorporate our love for particular animals with the desire and need to provide for healthy habitat for many species, not one alone?

Let's be frank. Treating deer as sacrosanct means an unacceptable trampling on the lives of countless other creatures. By now the scientific evidence is beyond dispute: overpopulations of deer are causing widespread

damage to the ecosystem. Unless we agree on ways to control their numbers, deer will progressively wreck some of the region's best habitats.

So, those of us who care about nature face a challenge: can we love beaver, love deer, even love them tenderly, and still accommodate a care for the people and other creatures whose lives they may disrupt? Can we develop wise hearts and a uniquely human capacity to under-

stand—and to feel affection for—the greater community, and not its individuals?

Often eyebrows are raised when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposes to build a dam. When the C.W. Army Corps of Beavers go to work, the results are often controversial as well. Such controversy is not to be avoided. If we want to have healthy habitat for deer and butterflies, for flowers and frogs, beaver and birds, then we must make decisions and implement them. At times the process may be hard, even painful. Making hard choices, however, is what we humans do. As parents, as voters, as friends, we make our best choices and live the results. At least in the case of deer and beavers, we seem to be getting better at it.



Debra Shore

EDITOR







## FEATURES

## DEER AND THE ECOSYSTEM

- by Jill Riddell .....4  
Can smart and decent people resolve the dilemma of deer? Land managers and advocates talk it out.

## THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

- by Judy Pollock .....10  
100 Years and Counting: citizen scientists have fun while tracking the fortunes of feathered friends.

## THE MINGLED DESTINIES OF BEAVER AND PEOPLE

- by Jack MacRae .....12  
These furry engineers change the world. They flood out some neighbors—and make homes for others. What a story!

## DEPARTMENTS

- Into the Wild** .....15  
Where to ski cross the country, follow animal tracks, enjoy winter.  
**Natural Events Calendar:** Skating on thin ice; owls hanging out; deep diving old squaws; the otter limits.
- Meet Your Neighbors** .....23  
Mighty Acorns. Palos Park Tree Body. Snow bunting. White-footed mouse.
- Family Quiz Game** .....27  
Test your local nature knowledge.
- Marsh Under Moonlight** .....28  
by Miles Lowry
- News from Chicago Wilderness** .....30  
Pennies for the Prairie. Forest preserves for sale? Wreckless abandon. The news of nature and nature's people.
- Reading Pictures** .....36  
Three Clues.



**ABOVE:** Felling great trees—just to eat the bark—beavers challenge our views of benign and changeless nature. Photo by Mike MacDonald.

**OPPOSITE:** Cook County's Black Partridge Woods. Photo by Mike MacDonald.

**COVER:** Wind, water, winter light. Photo by Willard Clay.



Photo: Bob Curtis



Photo: Jim Flynn/Root Resources



Photo: Kim Karples/Life Through the Lens

## Chicago WILDERNESS

Volume III, Number 2

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**President:** Dr. George Rabb  
**Vice-President:** Dan Griffin  
**Secretary:** Laura Gates  
**Treasurer:** Barbara Whitney Carr  
Jerry Adelman, Laura Hohnhold,  
John Rogner, Ron Wolk

**EDITOR** ..... Debra Shore  
**SENIOR EDITOR** ..... Stephen Packard  
**ASSISTANT EDITORS** ..... Sheryl De Vore  
Chris Howes

**NEWS EDITORS** ..... Alison Carney Brown  
Elizabeth Sanders

**ART DIRECTOR** ..... Terri Wymore  
**EDITORIAL CONSULTANT** ..... Bill Aldrich

Chicago WILDERNESS is published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$14/yr. Please address all subscription correspondence to Chicago WILDERNESS, P.O. Box 268, Downers Grove, IL 60515-0268. (630) 963-8010. Please direct editorial inquiries and correspondence to Editor, Chicago WILDERNESS, 9232 Avers Ave, Evanston, IL 60203. (847) 677-2470. e-mail: editor@chicagowilderness.org Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned without a self-addressed stamped envelope. Chicago WILDERNESS is printed on recycled paper and should be passed around from friend to friend. Chicago WILDERNESS is endorsed by the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council. The opinions expressed in these pages, however, are the authors' own. © by Chicago Wilderness Magazine, Inc.

ISSN 1097-8917. Postmaster, address service requested to Chicago WILDERNESS, PO Box 268, Downers Grove, IL 60515-0268.

All rights reserved.





*Prey without a predator*

# Deer and the Ecosystem

by Jill Riddell

**T**here's something about deer that epitomizes the wild. Even though next door may be a shopping mall complete with Gap and Starbucks, a deer in a forest preserve transports a visitor away from all of that—from all that is tame, from all that is ordinary.

Yet can there be too much of a good animal? In Chicago Wilderness, white-tailed deer have become so prolific that large herds threaten healthy natural ecosystems. Chicago WILDERNESS invited five people with expertise on deer to consider where we and the deer now stand. Some participants, originally opposed to deer control, have become convinced that reducing deer numbers is necessary to preserve entire ecosystems. Others, who once regarded deer policy only as a professional question, have come to respect the strong feelings deer evoke for many people.

## PARTICIPANTS

**Tom Anderson** is director of the Save The Dunes Council, a nonprofit organization in northwest Indiana. His involvement in the issue dates back eight years when Indiana's Department of Natural Resources was considering reducing deer herds in state parks, including the Indiana Dunes State Park. Initially, Save The Dunes Council opposed the reduction, but after an in-depth study demonstrated that serious damage was being done to the park's flora, the Council decided to support deer reduction.

**Steve Barg** is director of education for Lake Forest Open Lands. Previously he was director of the Heller Nature Center in Highland Park and a member of the City of Highland Park's task force on white-tailed deer.

**Marty Jones** is in charge of the urban deer project for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. He started working on the issue in 1983, conducting an urban deer study for the Illinois Natural History Survey.

**Dan Ludwig** is the animal ecologist for the DuPage County Forest Preserve District. He first became involved with urban deer in Illinois in 1985, when he rode along on aerial counts to assess relative abundance of deer in north-eastern Illinois. After examining data on deer population gathered between 1985 and 1990, the Forest Preserve District decided to set up a study measuring the impact of deer on vegetation.

**John Oldenburg**, a forest ecologist, was hired in 1992 by



Photo: Lou Nettlehorst

the DuPage County Forest Preserve District to administer several natural resource programs, including the deer control program. He believes that, through research, "we gained a lot of insight into what happens to deer and how they move. We believe that we're approaching a level of density that we feel is more in balance with the ecosystem, [where] deer can live in balance with the other organisms."

**Jill Riddell** is a freelance writer who worked previously as communications director for both Openlands Project and for the Illinois Nature Conservancy. She served as moderator for the discussion.

## BACKGROUND

**Marty:** In Illinois, deer were gone by the turn of the century. Deer were given complete protection from market hunting in 1901. After that, there were even attempts to try and reintroduce deer. In the absence of predators and with complete protection from hunting their numbers rebounded dramatically—so much so that hunting seasons were opened up beginning in 1956. Today you see estimates for deer numbers in Illinois up to 500,000.

**Steve:** When I was a child I never saw deer, and I grew up in a rural area. And when I did see a deer, it was usually up





*Trillium blooms inside a deer enclosure fence on the right side of this photo. Outside the fence, trilliums and many other species of plants and animals are declining or gone.*

## ECOSYSTEM IMPACT

The issue of whether to cull deer is sometimes falsely described as an argument between “plant people” and “animal lovers. In fact, the heavy grazing of an overly large population of deer affects much more than plant populations.

**Tom:** Deer don’t have an impact just on plants. By devouring many plant species, deer cause other damage to the ecosystem—to the songbirds, numbers of bird species, ground nesting birds, small mammals, amphibians, on and on. It is important to look at the whole ecosystem, because as we got into the public debate, some people attempted to polarize the debate—to say “You are either for the plants or you’re for deer.”

**Steve:** We had people coming to us saying, “Why don’t you just go out and spray all your trillium with Deer Away?” Even if Deer Away is an effective repellent, the idea that we would be able to spray every plant that might be browsed by deer—they didn’t understand that this wasn’t a garden.

One of the other things that managers of public land have to talk about that’s different than private landowners is that natural areas are under a tremendous amount of pressure. You’ve got invasive species, changes in water flows and levels, fragmented habitat. You have all these pressures already that you are trying to eliminate if you want to maintain a healthy natural area. And in terms of managing the preserve I was responsible for, even though deer are naturally found there, they were putting as much or more pressure on the ecosystem as an invasive shrub like buckthorn does.

**Tom:** The animal people most come to see at the state park turns out to be deer. The public perception of deer is a lot different than the public perception of buckthorn. I don’t think anyone would have stopped to say, “You shouldn’t cut buckthorn.”

There were certainly people on the deer task force in Indiana who didn’t care what the impacts on the ecosystem were. To them, having more deer was an even higher value, no matter what the impact.

## DENSITY OF DEER

How do we know how many deer are too many? Or is it more helpful to measure the health of the ecosystem than to count the deer?

**John:** A homeowner may like plants, he likes his hyacinths, but he’s willing to accept 30 deer per square mile and figures he’ll just plant more hyacinths because he knows the deer will eat some of them. His tolerance for lots of deer is going to be higher than the land manager who says we can only deal with six to 10 deer per square mile because of the impacts that were demonstrated in our preserves. And the hunter may like 40 per square mile.

**Jill:** John, has your goal of the forest preserve’s carrying capacity\* changed over time?

---

\*Carrying capacity refers to the density of deer that can be sustained by a tract of land.

in the north woods of Wisconsin. To me, it symbolized that I was in the wilderness. It was great. We’d all celebrate. How many of us had that experience? Most of us probably.

Even today, I love seeing deer in preserves. It still rings of that feeling, “Oh, we’re in the wilderness now.” Here is a large grazing mammal that still inhabits the same places that we inhabit. What a wonderful thing!

**Jill:** I would imagine everybody here had similar experiences, and that’s part of why you became interested enough in nature to make it your career. But then things changed?

**Steve:** In Highland Park, we used to show people a photograph from Ryerson Conservation area in south Lake County. Ryerson put up an eight- or ten-foot wire fence in 1987 called an enclosure that allows movement of a lot of plant-eating mammals but that excludes deer. Anyone can stand there in mid-May and see a marked difference. Inside the enclosure where the deer can’t get to it, you’ll see lots of flowering plants—larger plants, and a greater variety of species often times. Outside, you see very few flowers or no flowers at all, much smaller plants and less biodiversity. It’s like looking at a garden next to a gravel road.

**Tom:** The impact of deer has been very substantial on spring wildflowers at Indiana Dunes State Park, where there are something like 30 or 40 rare and threatened species. There is one endangered shinleaf that was reduced from a [fairly large] area down to literally a couple of individual plants.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR?

Do you have thoughts about deer? Or, for that matter, about alien invasions, suburban sprawl, prescribed fire, or the best way to teach kids about nature? If you can present a perspective or describe an experience that would be valued by *Chicago WILDERNESS* readers, then we’d like to print it. Send letters to: Editor, *Chicago WILDERNESS*, 9232 Avers Avenue, Evanston, IL 60203.



**John:** During the reduction phase we were moving down toward a particular density goal. But now that we are starting to see a recovery in populations of various plant species, we're starting to ask more intricate questions about what's going on. We want to know whether the population is in balance, what is the sex ratio, what is the age structure, what is the density for a particular type of prairie versus a savanna.

**Marty:** I have been emphasizing the point for years that the focus of management programs is not on the deer numbers so much as on healthy habitat. What we're actually trying to accomplish on these sites is to restore the habitat.

**John:** It was never our idea to put a number to this. When the health of the ecosystem recovers, that's the density at which we would like to sustain the deer population.

**Tom:** The numbers game was played during our experience too. It was said that we needed to have a number, and we can't do anything until we know the exact number. As anyone knows, it is not an easy task to do a census. It costs money. And it is the ecosystem impact that you're trying to manage for, not necessarily an artificial number.

**Steve:** We surveyed neighbors; we did surveys in the city newsletter; we made individual phone calls to neighbors; we took a lot of information in.

We had neighbors on two sides of the driveway coming into our preserve. One would call us and complain, "What are you going to do about your deer eating my expensive landscape material?" The other neighbor would say, "How can you consider getting rid of deer?" He fed the deer from a 300-pound corn feeding thing in his backyard.

**Jill:** Is it fair to say that in your experiences on your various preserves that the public needs to have some kind of a voice in what that carrying capacity is going to be at a given preserve?

## The focus of management programs is not on the deer numbers so much as on healthy habitat.

**Tom:** One of the failures of our state agency was that they recognized the problem but they were reluctant to share that information or to go to the public. To have the public be part of the decision-making before decisions were made would have gone a long way toward public acceptance. Instead, they basically made the announcement. The opposition formed. They used this lack of public input or involvement to show how uncaring the DNR was. The media said, "Wow, if this was such an important thing why didn't they come out and tell anyone?"

It took a number of months to undo what was mishandled to begin with. The more information the public understands, the more the public will support sound decisions. The more that the public is cut out of a sound decision, it creates antagonism that doesn't do the issue any good.

**Steve:** My experience in Highland Park was different than that. We did do a lot of education. We had a lot of public information out ahead of time. We had a deer task force assigned. We had public input. And I think I would speak



Photo: Forest Preserve District of Cook County



Photo: Stephen Puckard

*At top: This grazed-out, shaded-out forest preserve in Wheeling has little food for deer or most other species. Bottom: Somme Woods in Northbrook has benefited from years of deer control and restoration. Deer and other wildlife are thriving in balance.*

for almost every person on the deer task force that when that group was dismantled there was more polarization than when we started it three years before.

**Jill:** Do people who believe in the rights of individual animals respond to the argument that there are other animals dying because of the very high deer population?

**Tom:** Trying to see the macro picture is difficult sometimes.

**Dan:** You can try to explain that as a land managing agency our statutory responsibility is to preserve, restore, and restock native flora and fauna. We're not doing our jobs if we let these densities of deer build up at the expense of everything else.

**Steve:** The common argument is, Why don't we just let nature take its course? I don't know how many times we've all heard that. And the reality is that we've manipulated the environment. We can't let nature take its course. We are part of the natural world.

**Jill:** How has that argument gone for you, has that been persuasive?

**Dan:** Certain individuals accept it. But some people are never going to accept it. Because, as Steve said, you are killing an animal. Bottom line.

**Steve:** There's not a person here today that would want to go out and take any animal unnecessarily, even a wasp nest.

No one is blaming the deer. The deer are just doing what



they do naturally. But we also have to 'fess up to say we humans have created this problem. We eliminated predators. We've taken hunting out of the mix. And then to say just let nature take its course? We've created the problem. We need to deal with the problem.

### TRANSLOCATION

Moving deer from one location to another is a solution that has been tried in the Chicago Wilderness region. How well has it worked?

**Steve:** The solution that was proposed and adopted in Highland Park in 1995 and again in 1997 was translocation—capturing some of the deer and moving them somewhere else. It was more costly than lethal removal, but the people of Highland Park were willing to pay for it. In the end we did transfer 20 deer from Highland Park to a private wildlife reserve.

### Of the 20 deer that were moved, four years later none are surviving.

Out of the 20 deer transferred, 19 made it to the transfer site. That was an extremely high percentage compared to other translocations we were aware of. That part of the process went well. Everyone was excited.

But within a year and a half, there were only eight deer surviving. I talked to the manager of this park, and he said—I'll never forget this—he said, "Steve, someone who knows nothing about deer, who has absolutely never seen a deer before, could come and sit on our observation platform and look at the Highland Park deer and look at our resident herd and say, "What's wrong with those deer over there?"

He said they looked unhealthy; they were gangly; they were thin. They never mixed in with the resident herd. Coyotes had gotten in under the fence of this wildlife preserve and had taken eight deer, all of them Highland Park

deer. Not one from the resident herd.

**Jill:** Because the predator will take the weaker animals?

**Steve:** Yes. The Highland Park deer were isolated from the other herd animals. Then the rest of the deer fell to a virus. Of the 20 deer that were moved, four years later none are surviving.

**Jill:** What's a deer's normal life span?

**Marty:** Does can live up to 16 to 18 years. We've documented that locally.

**Steve:** Most of these animals were younger deer that were easily trapped.

**Marty:** Their survival is so low because you are essentially turning them into an area they are not familiar with. [In free-range situations] you would be dumping these animals out in an area that's already occupied by deer. They are just going to get bumped along by the resident animals that have already set up territories.

**Steve:** There should be an understanding that translocation of deer as a viable option to protect an animal's rights isn't really happening. You're not protecting an animal's rights by putting it in a completely foreign area under stress, removed from family or herd. It's not what we would consider a humane option.

### IMMUNOCONTRACEPTION

Injecting does with some form of birth control is one option that is often recommended. The participants discussed the current state of knowledge and technology of wild deer immunocontraception.

**Steve:** There was a park in Columbus, Ohio, called Sharon Woods. They had a little bit different situation from ours in Highland Park in that they had a pen set up on-site as a temporary holding area for the deer. At the time, there was a two-shot immunization, and the shots had to take place within a week or two of each other. And so the most efficient way to do that was to actually capture the deer, inoculate them once and hold them for a week or 10 days, inoculate them again, tag them and release them. But it was not successful. The Sharon Woods information that we got back was that even among the ones that were successfully inoculated, 50 percent of them had twins the following year.

There were questions of whether the inoculation was delivered correctly. And then the other problem was just the mechanics involved of capturing deer, holding them, inoculating them twice, releasing them, and having to do that every year. The labor involved was enormous.

**Marty:** They have been working with bio-bullets, which are essentially a plastic bullet that you shoot into the animal that would have a compound implanted in the bullet, and it would slowly dissolve over time in the animal's tissues. The dose would be released over time so managers wouldn't have to give a booster shot every year. But once again, it's really experimental.

**John:** There's some hope along the lines of immunocontraceptives, but it's a long way off from its practical application and maintenance.

*Touhy Avenue in Chicago, at the Edens Expressway overpass. For automobiles to be the only functioning predator is no kindness to the deer.*



Photo: Stephen Packard



## LETHAL REMOVAL

Killing deer has proved the only viable solution so far to reducing excess populations of deer. The majority of the programs that harvest deer donate the meat to food pantries.

**John:** When you're in a reduction phase, the idea is to get the population down. We wanted to be able to surgically shoot an animal to incur rapid death.

**Jill:** Is there any way to turn the shooting of the deer into a positive cultural experience? In many parts of the state, deer hunting is a rite of passage for young men and to some extent young women. It's part of the culture.

**John:** There's no sense of community to the earth anymore. You see the problem in the schools—if you have talked to teachers, the kids think they get their cereal from a store. Everything comes from the store. That's part of the educational challenge we have.

**With this issue, people are really concerned about nature. You build on that caring and find common ground.**

**Jill:** Maybe there would be an opportunity down the line to restore that. It's not so much introducing hunting as sport as it is introducing ritual. Death is a part of life. And taking a deer's life honorably and with respect is different from some people's image of deer hunting.

**John:** During the reduction phases you really have to question the efficacy of that choice, because what we're doing is not hunting. It is a clear reduction of the number of animals, and it's not a hunting situation at all. You would be hard-pressed to hunt Waterfall Glen in DuPage County down to the level of deer the ecosystem can sustain. We'd still be sitting on the explosive side of birth rate at this point.

## ENCOURAGING AND REINTRODUCING NATURAL PREDATORS

Deer have swung out of balance with respect to the rest of the ecosystem because human beings have eliminated the wolves, wild cats, and bears that would once have kept the population in balance. The group discussed the role of natural predators.

**Marty:** The phenomenon of increasing coyote numbers seems to be a regional phenomenon. We get more and more reports from different municipalities along the North Shore seeing more and more coyotes.

I've heard reports about some of the Cook County preserves, that they feel they are not seeing as many fawns in some of the areas. We have also had instances in municipalities where deer have been taken down by coyotes in people's yards.

**John:** Some of the recent studies on DuPage forest preserves indicate a predation by coyotes on pre-weaned fawns anywhere from 20 percent to even 80 percent.



*Deer can be aggressive to each other. In spring, the does will set up breeding territories and exclude all other females including their own daughters.*

We're interested in any type of natural predator/prey relationship that does occur, because it would weigh heavily into the model that we put together with respect to how many deer need to be culled.

**Dan:** The coyote is another opportunity to educate the urban public. Not everybody's enchanted with the

idea of coyotes in their backyards.

And I wouldn't anticipate a drastic decrease in deer, because even if there's, say, 15 percent fawn mortality, you still got 85 percent, and you still have an increase in the population.

**Jill:** Are there any other predators that would help reduce the number of deer?

**Tom:** Mountain lions, but that's not realistic.

**Marty:** Reintroduction of predators is probably not a viable option.

## PROPOSAL FOR A REGION-WIDE APPROACH

To date, scores of towns, counties, and other governments have had to struggle alone with the deer issue. This discussion proposes that a unified approach could help facilitate consensus and wise solutions.

**Marty:** We've gone through the litany of alternatives time and time again. It boils down to essentially a couple of options, both of which are lethal. We can hunt deer in our parks and preserves in a controlled fashion or use a sharp-shooting program.

**Jill:** Is there any way we can come to some sort of a region-wide solution to this problem instead of everybody having to go through an identical kind of process of wrestling with their individual deer problems? Is there any way for a broader solution so that somebody in St. Charles isn't going to have to go through the same thing that Highland Park has already gone through?

**Dan:** I would hope Chicago Wilderness would take the lead. Somebody has to pull it all together and set a standard protocol for a program like this. Then when a land manager at a village board meeting is asked, "Who approves?" We can answer, "The Chicago Wilderness partners approve of it. These people have all done it, and here's how it's set up." This leadership, whoever assumes it, can also articulate the reasons for deer control. It needs to be clear why it's important from an ecosystem perspective, from a land manager's perspective, and from a homeowner's perspective.

**Tom:** Utilize the expertise. Don't let there be another community where they have to start from scratch and bring people in and spend the money when you have the expertise available here and people have been through it.

Valuing other people's personal perspectives is important, even if you may not agree with them.

With this issue, people are really concerned about something. They're concerned about nature. You build on that caring and find common ground.





# 100 Years of Counting

*Snowy owl*

by Judy Pollock

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Christmas Bird Count. The tradition of venturing forth in the cold to count birds began in the early days of the conservation movement. Frank Chapman, an eminent ornithologist and founder and editor of *Bird-Lore* (precursor to *Audubon* magazine), had the idea of holding a bird count to replace the then-popular holiday tradition of a Christmas bird hunt. Participants in the bird hunt competed to see who could shoot the most birds, of any species; none were then protected.

The first count was held on Christmas Day, 1900. Ninety birds were counted by 25 “groups” of birders, most of which had only one or two observers. The only Illinois count was in Glen Ellyn, with these results:

Crow	17	Chickadee	19
Prairie hen	8	Bluejay	7
Downy woodpecker	2	Tree sparrow	1
White-breasted nuthatch	1		

*Common goldeneye*



Photo: Rob Curtis

“Prairie hen” presumably refers to the prairie-chicken, a once-plentiful bird that is now endangered in most states due to the destruction of its grassland habitat. Browsing through the early counts gives a glimpse of local bird life at a time when there was much more open space—20 “prairie hens” in Chicago in 1906, and hundreds of birds of open country throughout the region—Lapland and McCown’s longspurs, horned larks, and “snowflakes” (snow buntings).

Christmas count data from the last 99 years is now available on BirdSource (at <http://birdsource.org>). According to John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the second hundred years of the count may be dramatically different from the first: “The new technology we are developing will revolutionize the way we use Christmas count data. We hope to allow any user to perform his or her own sophisticated analyses of population trends and bird movements through our website. The work of the citizen scientist will contribute to a powerful and immediate tool for bird conservation.”

For many, the chief reward from participating in the count is the countdown dinner. At the end of the day, cold and weary birders file into a warm and friendly place—a restaurant or home of a bird club member—to tell their stories. All gather after dinner, as the compiler goes through the list of birds, from the most common to the least, adds up the counts of the parties, and compares the total to previous years. At the end of the evening, the greatest prizes are revealed—a golden eagle, perhaps, or a yellow-breasted chat—birds that have rarely, or never, been recorded in that count circle.

Here are some stories from local Christmas counters, in honor of the 100th count:



Long-eared owl

Photo: Joe Novak



Cardinal

Photo: Jim Flynn/Root Resources



Photo: Art Morris/Birds As Art



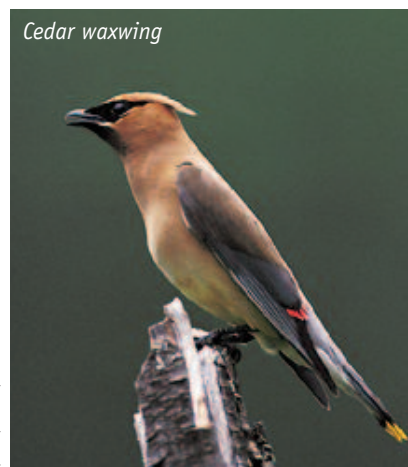
Pine grosbeak

Photo: Rob Curtis



Common redpoll

Photo: Rob Curtis



Cedar waxwing

Photo: Alan G. Nelson/Root Resources

### Chuck Westcott, compiler for the Barrington count from its inception in 1964 until 1995:

"Cold winter weather is, of course, anticipated, but three years were particularly brutal. January 1, 1969, December 17, 1979, and December 19, 1983, all brought sub-zero temperatures. In 1969, the 15-20 mph winds lowered the effective temperature to around minus 40°...tears running down cheeks actually froze and the only ones with warm feet were those wearing electric socks. I've been asked, 'Why go out in the winter's bitter cold to count birds?' For me it's the challenge of pitting one's self against the elements."

### David Johnson, a member of the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee and a participant in about 100 counts:

"Perhaps my favorite CBC season ever was in '77-78 when pine grosbeaks invaded Illinois. In Cook County at the Dam #1 Woods, while

participating in the Evanston North Shore count, John Hockman and I watched two pine grosbeaks eating ash seeds along the Des Plaines River. I have NEVER seen a pine grosbeak in Cook County since. That year I chased down two Bohemian waxwings in Lake Forest that were reported on the Evanston count. I saw one, and that was my Illinois lifer!"

### Al Stokie of Park Ridge recalls his most memorable count:

"December 25, 1991 started off like any other Christmas Day. For me, that means driving to Chicago's Montrose Harbor to take part in the annual lakefront Christmas count. My group consisted of Kanae Hirabayashi, Jeff Sanders, Eric Walters, and me. Jeff and Eric went to view the gulls in the harbor while Kanae and I walked along the rocks bordering Lake Michigan hoping to add a duck species or two. While walking, we noticed a strange white bird standing on the rocks. 'Its head sort of looks like a pigeon,' said

Kanae. It was a first winter ivory gull. Still, I wondered. I called out to Eric and Jeff, who hurried over and shouted, 'It's an ivory gull!' The gull disappeared over the lake, but went on to become a celebrity when Richard Biss rediscovered it at Burnham Harbor on the Sunday after Christmas. Hundreds of people from all over got to see the gull. It even had a feature role in at least two newspaper articles and several short segments on Chicago television stations."

### Sheryl DeVore, assistant editor of Chicago WILDERNESS and editor of Meadowlark:

"1988 marked my first Christmas Bird Count, and I had no idea what to expect. I spent the first hour climbing under and over bushes, dodging thorns and having near collisions with trees, looking for a northern saw-whet owl that never appeared.

"I found cedar waxwings, a tufted titmouse, and even a rough-legged hawk that day."



# *The Mingled Destinies of Beavers and People*

by Jack MacRae



Photo: Don and Pat Valenti/Root Resources

**I** trust beavers need no introduction. They are big, brown, bucktoothed rodents that chew down trees and construct dams. They have been sharing the land and waters of the Chicago Wilderness for the last 10,000 years or so with the human species. For a short period in the 17th and 18th centuries, their relative importance rose considerably when the fashion of the day dictated that ladies and gentlemen could only be properly dressed if they wore a felt hat, manufactured from the pressed fur of the beaver. The demand for beaver pelts was so great that, by the end of the 19th century, the beavers had been trapped out, essentially extirpated from Illinois.

For most of the 20th century, beavers were missing from the biodiversity of our region. People interested in seeing local beavers would have to be satisfied with captive beavers in zoos or with mounted specimens in museums. That is, until a 1950s project to reintroduce the beavers was initiated by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. (Earlier attempts to establish colonies of beavers had been successful elsewhere. The Fish and Wildlife Service had released several pairs of beaver into Jo Daviess County in the 1920s and '30s.)

As rodents are wont to do, the Cook County beavers reproduced rapidly. Within 20 years, beavers found their way across the Chicago Wilderness. The Des Plaines River, the Fox River, the DuPage River, and their many tributaries all became home to thousands of beavers. The wildlife that depends on beaver ponds had a great resurgence. Lovers of wildlife were thrilled that this appealing animal had been restored. Thrilled, that is, until the beavers started to disperse into, ahem, certain sensitive areas. To wit: On the southside of Chicago, in the historic Jackson Park Lagoon is the Paul Douglas Nature Sanctuary, affectionately known as Wooded Island. It is one of the premier sites in Chicago for birding; dozens of species can

be spotted in a relatively short time. This island is also home to a small colony of beavers, who until recently have maintained a fairly benign presence. But lately, the beavers have been taking more than their fair share: 75 large trees have been gnawed down, causing consternation among the birding crowd. The solution? Chain link fence has been wrapped around 60 or so trees, and on the advice of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, several hundred trees have been painted with a sand-impregnated varnish to deter chewing.

In Lake Calumet, within the "Big Marsh," a rookery of black-crowned night herons has been established in a large stand of common reed. These state-endangered birds nest communally, typically in trees, but in this instance their nests were located amongst the emergent vegetation. During the winter of 1998-99, however, a drainage culvert became plugged, disrupting the outflow of water, thus flooding the stand of common reed, effectively forcing the herons to search for new living quarters. The Chicago Department of Environment, with the help of various agencies, removed 30 truckloads of debris. The water receded for a while, then stopped. The reason? Beavers had dammed up the open culvert. This began a battle between city workers tearing up the dams, and the beavers rebuilding them. Fortunately for the herons, the common reed has regenerated and is expected to provide good nesting habitat for the year 2000 nesting season—weather, and beaver, permitting.

Poplar Creek is a little, meandering, spring-fed creek in the northwest corner of Cook County. The flowing waters provide excellent habitat for such uncommon fish species as the fantail darter and rainbow darter. It's also home to a colony of beavers who are doing their best to dam the creek to create a beaver pond. The problem is, a beaver pond would ruin the darters' spawning grounds, as slower



Photo: Richard E. Witkewicz

*Above: Beavers eat mostly bark. They cut trees at night and drag limbs to the safety of water, where they can eat in peace. Facing page: A child learns that destruction of trees by beaver is a part of healthy nature.*



moving water would allow silt to cover the gravel bed. Thus, in order to protect certain species, the beaver dams are removed on a regular basis, allowing the creek dwelling fish to procreate their species.

In DuPage County's Fullerton Park, resident beavers had created a pond through their damming activities. Shortly thereafter, the shore of this pond sprung to life with numerous wetland and wet prairie plants, as the buckthorn and box elder thickets became drowned out. The volunteer site steward recalls a huge increase in shore birds visiting the preserve. Unfortunately, the pond also affected an adjacent field, earmarked for future development. So, a device referred to as a beaver pipe was installed and the wetlands were effectively drained.

Along the border between Indiana and Illinois, vigilant members of the local Audubon Society alerted authorities to beaver activity at Wolf Lake. It seems beavers were gnawing into trees found growing along the slag banks of the lake. Birders were concerned that these trees, if lost to the beavers, could not be replaced, due to the current conditions of the shoreline. The authorities, however, told the birders (and the press) they planned to do nothing about the beavers, saying they were reluctant to raise the ire of the animal rights activists.

Lastly, one day several years ago, an Evanston firefighter named Jim arrived for his scheduled shift at the Central Street Fire Station #3 next to the North Shore channel. He parked his pride and joy, a shiny Volvo station wagon, in a seemingly safe parking spot. Unbeknownst to Firefighter Jim, the trees he parked under had been targeted by a hungry beaver. I'm sure you can guess what happened. No word on the insurance claim.

Of course beavers have a profound impact on their surroundings; they always have! But beaver activity cannot be labeled as good or bad, it's just who they are. While studies show plant diversity increases through their feeding habits, beavers have, in isolated areas, removed every tree in a park. The occasional flooding caused by beaver activity assists in a natural and important disruption in hydrology. In short, beaver activity helps some species, and hurts others.

In this day and age, the proverbial collision between nature and people is commonplace. Should beavers, like white-tail deer and cherry trees, be controlled when they threaten other species? One must remember, controlling beavers, like nearly all aspects of natural area management, is not achieved through a vaccine. It is not something that can be applied once and then never again.

Blaming beavers for flooding, loss of suitable bird habitat, and siltation of our waterways is wrong headed and stupid. Human development of our landscape is a far greater threat to the natural areas and systems than any rodent. In a natural setting, with natural processes in place, beavers are merely another interesting addition to a region's fauna. But, in a highly artificial landscape such as ours, with only fragmented islands of nature remaining, beavers can spell trouble for certain plants, animals and, of course, firefighters.

*Jack MacRae claims he was born at an early age in the midst of the Chicago Wilderness. He has had a 20 year career as an interpreter of natural and cultural history and is currently employed as a Naturalist with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County.*



Photo: Forest Preserve District of Cook County

*In 1961 Chuck Westcott (at left) and other Cook County Forest Preserve staff release beaver to restore and restock an important part of the natural ecosystem.*



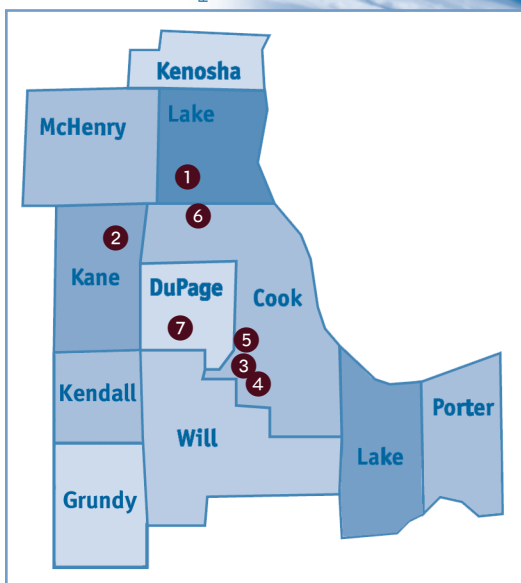
Photo: Anthony Mercera/Root Resources

*A beaver checks out a break in her dam. Soon she will repair it. Beaver ponds are a major habitat for other wildlife, from ducks to dragonflies.*

# Into the Wild

## OUR GUIDE TO THE WILD SIDE

Photo: Kim Karpales



① LAKEWOOD FOREST PRESERVE—Lake County

② BURNIDGE FOREST PRESERVE—Kane County

### CROSS COUNTRY SKIING IN COOK COUNTY

③ Camp Sagawau

④ Palos/Sag/Swallow Cliff Woods

⑤ Bemis Woods

⑥ Deer Grove

⑦ HERRICK LAKE FOREST PRESERVE—DuPage County

Maps: Lynda Wallis



# Natural Events

## C A L E N D A R

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

WINTER 1999–2000

### JANUARY

#### Long-Eared Owls

A man was recently arrested for killing and eating a long-eared owl. (This is not a true story.) His defense was that he was starving and only committed the crime to feed his family. A sympathetic judge acquitted the defendant, but questioned the man on what long-eared owls taste like. "Just like short-eared owls," the man replied.

Long-eared owls are hanging out in our area. These large dark owls spend their days sitting quietly in groves of conifers. They are the most nocturnal of our owls; rarely venturing out until well after dark. During the annual Christmas Bird Count, long-eared owls have been seen across the Chicago Wilderness, occasionally as solitary individuals, but usually in small groups. Late last winter, a veteran birder in DuPage County spotted a group of long-ears at Springbrook Prairie and spent several hours crawling on his belly to capture them on film. Now, that's what I call dedication.

#### Old Squaws

The winter sunrise over Lake Michigan is a beautiful thing to see. Our local great lake is also a wonderful place to see large, loose flocks of sea ducks, a type of waterfowl that spend their winters paddling about our area. One of our

visiting sea ducks, the old squaw, holds the Guinness world record for deep diving by a flying bird. In the late 19th century, commercial fisherman working in southern Lake Michigan frequently snagged old squaws at depths of 180 feet below the surface. They are swimming this deep in search of fresh water crustaceans. There is danger under the water for these ducks, however. During a two-month period in 1946, one Lake Michigan fisherman tragically caught an astounding 27,000 old squaws in his nets!

A fantastic place to see sea ducks is along the North Shore. There is a beautiful lakeside park in Lake Bluff—appropriately named Sunrise Park—where you can sit with a thermos of strong coffee (I take mine black, please) and enjoy the spectacle of sea ducks through your binoculars.

#### The Lichen in Winter

A colleague of mine—a very bright, eloquent guy—once told me, "When I think of winter, I think of lichens." I thought this to be a rather

odd thing to say, but as I admire this guy's work so much, I thought I should do some investigation into lichens in winter. He is correct! Lichens flourish from the melting snow and general damp conditions of our warm winter days. Winter is a great time for us to examine these beautiful and intricate growths on our rocks and trees. Lichens around here are a palette of grays, greens, oranges, and reds. They're found in many of our natural areas—on tree bark, rocks, and old wooden buildings.

My favorite lichens are the British Soldiers, tiny one-inch spikes with a small red top. They can be seen growing in parks and forest preserves, often on the roofs of old wooden structures, such as those wonderful Civilian Conservation Corps shelters that were built during the great depression.

### FEBRUARY

#### Visiting Shrikes

Winter is the time for a few northern shrikes to visit the Chicago

Wilderness. These marvelous birds spend the warmer months near the Arctic Circle, venturing into our area after the snow flies. They can be seen (rarely, mind you) perched at the top of bare, exposed trees. Look for a gray, stocky, robin-sized bird, with a black mask across their eyes. Crabtree Forest Preserve near Barrington and Thorn Creek Forest Preserve in Will County have had visits from northern shrike in recent years.

Both the northern shrike and the loggerhead shrike are predatory songbirds. They possess heavy hooked bills, but lack the strong talons of most birds of prey. To compensate for their inability to grasp their food, shrikes are known to impale their victims on sharp thorns. After the northern shrikes have left for their northern breeding grounds in the early spring, the loggerheads move in, looking for protected areas to raise their families.

#### Skating on Thin Ice

As a youth, my friends and I would play ice hockey on the frozen waters of Baker's Lake, on the southern edge of the Village of Barrington. After the games, we would skate for hours through the shallow marshy areas, jumping over muskrat dens and the ubiquitous, frozen, dried cat-tail leaves that dot the landscape. For my money, skating is



*Long-eared owl displaying defensive attitude.*

Illustration by Robert Gillmor from *Owls-Their natural and unnatural history*, Taplinger Publishing Company, 1970.

a more enjoyable way to travel than cross-country skiing. Perhaps it's because of the speed (I can skate faster than I can ski) and there are certainly fewer hills on a frozen pond! So, if you like that invigorating combination of peaceful winter nature and speed, lace up your skates and head out to a nearby frozen wetland. I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

## MARCH

### Tora! Tora! Tora!

I really don't want to sound uncaring or overly macho, but for those of us who like our nature "red in fang and tooth", the sight of a Cooper's hawk attacking a bird feeder is a pretty cool thing. Swooping in with a low approach, this medium-sized bird of prey slams into its victim feet first, sending an explosion of feathers into the air. Wow!

Cooper's hawks specialize in a diet of songbirds. With long tails and rather stubby wings, these accipiters are designed for maneuverability and quick aerial movements. They favor open woodlands for nesting sites and have benefited from the removal of buckthorn from our natural areas. A true success story is that Cooper's hawks have so increased in population that they have been removed from the endangered species list in Illinois. Way to go! The Old School Grove in Lake County, Illinois, with its stands of mature oaks along

the Des Plaines River, provides perfect habitat for these feathered hunters.

### Kingfishers

During the late winter, our resident male kingfishers are currently staking a claim to their parcel of real estate along local rivers and streams. They won't tolerate interlopers and will establish firm boundaries between their neighbors, which they guard with great zeal. Seasonally monogamous, male and females will pair up as soon as their province has been established. Once the spring thaw begins in earnest, home building will commence. The male initiates construction, with the female sitting close and offering words of encouragement. Soon both male and female will take turns excavating a long (several feet), narrow (several inches), horizontal tunnel

into the soggy stream bank, using their strong beaks and feet to loosen the earth. A nest chamber to contain the eggs will be located at the end of the tunnel.

Canoeists in our area should have little difficulty in locating kingfishers and determining their home range. Watch as these stocky birds fly ahead to the far border of their territory, and then loop back overhead, clacking noisily. While there are no known pre-copulatory displays, after mating the male will celebrate by performing an acrobatic aerial display soaring close to the water.

### The Otter Limits

Let's hope there are some Chicago Wilderness river otters in the family way, although this condition in river otters can be confusing. Males and females will mate in the late winter, but

their offspring may not appear for nearly a year. It seems that implantation of the embryo into the uterus is delayed for several months. Re-mating between otter couples occurs very soon after giving birth, leading to another yearlong period of pregnancy.

The wonderful Kishwaukee River system in McHenry County contains suitable otter habitat; it has a bed of smooth cobblestones and gently sloping banks. An adult male river otter—a likely victim of an automobile accident—was found two years ago, along the north branch of the Kishwaukee between the towns of Harvard and Woodstock. The McHenry County Conservation District's fine team of restoration ecologists positively identified him.

More recently, wildlife biologists in Lake County found





## WORK PARTIES

**W**ork Parties are for anyone interested in helping our natural areas. No experience is necessary. Volunteers are trained to do the restoration necessary to maintain and restore our native ecosystems. Typical activities include brush clearing, weed pulling, seed collecting, and seed spreading. Long pants and sturdy shoes are recommended. Call the contact people before the workday to confirm times and directions. Also, all county Forest Preserve Districts have many other workdays. Contact them for a complete listing.

## LAKE COUNTY

**Grant Woods (Lake Villa):**

Dec 18, Jan 15, Feb 19,

9 a.m. - Noon.

Call for meeting place.

Contact Tom Smith, Conservation Volunteer Coordinator, Lake County Forest Preserves:

(847) 948-7753, ext. 212.

**L**akewood Forest Preserve is a great winter sports destination with a sled hill, an ice skating pond, and three miles of trail for cross-country skiers. At more than 2,000 acres, Lakewood is also the largest forest preserve in Lake County, home to 17 endangered species, a bat colony, one of the best spots in the county for migratory birds, a nine-mile horse path, and, for some reason, an archive housing the largest public

collection of postcards in North America.

At first glance, the entire site resembles a quaint rural estate owned by a wealthy farmer of simple taste. Set between two cornfields, a driveway leads to a cluster of buildings all painted white: a barn, a brick silo, a museum, and a small two-story cottage. Further out, open fields give the impression of a park atmosphere. But out along the trails—used by hikers, horseback riders,

cross-country skiers, and snowmobilers—pockets of oak woodland and evergreen groves mix liberally with wetlands and open fields. Along the western edge is the Wauconda Bog Nature Preserve, designated a National Natural Landmark in 1974. Guarded naturally by poison sumac, this 67-acre bog harbors more than 100 plant species and attracts many birds. (Note: the wet, unstable soil makes trekking here problematic. Contact the Lake County Forest Preserve before visiting.)

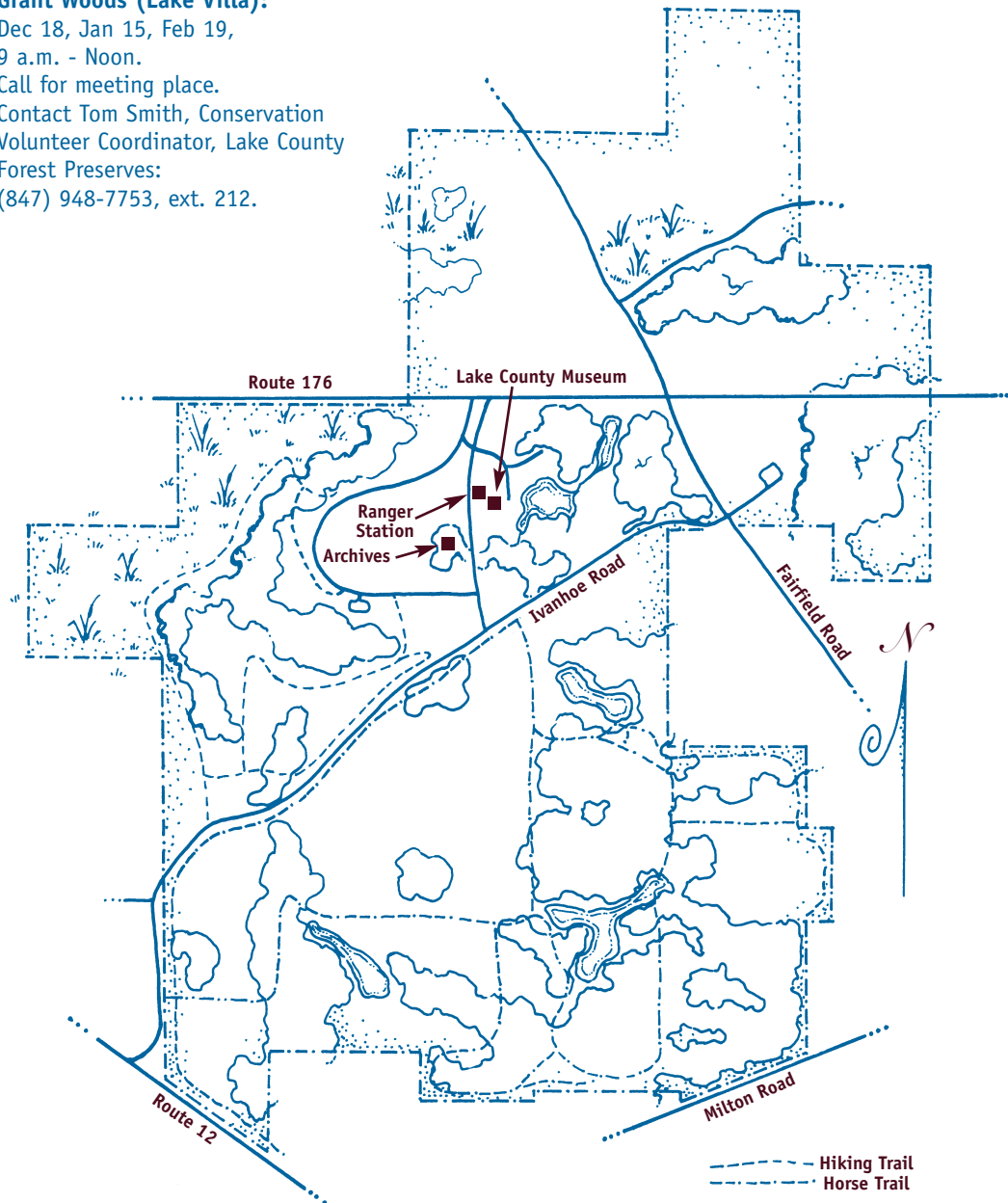
In the early to mid-1800s, this site was owned by local prairie farmers who harvested firewood and lumber. Later, in the mid-1900s, it became Lake County's largest farm, complete with livestock, orchards, gardens, and crops. In the early 1960s, it became a dairy farm and, in 1968, began to be acquired by the County.

For a little indoor education followed by some outdoor fun at Lakewood, check out the Coyote Howl on January 29 or the Knee High Naturalist program on January 28 (for ages 4 and 5). Prepayment is required and more information is available at Ryerson Woods, (847) 948-7750.

Admission to the Lake County Museum is \$2.50 for adults; \$1 if under 17; free on Tuesday. Museum hours are 11am-4:30pm Mon-Sat.; 1pm-4:30pm Sunday. Winter sports area hours: 6:30 am-7pm when conditions allow. Winter sports hotline: (847) 367-3676 x165.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take Rte. 12 north to Rte. 176. Follow Rte. 176 east and turn right into the preserve entrance.

—Christopher Percy Collier



**C**urse a Windy City winter all you want. Venture forth into the wild this time of year and you'll thank goodness you live in Chicago Wilderness.

With autumn leaves long gone and spring flora nowhere in sight, the golden grasslands at Burnidge Forest Preserve churn like a storm on the high sea—even if it is the dead of winter.

Turning off Big Timber Road in Elgin, I enter Burnidge, the largest forest preserve in Kane County. Soon I'm smacked in the eye with royal blue water wrapped in the bronzy open roll of classic Midwestern prairie. Traversing a wood-planked bridge along a 12-mile tangle of mowed grass hedges, my imagination wanders. I find myself in the midst of a grassy impressionistic vignette, a mosaic composed of many pin-thick stalks. A patch of blonde Indian grass beams as bright as the silky hair of tow-headed child. A light rusty swath of big bluestem fades away into the horizon. While an entire hill of prairie dropseed seizes up like a giant wave on the open water, great clumps of prairie grass come flush-

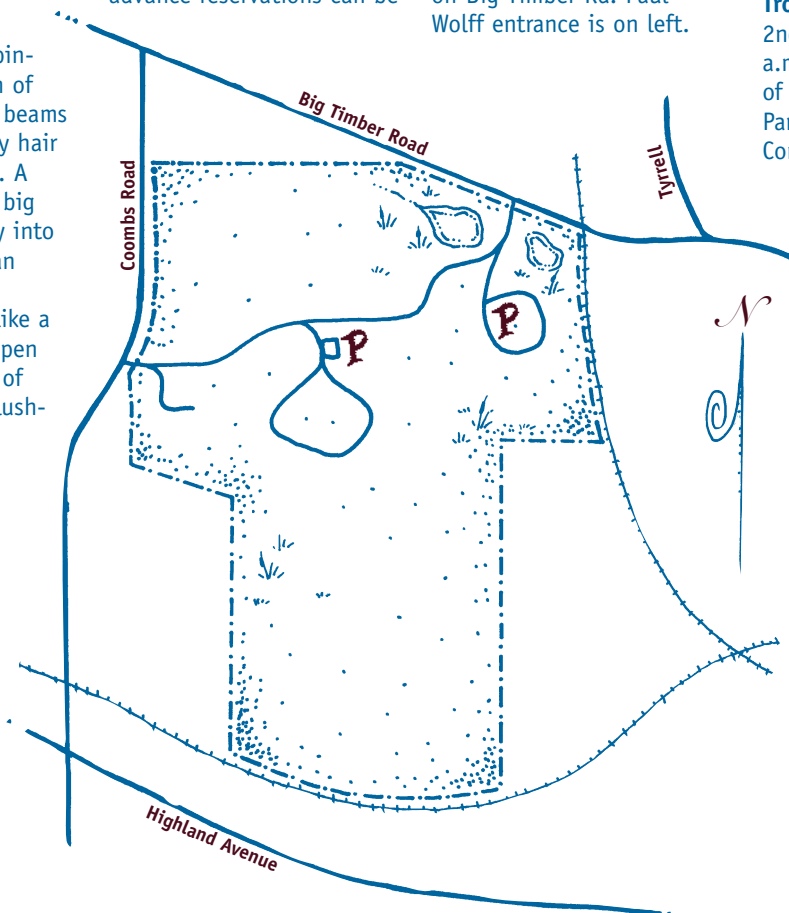
ing down, one after another, as though the wind were conducting its own earthy concerto—all heard in the soft speak of whisper.

Also tucked away within Burnidge's 500 acres is the Paul Wolff Campground, one of only three camping areas in the Kane County forest preserves and clearly the most popular. (The others are Bliss Woods and Buffalo Park.) In the western section, you'll find 48 trailer sites complete with electricity and water. In the eastern section, way off in woods, are 19 sites for campers yearning to get further away from civilization. Before leaving Burnidge, I make a solemn vow to return come spring toting a tent, sleeping bag, and every camera lens I own. Camping is permitted from May 1–Oct 31; advance reservations can be

made by calling (847) 695-8410. Rates range from \$5 for primitive sites to \$10 for luxe.

In 1991, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kane-DuPage Soil District made a joint agreement to develop wetland habitat here. As agricultural field tiles were removed and entire areas re-seeded, a series of watersheds now filter into Tyler Creek and two wetland acres have grown into almost 20. Prescribed burns are scheduled every other year and interpretive programs are orchestrated by Valerie DePrez on a regular basis. For further information about programs and volunteer opportunities, call (847) 741-9924.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take I-90 to Rte. 31. Take Rte. 31 south to Big Timber Rd. Turn west on Big Timber Rd. Paul Wolff entrance is on left.



### LAKE COUNTY (CONT.) Illinois Beach State Park (Waukegan):

2nd Saturday every month, 9 a.m. - Noon. Call for meeting place. Contact Don Wilson: (847) 872-8404 (home), (847) 937-2583 (work).

### Ryerson Conservation Area (Riverwoods):

Jan 22, Feb 26, 9 a.m.- Noon. Call for meeting place. Contact Tom Smith, Conservation Volunteer Coordinator, Lake County Forest Preserves: (847) 948-7750, ext. 212.

### KANE COUNTY

#### Aurora West (Aurora):

Jan 16, Feb 13, 1 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Call for meeting place. Contact Doug Kullen: (630) 896-9375

#### Ferson Creek Fen (St. Charles):

4th Saturday every month, 9 a.m. - Noon. East side on Rte. 31, north of St. Charles. Contact Mary Ochsenschlager: (630) 513-3338

#### Trout Park (Elgin):

2nd and 4th Saturday every month, 9 a.m. - Noon. Take Rte. 25 to north end of Elgin. Turn west on Trout Park Blvd. Parking lot on right by ball field. Contact Sue Bohne: (847) 697-4929



## WORK PARTIES

## MCHENRY COUNTY

**Alden Sedge Meadow (Alden):**

Dec 11, Jan 1, Feb 5, 9 a.m. - Noon.  
Call for meeting place.

Contact Dan Wilson: (815) 648-2389

**Cary Hillside Prairie (Cary):**

Jan 29, Feb 12, Mar 11, 10 a.m. -  
12:30 p.m. Call for meeting place.

Contact Mark Neiweem:  
(847) 639-8294

**F**or beginners and advanced skiers alike, there's no better place to start than at Camp Sagawau. Pending snow conditions, Sagawau Nordic is open 9:30 am to sunset every day starting in late December and running through early March where nearly 4 miles of groomed trail at every skill level await. Rent skis, poles, and boots for \$10, take a lesson for another \$10, or do both for \$18. Register as soon as

the Monday morning immediately preceding a week-end lesson and, as long as the official temperature at O'Hare Airport stays above -10° F, you're good to go. If you've got your own gear and you're ready to glide, just sign in for a free trail pass and hit the trail. Trails at Camp Sagawau consist of two loops both starting next to the old farmhouse. An easy 2.5-mile loop brings beginners through a predominantly open prairie,

while steep hills run through a more difficult 3-mile jaunt amid oak and maple. Also within Camp Sagawau, you'll find Cook County's only rock canyon.

Every Sunday, between January 16 and February 27, a free ski nature tour starts at 1:30 pm. Call (630) 257-2045 for details.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take Rte. 55 east to Rte. 83. Follow Rte. 83 south, then west. The entrance is on the left.

## BEMIS WOODS

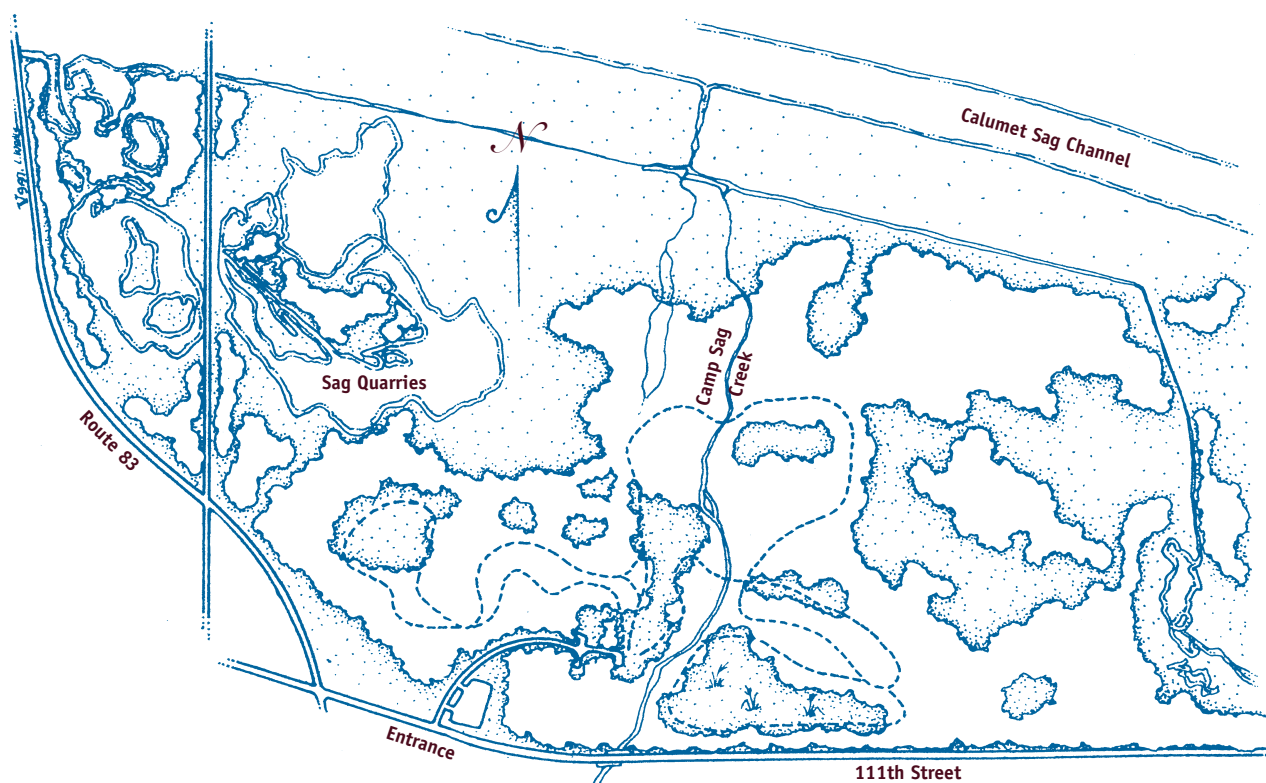
**N**ot far from the Brookfield Zoo, along the backwoods of a few charming suburban communities, you'll find a five-mile web of interconnecting trails working their way along the path of a small creek through a maze of short but steep ascents.

A compass and map are essential, unless you don't mind getting lost for a little while. Though following the path left behind by another may prove fruitful, it's easy to lose the trail and find yourself bushwhacking back to wider, more well-traveled paths. Bemis Woods is challenging, but not daunting.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take Rte. 290 to 17th Ave. Follow 17th Ave. south to 31st St. Take 31st west to Wolf Rd. Take Wolf Rd. south to entrance on right.

—Christopher Percy Collier

## Camp Sagawau



## DEER GROVE

**I**n the summer months, this 1,000-acre preserve is one of the more popular places to mountain bike in Cook County. So expect hills. In the western section, across Quentin Rd., find the start of an 8.3-mile multi-use

trail ranging anywhere from 2 to 10 feet wide just off the north parking lot. Though much of the western section is wooded, the eastern side has some open prairie where it's not uncommon to spot deer prancing across the fields.

**DIRECTIONS:** From the east, take I-90 west to Rte. 53. Take Rte. 53 north to Dundee Rd. Follow Dundee Rd. west to Hicks Rd. Turn left into preserve and right to the north parking lot.

## PALOS/SAG/SWALLOW CLIFF WOODS

**A**fter honing your skills at Camp Sagawau, you may want to head out into multi-use trails within the Palos Preserves. There are 18 miles of multi-use trails north of the Cal-Sag Channel and another 17 miles in the southern section. This is also the prime mountain bike destination in Cook County. In fact, it

was getting a little out of hand until the District started shutting down trails due to erosion. There are 6.2 miles of groomed trails in the Swallow Cliff Woods area and, if things get too tiring, you can always ski over to the toboggan run for some hot chocolate or a ride down one of its six slides.

**DIRECTIONS:** From the east, take I-55 west to Rte. 83. Take Rte. 83 south to Swallow Cliff Toboggan Slide entrance on right.

## WILL COUNTY

**Hickory Creek Barrens (Mokena):**

Jan 22, 8 a.m. - Noon.

From Wolf Rd., turn west on Kluth (intersection is one mile north of Rte. 30) and proceed to South Brightway. Turn west and meet at the cul-de-sac. Contact Volunteer Office, Forest Preserve District of Will County: (708) 479-2255

**Raccoon Grove (Monee):**

Jan 29, 8 a.m. - Noon.

On Pauling Rd., just east of Rte. 50 (Governors Hwy.), one mile south of Monee. Contact Volunteer Office, Forest Preserve District of Will County: (708) 479-2255

**Romeoville Prairie (Romeoville):**

Feb 12, 8 a.m. - Noon.

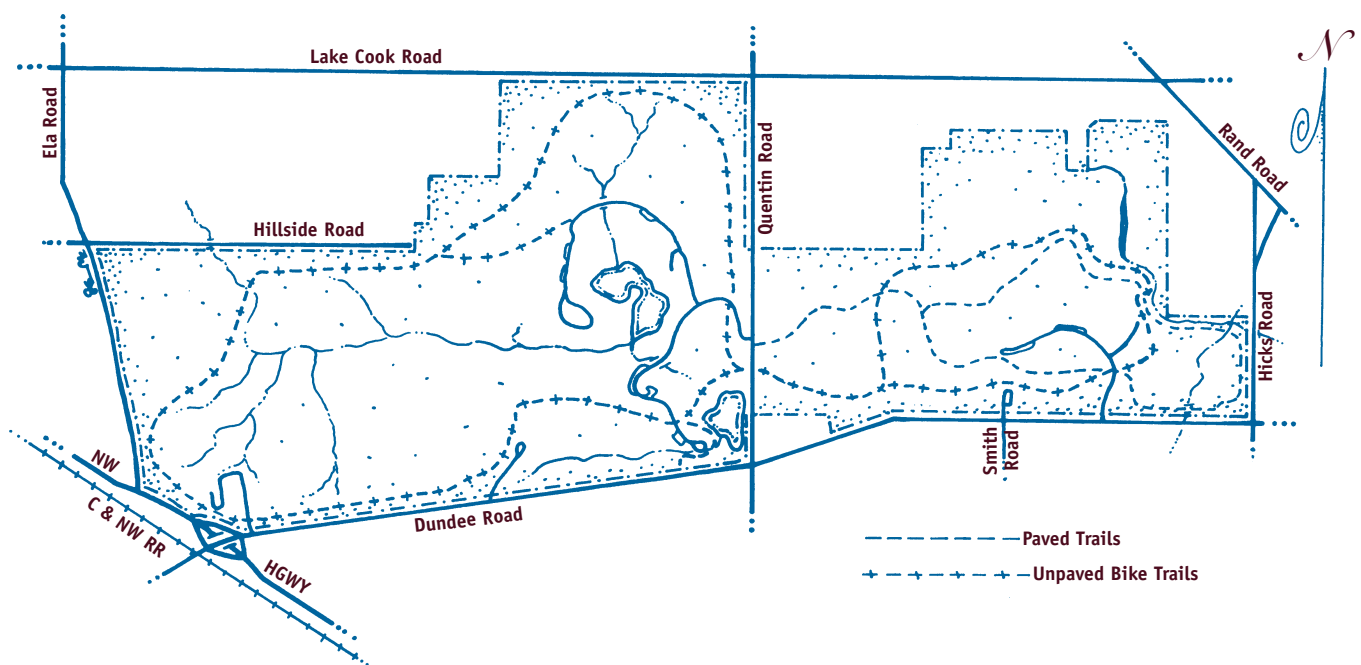
East of Rte. 53 on 135th St. Contact Volunteer Office, Forest Preserve District of Will County: (708) 479-2255

**Lockport Prairie (Lockport):**

Feb 26, 8 a.m. - Noon.

East of Rte. 53 on Division St. Contact Volunteer Office, Forest Preserve District of Will County: (708) 479-2255

## Deer Grove





## WORK PARTIES

**DUPAGE COUNTY****Eggerman Woods (Naperville):**

Dec 18, 9 a.m. - Noon.

Call for meeting place.

Contact Forest Preserve District of DuPage County: (630) 876-5929

**Mayslake (Oak Brook):**

Jan 15, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Call for meeting place.

Contact Forest Preserve District of DuPage County: (630) 876-5929

**Green Valley, Thunderbird Woods (Woodridge):**

Feb 5, 9 a.m. - Noon.

Call for meeting place.

Contact Forest Preserve District of DuPage County: (630) 876-5929

**St. Stephen Cemetery Prairie**

Feb 12, Mar 11, 9 a.m.

Call for meeting place.

Contact Bill Gunderson: (630) 665-5183

**W**inter boring? Not with the activities available at

**Herrick Lake Forest Preserve, located in central DuPage County.** Herrick Lake offers year-round activities for anyone who enjoys the outdoors, but it really comes into its own in the winter.

When Chicagoland's capricious snowfall finally arrives in sufficient quantity, cross-country skiers have miles of groomed trails available to them when Arrowhead Golf Course becomes Arrowhead Cross Country Skiing Headquarters during the winter.

When the trails of Herrick Lake are combined with those of adjacent Arrowhead Golf Course and contiguous Danada Forest Preserve, the Forest Preserve and Wheaton Park District personnel prepare groomed cross-country ski trails for public use.

The area is well known as a local place for easier, more family and group-oriented outings such as the Moonlight Skis, followed by a chili supper, scheduled for January 15th and February 12th. Call (630) 653-5800 for information on snow conditions, hours, and special events. Hours vary daily not only due to snow conditions, but also to allow some night skiing during the week as well as some weekends.

Herrick Lake is an ideal location for those who have considered cross-country skiing, but never tried the sport. Lessons for beginners of all ages are available on weekends through Arrowhead and skis are available for rent at \$7 for children and \$9 for adults.

The trails in this area offer a variety of wooded and open vistas while traversing a basically flat terrain that is not too challenging for a beginner but with enough distance to

still offer a good outing for more experienced skiers. The curving trails through the gently rolling area make people disappear from view and offer moments of solitude.

When the surface of Herrick Lake becomes safe, ice fisherman and skaters appear. The Forest Preserve District does not maintain the ice or clear the snow, but this does not mean that winter lovers are not present in abundance. The same good fishing that was there all summer is there in the winter and fisherman know it.

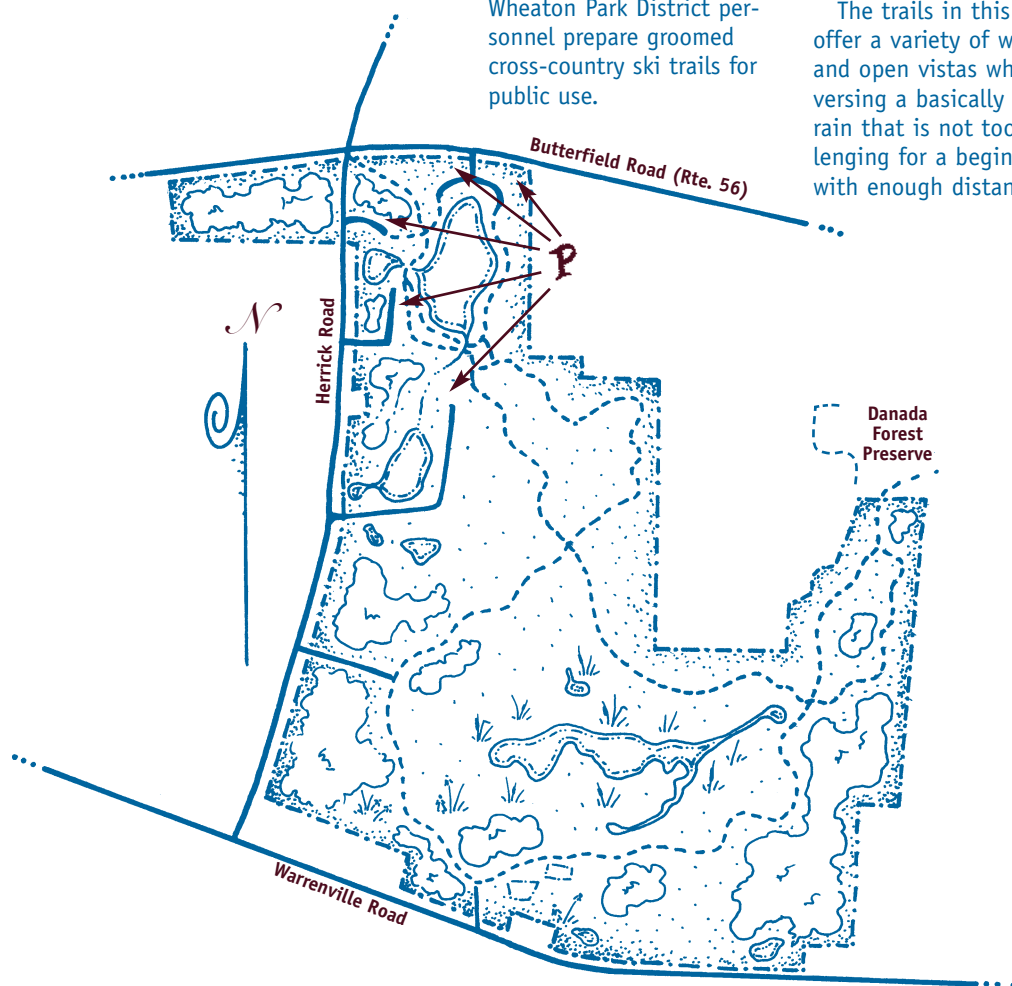
Other hardy souls bring shovels to clear the ice for hockey games and the pleasure skaters follow suit. Many of the area's residents learned to skate and play hockey on Herrick Lake's frozen surface.

Visitors even find winter hiking opportunities. The woods provide a break from the wind and the open areas offer the same wonderful views of marshes and fields that take on an entirely new look during winter, especially after a fresh snowfall when deer, raccoons, and other small animals leave their tracks.

No matter what the day's activity, if it should become too much winter, Arrowhead Golf Course's pro shop is an easy stroll from the main Herrick Lake parking lot and offers not only heat, but also a concession stand, restaurant, and bar to salvage—or complete—the day.

**DIRECTIONS:** The main entrance to Herrick Lake Forest Preserve is on the south side of Butterfield Rd., west of Naperville Rd. and just east of Herrick Rd., in Wheaton.

—Kandee Haertel



# Mighty Acorns: school-of-the-woods



Photos: Kim Kapalek/Life Through the Lens

It's a sunny day in March, and a fresh layer of snow blankets the rolling landscape in North Chicago's Greenbelt Forest Preserve. The woods are quiet on this late winter morning, their silence broken only by the occasional twitter of a bird—and the shrieks of a group of 5th-graders on a field trip from nearby Lyon Magnet School.

"We saw a deer!" yells 11-year-old Kevin Womack as he runs into a clearing with three breathless classmates. "We were exploring," he gasps, "and we saw deer tracks, so we followed their footprints, and we found four deer!"

Kevin is a Mighty Acorn, one of 5,000 students in Chicago-area schools learning to explore and restore natural areas in their own communities. Launched in 1993 by The Nature Conservancy in collaboration with the Cook County Forest Preserve District, the Mighty Acorns program was expanded last year by several Chicago Wilderness partners with a grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation. Today, 55 schools in six Chicagoland counties participate in the program.

While Kevin was off exploring the woods with an adult leader, the other half of his class was gathered in a tight semi-circle around Jan Ward, Youth Stewardship Coordinator for the Lake

County Forest Preserves. Ward, a petite blond with bright eyes and a pixie cut, is on her knees in the snow with a bow saw in one hand and a giant pair of loppers in the other.

"Always hold your tools facing down," she shouts to the students. "I don't want anyone cutting off each other's fingers."

What Ward wants them to cut off, instead, are branches of buckthorn and honeysuckle—non-native plants that have spread like wildfire in the 518-acre forest preserve, blocking sunlight and preventing the growth of oak trees and native flowers.

"We're making space for the plants that are supposed to be here, and getting out the ones that aren't," says Waukegan resident Alfredo Mazon, 11, as he tosses a buckthorn branch onto a growing pile of brush.

Three times a year—in the fall, winter, and spring—nine Mighty Acorns classes from Waukegan and North Chicago schools spend two hours at the Greenbelt Forest Preserve. They begin with a group activity that illustrates a key ecological concept. Then they split up: half the students work on stewardship activities; the other half explore the area with field instruments like binoculars, tweezers, magnifying glasses, and collection boxes. After an hour, the

groups switch.

By visiting the same location throughout the year, Mighty Acorns can observe seasonal changes and see the results of their stewardship.

"Last year, a class removed non-native plants from a small area in the fall and winter," says Ward. "When they came back in the spring, the ground was just covered with shooting stars. They were so excited."

"This program has given the forest preserve a whole new meaning for me; it's not just a place to have a picnic," says Waukegan resident and parent volunteer Lindsay Shepard, pausing for a moment from branch-cutting with his daughter, Lindsay. He thinks the program has helped her "learn how to respect nature and that everything is an important part of the ecosystem here."

When their work is finished, two large brush piles demonstrate to the class how much they can accomplish in a relatively short time.

"Every little bit helps," says Dawn Szweda, a Lake County Forest Preserve volunteer. "Even if the students clear around one oak, next year a little acorn could fall and grow into a new tree because the sunlight can now reach it."

That's what one Mighty Acorn can do.

—Caroline Arden Malkin



## Palos Park Tree Body: protecting trees, restoring the forest



*Pictured here clockwise from back/left: Betty Anderson, Linda Johnson, Keith Wolma, Marifran Peckenpaugh, Patricia Monson, and Carol Vandervelde.*

Photo: Erica Benson

Nobody likes it when Commonwealth Edison trims trees. Certainly not the residents of Palos Park in southwestern Cook County. Palos Park is a small village with a small budget, but lots of big, majestic trees. So when ComEd crews trimmed aggressively in 1993 to protect power lines, the residents responded with an uproar.

Restrained by a tiny tax base, however, Palos Park was simply unable to create a fully funded forestry department. So the village established Palos Park Tree Body. The name is suitably informal, even ambiguous, for an entity expected to use volunteers and creativity when its limited budget and lack of any full-time staff come up short.

The Tree Body name also captures the essence of Palos Park—an area still framed by the oak-dominated woodlands among which cottages were first set when University of Chicago professors sought a place of tranquil retreat in the late 1800s.

In the 1990s, that woodland frame is failing. A tree survey revealed that maintaining the health of the village's parkway trees would require 20 times the Tree Body's annual budget. At the same time, many trees on private property were in danger as few owners understood the value of the oaks on their properties. One man, for example, purchased a woodland lot and promptly began to cut every tree

in sight before he had even thought about where his future house would go. "My wife," he said in explanation, "loves grass."

One of the Tree Body's first major efforts was a campaign to pass an ordinance providing protection to trees on public and private property. When this struggle came to an unhappy end, some members quit. The 1996 survey made even more clear the paucity of the Tree Body's resources. Exhausted and disheartened, more members left. After a while, only Linda Johnson, the current chairman, and Carol Vandervelde remained.

The next year was like George Washington's winter at Valley Forge—a grim, dark time with renewal just beyond the horizon. In fact, Linda Johnson says, "This (period) was a good thing because it made us look around for expertise." Area experts and institutions, many of them members of Chicago Wilderness, gladly shared their knowledge.

What Linda and Carol learned broadened their vision. "We saw it's not just trees," says Linda. "This is biodiversity. This is ecosystem management."

Linda Johnson remembers the essence of consultant Paul Petan's challenging words: "...the problem with your group is you're not thinking big enough. You have to dream!"

Two years later, the Tree Body stands re-invigorated even as its chal-

lenges remain daunting. What has changed are attitude and presentation. While still singing the praises of the natural world for its own sake, the Tree Body now finds common ground with many Palos Park residents by also speaking in the positive rhetoric of property value protection. As Linda, a retired high school teacher, says, "The reason the property values are higher in Palos Park is because of the beautiful environment." When pocketbook-oriented residents understand that, they come to an important realization—incremental losses of trees and open space corrode the character of Palos Park with negative financial consequences for everyone.

A measure of the success of this approach came in July when many residents showed up at a village council meeting to resist the proposed sale of an "unused" wetland owned by the village. The council ultimately declined to part with the parcel.

The Tree Body now has many more volunteers and many more allies within the village government. Younger residents are also making their voices heard. An affiliated foundation is in the process of being created to attract more outside funding. Thinking big, the Tree Body successfully encouraged the village council to include strong emphasis on the protection of the village's natural resources and support for natural landscaping in the village's 20-year comprehensive plan.

While the Tree Body presses forward with a far-reaching vision, its members continue to mind the everyday details. For instance, members are helping to direct the Public Works department's tree maintenance operations and even guide the location and species selection for new tree plantings.

"What we feel here," Linda says, "is a lot of momentum building."

—Nathan Aaberg



## Snow buntings: Living snowflakes on shorelines and grasslands

Several inches of heavy snow fall one winter evening on rural fields near Glacial Park in McHenry County. In the morning, a flock of whitish finch-like birds with tawny capped heads and spotted cheeks bathe in the snow and interject chatty trills. When they fly to a field to seek seeds buried in the snow, their large white wing patches confirm their identity. These are snow buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), aptly named because they breed in the inhospitable Arctic tundra, but come to the Chicago Wilderness region in winter where they are completely at home in the cold, snowy climate.

The snow bunting breeds farther north than any other land bird, building nests of mosses and sedges on stony beaches and grassy tundras in the Arctic. The female must hide her nest well, in crevices or mosses to avoid predators such as Arctic foxes and snowy owls. Winter comes early to the Arctic. The cold kills the grasses and sedges, and when the last of the seeds have been plucked by snow buntings and other animals, these birds must fly south to find food.

The journey is treacherous; snow buntings are sometimes one step ahead of a blizzard, sometimes one step behind. By time they reach the Chicago Wilderness region, the brisk wind is signaling winter's arrival.

But snow buntings welcome the snow. On extremely cold nights, they sink as low as possible into the snow to keep their legs and feet from getting exposed to the air. Even when temperatures fall below zero, snow can provide insulation to the buntings, which can withstand temperatures of minus 40° F.

Birders start seeing snow buntings in the Chicago Wilderness region sometime in October. Look in rural grasslands, fields, and along the Lake Michigan shoreline for a light-colored, sparrow-sized bird with a short, conical bill, feeding on the ground in small flocks. Its mottled white, brown and tawny colorations blend in well with the snowy grasslands. Listen, too, for its distinctive flight call.



Winter plumage

Photo: Rob Curtis



Breeding plumage

Photo: C. Postmus/Root Resources

At the end of October, birders counted 100 snow buntings at Winthrop Harbor along the Lake Michigan shoreline. A week earlier, birders saw some 50 buntings at the North Point Marina in Waukegan Harbor. In winter, you may find snow buntings in fields at Fermilab in DuPage County, along the Lake Michigan shoreline at Montrose Harbor, at Illinois Beach State Park in Lake County, along the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, and along the roadsides near fields in rural areas, especially in McHenry and Kane Counties, among other places.

Truly a bird of the Chicago Wilderness in winter, the snow bunting typically does not go much farther south than central Illinois.

Usually only two or three snow buntings are counted south of the Chicago region during the annual Christmas Bird Count. Flocks of dozens to about 100 are counted on Christmas Bird Counts in the western portions of the Chicago region. Snow buntings are also numerous during counts in central Wisconsin, Michigan, and the Canadian provinces.

The buntings molt their buff and white winter plumage when they leave this region in late winter to journey north. By the time they have arrived at the treeless tundra to breed where daylight is continuous, they are wearing deeply contrasting black and white plumages.

—Sheryl De Vore



## White-footed mice: home recyclers



Mouse trails in snow

Photo: Joe Nowak

Last summer, a gray catbird built its nest in a shrubby woodland. But this winter, a different creature lives in the seemingly abandoned nest. On a brisk winter hike, you may walk right by an old bird's nest, not even knowing the life that may be brimming inside—a large-eyed, big-eared, brown-backed 1-2-inch long animal with snow-white underparts and feet, and long, thin tail. It's called the white-footed mouse.

The white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*) dwells mostly in woodlands, river bottoms, and shrubby areas. An acrobat on tiny feet, this mouse can climb on trees and shrubs where it creates a dome of plant materials, feathers, and down on top of an old bird's nest. Snuggled inside, the white-footed mouse can survive and

even bear young during cold winters.

The white-footed mouse and its close relative, the deer mouse, look nearly identical, although if placed side by side the deer mouse is often slightly smaller, with a shorter tail. Neither hibernates in winter and both are active at night. But they live in different places.

You won't find a deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) in a tree or shrub. This species doesn't climb. Instead it lives mostly in grasslands where it builds a burrow one to 12 inches below the soil. There it keeps warm and raises young.

Because so much of Illinois' grasslands have been lost, deer mice numbers are declining statewide. The white-footed mouse, which also lives in hollow logs, stump holes, thickets,

and underground burrows, may be more adaptable.

Both serve as important food sources for owls, weasels, foxes, and other animals. In fact, says Steven D. Bailey, an owl expert and ornithologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey, "the northern saw-whet owl, a Chicagoland Wilderness winter visitor, relies to a great extent on white-footed mice for its food." Bailey said in a recent analysis of saw-whet owl pellets, "the contents all had remains of the leucopus species."

Deer and white-footed mice get nicely fattened for their predators by eating plant seeds, including those from oak and hickory trees. The omnivorous rodents also eat insect larvae, spiders, and centipedes. They spend hours at night eating and eating. Small rodents need more food in proportion to their weight than do larger warm-blooded animals because it's hard for the little guys to conserve heat. They need a zippy metabolism to produce the extra warmth that counteracts the effects of a small body-to-surface-area ratio.

Some winter evening, when you are outside in a quiet woods, listen for soft scratching on a tree trunk or in leaf litter, as well as a quiet musical buzz. You're hearing a white-footed mouse searching for his midnight snack or singing, perhaps, for his supper.

—Sheryl De Vore



Photo: Michael Redmer

### MICE AND DISEASE

#### LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease, a serious condition affecting various body tissues, is transmitted by deer ticks. In its early stages

it is manifested as a skin rash, but it can also spread to the joints, nervous system, and to other organ systems in its later stages. White-footed mice can be hosts of the disease, transmitting it to the ticks which, when they become adults, can transmit it to humans. The Illinois Department of Public Health reports that the incidence of Lyme disease in the state has been declining since 1991. In some instances, Illinois residents probably got the disease in another state and came home with it. Health officials recommend wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and tucking pants legs into one's socks when walking through grassy areas. For more information, see the American Lyme Disease Foundation, Inc., [www.aldf.com](http://www.aldf.com)

#### HANTAVIRUS

Hantavirus pulmonary disease can be fatal. It is transmitted by breathing or touching rodent feces, including those of the white-footed mouse. However, it is not transmitted via rodent bites. Hantavirus causes flu-like symptoms including fatigue, fever, and muscle aches; later symptoms include coughing and shortness of breath. Pat Piercy of the Illinois Department of Public Health said Illinois has only had one confirmed fatal case of hantavirus. Of 70 mammals trapped near where the victim lived, 61 were the white-footed mice and seven tested positive for the disease. Bottom line is not to dig into or sniff rodent burrows. For more information: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps)





# Family Quiz Game

Test your local nature knowledge!

—by Catriona Bowman

## FOR THE BEGINNING NATURALIST (Reading helper may be needed)

1. What is the scientific word for an animal's long winter sleep?
2. Stick insects eat a) sticks b) grasshoppers c) leaves.
3. Clouds are made from a) smoke b) water c) dust.
4. What does nocturnal mean?
5. When a seed sprouts, which part of the plant emerges first?
6. What do you get if you cross an insect with a rabbit?

5. the root 6. Bugs Bunny  
leaves 3. b) water 4. being active at night, like an owl  
**FOR THE BEGINNING NATURALIST** 1. hibernation 2. c)

## FOR THE NATURE SCOUT

1. What nationality was Jean Jacques Audubon?
2. What is the other common name of big bluestem grass?
3. Which is the heaviest owl in the Chicago Wilderness region?
4. Which is the lightest owl in the Chicago Wilderness region?
5. Which of these are native to North America? White cross spider, Queen Anne's lace, Timothy grass, starlings, yellow jacket wasps, house sparrows, and dandelions.
6. Which Chicago Wilderness animal is the only North American marsupial?
7. What kind of insect is a firefly?
8. Which are the two classes of living animals that are warm-blooded?

Mammals  
snowy owl, which weighs in at 70 oz. (just over 4 pounds). 4. The Saw-whet owl, a real light-weight, at 4 oz. 5. None. 6. A beetle 7. Birds and  
**FOR THE NATURE SCOUT** 1. French 2. Turkey foot grass 3. The Arctic

## FOR THE JUNIOR NATURALIST

1. True or false: Spiders have antennae.
2. In which country, other than the USA, can tallgrass prairies be found?
3. Why is it a good idea to leave dead trees in the woods?
4. Where might you find rat-tailed maggots, ramshorns, cattails, arrowheads, and darners?
5. What is the loudest insect?
6. What is an herbivore?
7. Which is different from the other three?  
a) turtle b) lizard c) frog d) snake. (There are several correct answers. See how many you can get!)
8. What do you call crazy little bugs that live on the moon?

8. Lunatics.  
a) is also correct! Turtles are the only ones with a shell.  
reptiles. d) Snake, is also correct, as snakes don't have legs.  
Frog, because frogs are amphibians. The other three are  
400m (one fourth of a mile) away. 6. a plant eater 7. c)  
are dragonflies. 5. A male Cicada, which can be heard from  
are snails, cattails and arrowheads are plants, and darners  
4. In a pond. Rat-tailed maggots are fly larvae, ramshorns  
food, homes and shelter for many birds, insects and fungi  
**FOR THE JUNIOR NATURALIST** 1. false 2. Canada 3. as

## FOR THE SENIOR NATURALIST

1. To which family of mammals do mice, squirrels, beavers, and groundhogs belong?
2. True or false: Deer kill more people each year than any other wild animal in North America.
3. True or false: The Illinois River is polluted by sediments from cultivated land.
4. Where might you find a rattlesnake master, a shooting star, and an Indian paintbrush?
5. What is the major chemical pollutant in acid rain?
6. Which are the three groups of animals capable of powered flight?
7. Which is the odd one out? a) Cord grass b) Little bluestem c) Kentucky blue grass d) Indian grass.
8. What is the difference between a coyote and a flea?

1. rodents 2. True, indirectly. Deer overpopulation has caused an increase in deer-vehicle accidents which kill both people and deer. Source: Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources. 3. True. Source: Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources. 4. On the prairie—they are all prairie plants. 5. Sulfur dioxide, which combines with water to form sulfuric acid. 6. Insects, birds, and bats. 7. c) Kentucky blue grass. The others are prairie grasses. 8. One howls on the prairie, the other prowls on the hairy.  
**FOR THE SENIOR**



# Marsh Under Moonlight

by Miles Lowry



## NOVEMBER

One night two years ago, when battling insomnia and the light of the full moon streaming through my bedroom window, I decided to walk to Lincoln Marsh. It's just a few minutes from my home. There I was met with revelations I had not experienced since my days as a mountaineering instructor in Colorado.

The moonlight was so strong. No artificial light corrupted my night vision. Soon subtle shades of gray in the shadows gained strength

and power. I was hooked. Since then, I have visited the marsh at each full moon to make pictures.

In the summer, the night is cool. The sounds of sora rails and bullfrogs compete. Muskrats send smooth wakes behind them in the water. At times, egrets can be seen asleep in the oaks on an island in the middle. The great horned owl is a regular—his silhouette can be seen on a barren branch.

Cold winter nights are stark. Nature raw



## JANUARY

and severe. I set up my camera and tripod in the same spot each full moon, each lunar month, to interpret the effect of the light on the marsh. With 45-minute exposures, it is easy for me to adapt to the quiet darkness. As my camera records the image, I hike along the trails.

Canada geese sleep on the water before it freezes. Their movements are blurred by the long exposure. Airplanes emerge over the horizon, their lights making tracks in the sky.

From time to time I have worked to restore

this 130-acre marsh. I love the physical work. Who needs a gym? But as a photographer, the deepest inspiration for me is the break these acres provide from the visual monotony of the suburbs.

The Wheaton Park District, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, and the Conservation Foundation have all helped protect Lincoln Marsh. I pray that it will be here for centuries, for millennia. This soggy place is an island of magic for me and thousands of others, all of whom know it in our own way.



## 1 GRAND NEWS

Last August, Bill Hartwig, regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, authorized the Grand Kankakee Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (Spring '98, pp. 28-29). As proposed, the Refuge will one day include 30,000 acres scattered within the 3.3-million-acre watershed of the Kankakee River in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois. Once one of the largest inland marshes in America, this area provides habitat for two federally endangered species (Indiana bat and Mitchell's Satyr butterfly) and over 200 state-listed species.

"The Kankakee River Basin is a remarkably rich area, and we plan to protect and restore examples of its fine wetlands, oak savannas, and tallgrass prairies," said John Rogner, field supervisor for the Chicago field office of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "We also hope to acquire flood-plain areas that can be restored to wetlands, in order to expand this valuable habitat," he said. The stated goals of the refuge are to preserve, restore, and enhance all endangered or threatened species; restore and preserve a natural diversity and abundance of flora and fauna; protect migratory birds; provide the public with additional high-quality, wildlife-compatible public use and environmental education opportunities. Land acquisition

will be funded by allocations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

—Elizabeth Sanders

## 2 FOREST PRESERVES FOR SALE?



Photo: Alan Anderson

In June, the Board of Commissioners of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County voted to sell a 2.36-acre parcel of land along the Des Plaines River to the Village of Rosemont to expand its convention center. Board President John Stroger promised to use the proceeds of the sale to buy a larger parcel. He argued that the state's tax cap legislation prevents the District from raising acquisition funds. But John Sheerin, speaking for Friends of the Forest Preserve, pointed out that the region's other Forest Preserves have been raising hundreds of millions of dollars through referenda approved by voters.

Conservationists fought to stop the deal, arguing that this land was acquired by the District to remain protected for future generations and that, since the parcel was not 'surplus', its sale would establish a dangerous precedent for the District. Surplus land, as determined by the District's Advisory Committee, is land with no ecological or recreational value, often because it is a small, isolated piece of land. The Advisory Committee voted that this parcel was not surplus as it includes forest and wildlife habitat. Alan Anderson of the Chicago Audubon Society says, "It sure seems to be a woodpecker haven, with many trees along the river and inland providing nesting and feeding habitat." In his

visits, Anderson has also observed eastern phoebe, spotted and solitary sandpipers, black-crowned night-herons, great-crested flycatcher, Baltimore oriole, and non-avian residents from dragonflies and damselflies to a 12-inch female soft shelled turtle.

Many Commissioners sought to assure County residents that this sale would not by itself lead to others. Commissioners Cal Sutker, William Moran, Greg Goslin, and Mike Quigley, however, opposed the sale of land. Commissioner Moran, for instance, listed his reasons for voting against the sale: "I voted no because I believe that this sale would set a bad precedent for the future of our Forest Preserve lands. Our goal should be to acquire more land, and not to sell the existing, which has not been declared surplus. Even though the money from the sale is to be used for the procurement of future lands, it's the principle of selling non-surplus lands which I believe is far more important to the future of our Forest Preserves."

—Bill Eyring

## 3 GRASS ON A COOL GREEN ROOF

Native peoples called it "chi-ca-gua". Soon the nodding wild onion, Chicago's namesake, will be growing literally on top of City Hall. It and many other native plants will compose the newest architectural innovation in Chicago: a "green roof." It's all part of US EPA's Urban Heat Island Pilot Project to test ways to cool cities in the summer.

"Dark-roofed buildings and dark pavement absorb the sun's rays, warming the city by as much as 4° to 6° F" said William Abolt, Commissioner of the Department of Environment. "The City Hall garden will indicate how effective rooftop gardens may be in reducing urban temperatures," said Virginia Gorsevski, program analyst with the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation.

"Mayor Daley was impressed by the beauty and efficiency of the rooftop gardens he saw during a recent visit to Hamburg, Germany," said Abolt, "and he wanted to try something similar here." The 20,300 square foot, \$750,000 rooftop garden will be paid for by part of a \$25 million-a-year, four-year commitment to conservation programs by Commonwealth Edison Co., the city's major power company.

—Elizabeth Sanders

## 4 HEADWATERS OF THE CHICAGO RIVER PROTECTED

In October, after more than a year of negotiations, the Village of Lincolnshire purchased 63 acres that include the headwaters of the West Fork of the Chicago



Two sites in Chicago Wilderness had plants found nowhere else on earth. The marshes of Lake Calumet had American thismia (now extinct). A Kankakee River island had Kankakee mallow (still doing fine).

River, provide a connection to Florsheim Park, and harbor a small population of a state-threatened plant species known as marsh speedwell. The original park contains high quality prairie and oak woods (with a floristic quality index of 82, indicating the presence of highly diverse and conservative plant species). It is a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve.

The newly acquired parcel is bordered by Everett and Riverwoods Roads and I-94. The headwaters of the Chicago River, located on the eastern portion, contains hickories, oaks, and musclewood and is high quality oak forest, though invaded by buckthorn and in need of restoration. The Village, with help from Friends of the Chicago River and Lake County Stormwater Management Commission, hopes to secure funding to restore the headwaters and surrounding watershed. Village of Lincolnshire restoration projects are underway at Rivershire, Spring Lake, Balzer, and Florsheim Parks. The Village schedules work parties every Friday at alternating sites; anyone interested should contact Lydia Scott, assistant to the director of Public Works, at (847) 883-8600.

—Kathy Kowal

## 5 PEREGRINE FALCON DEFEATS NIGHTHAWK

The peregrine falcon edged out the cedar waxwing and four other candidates to become Chicago's first-ever Official City Bird. The Official Bird election was the brainchild of Chicago Audubon's Terri Likens, who had learned of a similar program in Portland, Oregon and thought it would be a great way to raise public awareness of bird species in Chicago. The Chicago Department of Environment provided funding for ballots and campaign posters. Ballots were cast in genuine Board of Election voting booths October 16-22 at

area parks, schools, museums, and cultural centers as part of Nature Week in Chicago. Other candidates on the ballot were (in order of votes received): the cedar waxwing, the common nighthawk, the eastern kingbird, the belted kingfisher, and the black-crowned night heron.

Photo: Malachi Ritscher

More than 24,000 ballots were cast. The peregrine will serve a four-year term as the ambassador of Chicago's habitat areas, then will face its first re-election challenge.

—Mark Sheehy

## 6 GRAINGER WOODS GROWS

On September 17 the Lake County Forest Preserves Board of Commissioners approved the purchase of a 34-acre parcel adjacent to Grainger Woods. The new land purchase protects environmentally sensitive wetlands, a sedge meadow and wet-mesic prairie, and brings the Preserve's total acreage to 291. "This purchase provides further protection for a rare northern

flatwoods forest and seven endangered species found at Grainger Woods," said Board President Carol Calabresa. In 1996, the Grainger Corporation donated 257 acres to the Lake County Forest Preserves. This constituted the largest single land donation in the Forest Preserves' history and is part of Grainger's unique conservation development plan for its new 515-acre corporate headquarters. Grainger Woods Conservation Preserve is located on St. Mary's Road and Route 60, just west of I-294 near Mettawa. For a free set of trail maps and a copy of the Forest Preserves' free *Horizons* newsletter, call (847) 367-6640.



CHICAGO/NATURE.COM

An online photo gallery & store

featuring the magic of

UNTAMED CHICAGO

through the eyes of Chicago native and nationally published nature & wildlife photographer

MIKE MACDONALD

1-877-MAC-FOTO (toll free)

Limited Edition Prints

Greeting Cards

CHARTER SCHOOL • VIEWS OF OPEN LAND FROM EVERY HOME • SPACIOUS FRONT PORCHES

CHOOSE FROM OVER A DOZEN MIDWEST HOME DESIGNS FROM \$200,000-400,000

ORGANIC COMMUNITY GARDEN • FARMERS' MARKET ON SATURDAY MORNINGS DURING SUMMER



We share 350 acres  
of open, protected space.

By clustering our homes together,  
we saved over 60% of our land.  
Come share it with us.

Prairie Crossing

ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S FIRST CONSERVATION COMMUNITIES



847-548-5400 or www.prairiecrossing.com

TRAINS TO CHICAGO & O'HARE FROM THE PRAIRIE CROSSING/LIBERTYVILLE STATION



WINTER 2006





Camp Red Mill

Photo: Ronald Trigg

## 7 A VICTORY OVER SPRAWL

"It was a remarkable coming together of people and organizations that saved Camp Red Mill," said LaPorte County (IN) Parks Foundation President Jim Jessup. The local Girl Scout Council announced in September 1998 that it wanted to sell the 160-acre property for \$325,000. "We had no money and no plans for acquiring it. It seemed an impossible dream to put together so much money in time to save the land from developers keenly interested in the property's potential both for upscale housing and peat mining," said Jessup. By last July, however, all the pieces had been assembled, and a deal for the land's purchase was closed.

"Camp Red Mill is a significant natural area," said Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ecologist Tom Post. "The many springs and seeps on the property form the headwaters of the Little Calumet River, and the property's wet woodlands harbor several rare plants, including rough sedge and American golden saxifrage."

The Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund, as administrator of a grant awarded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, facilitated the commitment of \$65,000 in federal funds for the project and donated \$2,500 of its own. When the Indiana DNR agreed to accept 107 acres as a state nature preserve, the Indiana Heritage Trust—a state agency that finances land preservation through the sale of environmental license plates—contributed \$160,000. The Northern Indiana Public Service Company also gave \$50,000. Local donations totaling \$50,000 from scores of individuals and organizations were matched by an additional \$50,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment, through LaPorte County's Unity Foundation.

The property will eventually become a LaPorte County Park, and plans are already underway to renovate existing structures for use in environmental educa-

tion programs. The bulk of the property, however, will remain a natural area. "Future generations will be able to enjoy and learn about nature in this beautiful setting," says Heinze Fund executive director Paul Kohlhoff, "only because concerned local citizens were able to forge a partnership with government and business for the general good of the public."

—Ronald Trigg

## 8 NATURE WEEK

The city of Chicago celebrated its first-ever Nature Week from October 16-23, bringing people of all ages closer to nature by engaging them in a variety of activities. Mayor Richard M. Daley launched a new initiative called Nature Chicago to coordinate the resources of all the city's nature-related organizations, institutions and government departments to foster a unified awareness and stewardship of nature in Chicago through conservation,



Voting for the city bird

Photo: Chicago Department of Environment

planning, and education. This initiative seeks to provide natural areas and nature programs in neighborhoods; enhance habitat, water quality, and recreational use of Chicago's waterways; improve the city's "green" infrastructure such as bike trails; and encourage conservation-minded design and development.

In after-school programs during Nature Week, children made leaf rubbings, searched for bugs, and learned about nature in their neighborhood. "I know there is lots of nature in my neighborhood, and I think it would be ugly without it," said one youngster. Thirty environmental organizations and institutions set up displays in Daley Plaza for a Nature Festival, attracting downtown workers out for a

lunchtime stroll. Evening lectures for adults, covered topics like "Landscaping with Native Prairie Plants."

—Nicole Kamins

## 9 WRECKLESS ABANDON

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore recently conducted an innovative site restoration project: airlifting junk from sensitive habitat. Before becoming a national lakeshore, a large roadless section had been a local dumping ground with auto bodies and large appliances left to degrade in an area that also happens to be prime habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. Traditional methods of removing the junk would have severely impacted the wild lupine—he sole food source for the Karner butterfly larvae. Instead, the scattered debris was gathered up by hand and packaged for removal by a contract helicopter. The nearly 14,000 pounds of material removed during two dozen flights was hauled away by a local recycling firm. The event received extensive regional media coverage focusing on the resource management benefits of the project.

## 10 PRAIRIE GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

The Liberty Prairie Conservancy has just produced a Prairie Awareness Program that provides a wealth of information for elementary school teachers about endangered Midwestern grasslands. The program includes a 4th-6th grade curriculum, teachers' guide, teachers' activity packet, and a video called *Jason's Prairie Journal*. Kits also include posters and bags of mixed native tallgrass prairie seeds to encourage youngsters to plant a grassland of their own. A glossary helps children develop an ecological vocabulary.

The Prairie Awareness Program can be purchased by Chicago Wilderness area educators of 4th-6th grade, by calling (847) 548-5989, or e-mailing to [info@libertyprairie.org](mailto:info@libertyprairie.org). Supplies are limited. The program was produced by A+ Media and partially funded by ComEd.

—Sheryl De Vore

## 11 STEWARDSHIP FORUM

The Morton Arboretum Naturalist Certificate Program is sponsoring a stewardship forum to explore the "Effects of Land Management on Illinois' Bird Populations." The effects of restoration activities on bird populations has been cited as both a major concern and a major success. Do methods exist that can maximize the value of ecosystem management for bird conservation?



This one-day seminar assembles five experts on the subject: Jeffrey Brawn, Ph.D., population ecologist, Illinois Natural History Survey; Angelo Capparella, Ph.D., associate professor of Zoology, Illinois State University; Dennis DeCoursey, director, Chicago Bird Observatory; James Herkert, Ph.D., listing coordinator for Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board; and Brad Woodson, restoration ecologist, McHenry County Conservation District. The day will conclude with a roundtable discussion.

**Date and time:** January 29, 2000;

**9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

**Place:** Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois

**Fee:** \$105 non-member, \$85 member (includes lunch)

**Information:** Jeff Skibins, (630) 719-2458

## 12 WINTER CHAUTAUQUA

Sponsored by the Geneva Forum for Arts and Education and The Geneva Park District, Peck Farm Park is hosting a Winter Chautauqua that opens with a community perspective program, "Landscape Genealogy." Art classes, storytelling, personal renewal workshops, a drum circle, and a jazz concert will round out the celebration. Fees vary.

**Date and time:** February 19, 2000;

**8:30 a.m.-9:00 p.m.**

**Place:** Peck Farm Park, Geneva, Illinois

**Information:** Dilip Das (630) 262-8244

## 13 NATURAL LANDSCAPING SEMINAR

"Think Globally—Act Locally" and glean insights from former astronaut and director of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History Dr. Jay Apt and Dr. Bob Breunig, director of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at a seminar sponsored by the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee of the McHenry County Defenders, McHenry County College, and the McHenry County Conservation District. Attendees will hear about the impact of human civilization on the Earth and the role of native plants in helping to provide remedies.

**Date and time:** February 26, 2000;

**8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**

**Place:** McHenry County College, Crystal Lake, Illinois

**Fee:** \$35 includes lunch

**Information:** McHenry County Defenders (815) 338-0393

## 14 BIRDING AMERICA IV

Discover great places, great people, and great birds from the Chicago area to the extremes of the Americas. Sponsored by Chicago Audubon, the Birding America

conference will highlight special birding destinations, here and abroad. A new feature this year will be a set of skill-building workshops, designed to help people become better birders and make birding more interesting.

Keynote speaker Richard Knapton from Eagle Eye Tours will talk about birding in Costa Rica. Concurrent sessions include Steve Kelling from Cornell Lab on "Bird Research"; and Walter Marcisz and Sheryl DeVore on "Warblers by Sight and Sound". The closing speaker will be Greg Butcher, Editor of *Birders World*, presenting "Regional Specialty Birds of the 48 States".

**Date and time:** April 1, 2000;

**9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

**Place:** Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe, IL

**Fee:** \$30 includes parking, late registration (after March 21) \$35

**Information:** Chicago Audubon (773) 539-6793

## 15 HABITAT COUNTS AT RYERSON SYMPOSIUM!

Thomas Lovejoy, former director of the World Wildlife Fund, will deliver the keynote address for the Friends of Ryerson Woods Special Millennium Nature Weekend and Symposium in May. This weekend event will feature bird walks, workshops, hands-on activities, and displays for

children and adults, focusing on the theme, "Habitat Counts!" Lovejoy will speak on Sunday, May 7, in the early afternoon.

Learn and celebrate during the peak of bird migration and wildflower blooming on the beautiful grounds of Ryerson Conservation Area in the Lake County Forest Preserves.

**Date:** May 6-7, 2000

**Place:** Ryerson Conservation Area, Deerfield

**Information:** Ryerson Woods

(847) 948-7750

## 16 NATURE WORKS

A crackling fire, the aroma of coffee, some hearty muffins, and a good book will all be part of Nature Works Café, a new program offered by the Forest Preserve District of Will County. Nature Works Café is a book discussion group that will meet at Plum Creek Nature Center on the fourth Wednesday of the month, January through April.

**January 26—Pilgrim at Tinker Creek**

**by Annie Dillard**

**February 23—A Sand County Almanac**

**by Aldo Leopold**

**March 29—Desert Solitaire**

**by Edward Abbey**

**Time:** 7:00-9:00 p.m.

**Place:** Plum Creek Nature Center, Goodenow Grove F.P., south of Crete

**Information:** Forest Preserve District of Will County, (815) 727-8700

CHOOSE FROM OVER A DOZEN MIDWEST HOME DESIGNS FROM \$200,000-400,000



## Use 50% less heat and feel warm all over.

Our homes are built using the  
energy-efficient Build America program  
approved by the U.S. Department of Energy.  
Come feel the warmth.

### Prairie Crossing

ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S FIRST CONSERVATION COMMUNITIES

847-548-5400 or [www.prairiecrossing.com](http://www.prairiecrossing.com)

CHARTER SCHOOL • VIEWS OF OPEN LAND FROM EVERY HOME • SPACIOUS FRONT PORCHES

ORGANIC COMMUNITY GARDEN • FARMERS' MARKET ON SATURDAY MORNINGS DURING SUMMER

TRAINS TO CHICAGO & O'HARE FROM THE PRAIRIE CROSSING/LIBERTYVILLE STATION



## 17 PENNIES FOR THE PRAIRIE



Photo: Pam Meiser

When faced with the daunting task of raising about \$480,000 to save 80 acres of open space adjacent to Barrington's Flint Creek Savanna from development, Citizens for Conservation (CFC) member Jo Seagren remembered that every little bit helps. Seagren, Melissa Warshaw, and other volunteers decorated and distributed milk and water cooler jugs to local businesses and area elementary schools in a "Pennies for the Prairie" campaign. By late fall the children had collected almost 800 pounds of change totaling \$2,411.

The expanded preserve will contain nearly a mile of creek, four oak groves, assorted wetlands and 30 acres of prairie. Pam Meiser, teacher and student council advisor at Rose Elementary School, challenged her students to predict what their milk jug full of pennies weighed each week. They charted predictions, weighed the jugs in the nurse's office, and recorded amounts. "Some kids even took their allowances to the bank to trade them in for pennies," said Meiser. After six weeks of wholehearted fundraising, Tami White's class collected almost 131 pounds of change and won a Student Council/Parent Teacher Organization sponsored ice-cream party.

—Alison Carney Brown

## 18 BEST BURN SEASON IN MEMORY

That's what most land managers have been saying about fall 1999. But Wayne Lampa, whose memory goes back to DuPage County Forest Preserve District's very first burns said, "Well, you get a fine opportunity like this every 10 to 12 years. 1988 was another good one. There are many important areas that just won't burn until you have a long dry season like this."

Lake County Forest Preserves' Ken Klick said, "It's been a rewarding season—exhausting but rewarding. We burned an incredible 30 sites. We burned every day between October 15 to December 3—except for three days, two because it was too windy and one because it was raining."

As this issue goes to press, DuPage County had burned an impressive 4,700 acres out of a goal of 5,400. (There will be a summary report of the 1999 season in the spring issue.) DuPage's Cindy Hedges pointed out that a year like this is especially important for areas badly infested by non-native grasses. "They burn poorly if at all unless it's really dry," she said.

The focus in most counties was on hard-to-burn areas. In some wooded areas, a fall like this is the only opportunity to burn without winds so strong that the old oaks are likely to burn too. And for marshes clogged with excess cattail, a dry fall burn is likely to thin them out to make room for the plants, birds, and other species of open "hemi-marsh." According to many land managers, the last fall of the millennium was distinguished for "quality burns."

But Lake County's Klick made perhaps an even more profound point. "Perhaps the greatest accomplishment was on a different level. We demonstrated to our Board that we can burn under dry conditions without problems. They had faith in us, and we lived up to it."

## 19 98 in '99: NEW MEMBERS

On November 22, Chicago Wilderness welcomed six new members bringing the total number of organizations to 98. The **Environmental Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences at Loyola University of Chicago** offers numerous courses relating to biodiversity and conservation. Faculty research projects include assessing effects of major land-use changes on stream quality in McHenry County, studying attempts to reverse cattail invasion at Ryerson Woods, and monitoring impacts of non-native species on Lake Michigan biodiversity. **DePaul University Environmental Science Program** provides education on local and global environmental issues. Through teaching and research activities, faculty seek to foster concern for the protection, restoration and stewardship of Chicago's natural environment. The 13-acre **Emily Oaks Nature Center**, a Skokie Park District facility, has

been a restoration site since 1988. The center's native plant garden for seed production is maintained solely by local volunteers. Emily Oaks' annual summer camp focuses on kids' relationship with nature. **NiSource Environmental Challenge Fund** is a not-for-profit corporation created by Northern Indiana Public Service Company to stimulate local efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance the environment in the NIPSCO service area. The Fund provides grants for biodiversity restoration/enhancement projects. The **Park District of Highland Park** offers programs to enrich the quality of community life through a variety of leisure pursuits and environmental education. The ongoing restoration of the 100-acre Heller Nature Preserve is a Park District project. The **River Forest Park District** seeks to acquire, develop, and preserve recreational open space and park facilities. The Park District seeks to provide opportunities for residents to become active participants in restoration and conservation efforts.

## 20 WASTE NOT

When it looked like the seven million ton Prairie View landfill next to Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie near Joliet was going to expand to 20 million tons capacity, activists sprang into action. Members of the Sierra Club, Thorn Creek Audubon Society, and Midewin Alliance wrote letters, testified before the Will County Board, and submitted petitions to the Illinois Pollution Control Board (Spring '99, p. 32). "The intent of the 1996 legislation that created Midewin, the National Cemetery, and two industrial parks, has always been that this would be a small landfill for waste from Will County only," said Marianne Hahn, president of the Midewin Alliance. With no deed restrictions, however, the county could have enlarged the landfill allowing garbage from much of northeastern Illinois to be deposited there. But Congressman Jerry Weller, apprised of the potential danger to Midewin's fragile habitats, sponsored an amendment to the Defense Department

## I PLEDGE

On June 1, 1999, nearly 1,000 Chicago third graders graduated from the five-month North Park Village Nature Center's Neighborhood Naturalist program. During the ceremony, children recited the Neighborhood Naturalist Pledge: "I pledge to be a good Neighborhood Naturalist; I pledge to protect the trees in my neighborhood; I pledge to keep nature in my neighborhood healthy."

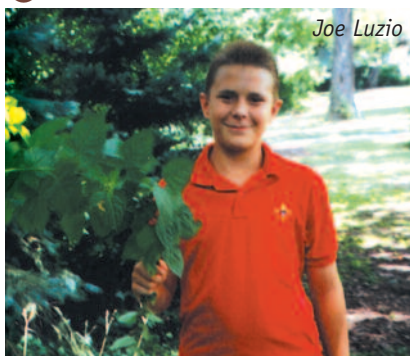


budget that limits the landfill to waste from Will County and municipalities lying partly in the county. Weller's amendment became part of the signed bill in September.

Meanwhile, Waste Management of Illinois Inc. is seeking a permit for the site from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The Sierra Club and other groups are urging Illinois Governor George Ryan's administration not to grant a permit for the landfill unless threats to Midewin's Prairie Creek are addressed and eliminated.

—Alison Carney Brown

## 21 THEY WILL COME



Joe Luzio

When asked if she planned to truck in animals to stock the proposed prairie at the Wildwood Nature Center at Maine Park in Park Ridge, Supervisor Julie Greve stated, "No, if we build it, they will come." The plan will transform the site into a prairie grove harboring more than 150 species of grasses and flowers. Grasses such as big and little bluestem, bottle brush, Virginia rye, along with blackeyed Susan, asters, wild blue iris, and bee balm will provide habitat for many species of birds, butterflies, small mammals and more.

Pizzo & Associates, landscape architects, has designed the restoration and will begin work this spring. The Wildwood Nature Center hosts a summer nature camp for more than 100 children. A local Eagle Scout, Joe Luzio, approached Greve for a nature project and she assigned him the task of removing non-native trees and shrubs. This ambitious scout is developing a map and field guide identifying the flora. The restoration may yield another dividend by un-inviting Canada geese, the scourge of manicured golf courses and parks, which prefer to avoid high grasses where their predators might hide. To help out, contact Greve at (847) 692-3570.

—Michael Graff

Special thanks to Jack Darin of the Sierra Club for his help with the news. If you know of news leads or exciting tidbits, contact editor Alison Carney Brown at [ac\\_brown@earthlink.net](mailto:ac_brown@earthlink.net) or P.O. Box 101, Wilmette, IL 60091.



*Ruellia humilis*

## The Natural Garden, Inc.

*Specializing In Native & Ornamental Perennials & Grasses*

- Grower of native forbs, grasses, sedges, shrubs and vines representing local/regional eco-types
- Native seed sold individually by weight, or in mixes for a dry prairie to sedge meadow or open woodland
- Plants propagated and seed collected from stock beds on site at our nursery
- Custom growing for the green industry

*Call for our catalog*

38W443 Hwy. 64, St. Charles, IL 60175 - Phone (630)584-0150 / Fax (630)584-0185



### 4.74 ACRE ESTATE

This award-winning residence is a contemporary abstract of a typical Midwestern farmstead with strong prairie influences. An incredible master bedroom with its own two and one-half baths plus three additional bedrooms, dramatic great room, family room and private library comprise the bones of the home. A path system was developed to enhance the experience of the property and to create vistas of meadow grasses, wildflowers, nursery grass, woodsy plants and grass meadows. The 4.74 acre estate includes a 2+ acre buildable lot. Upper bracket.

*Brush Hill Realtors • Vivian T. Budelman*

25 W. Chicago Avenue, Hinsdale  
630-920-0666

**Pizzo &  
ASSOCIATES, LTD.**  
ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

10729 Pine Road  
Leland, IL 60531  
Serving the tri-state  
area and beyond.

Invasive Plant Control  
Truax Drill Seeding  
Controlled Burns  
Bioengineered Erosion Control  
Plant Inventory  
Native Landscape-Design & Installation  
Consulting

**(815) 495-2300**





## Three Clues

A layer of soil, a layer of foliage, both filled with life. But in between is a layer about five feet high, of very little. One overpopulated animal species walks through that layer, eating everything that grows. Overpopulated deer, here along the Des Plaines River in Wheeling, have destroyed most of the ecosystem they could reach.

Some people would say that this scene represents *two* overpopulated species. One ate the shrubs. The other ate hot dogs or paté at the picnic table.

Yet under the right circumstances, great numbers of people, nudged by laws and ethics, can live compatibly with biodiversity. Great numbers of deer cannot. Neither laws nor ethics impress them. Deer eat or die, they breed whenever they can; that's it. People not only can restrain themselves, we can also notice symptoms. We have needed and have developed a practice of medicine that can maintain ourselves in good health, most of us, most of the time. We need, and are

developing, a medicine of ecosystems. It's called restoration.

For 20 summers now, the deer of the Des Plaines preserves gobbled up orchids and lilies and asters and shooting stars. Then, as each autumn turned into each winter, the deer fell back on the same food as beaver. From November through April, deer sustain themselves mostly on the bark of twigs.

The hungry mouths and teeth of deer can reach about five feet high. Thus, in areas where deer are severely overpopulated, a distinct line five feet from the ground develops as a visible symptom. As the shrubs go, and the young trees go, so go the flowers, and all the butterflies, and most birds, and most biodiversity.

The spreading oak on the left probably whiled away its youth (like the spreading hawthorn on the right) among cattle in a pasture. The larger trees back then, its parents, had earlier presided over buffalo and elk and wolf and Potawatomi. No browse line developed because wolves and human hunters helped to maintain a balance.

Buckthorn (a distinctive green in this photo, long after the native species have gone dormant) is a different kind of wolf. It gobbles up the light, filling the spaces the sun shone through.

But so do all the other treetops on those dense young trunks visible through the browse line. Aggressive native trees are seeking to replace the oaks. Fire was a part of the balance, with the wolves and hunters. It was the fire-maintained open woodland that allowed the oaks to flourish. For a while, imbalances seemed to toll the death knell for an ancient ecosystem.

Three clues: crowded little trunks, green buckthorn, browse line. They are merely symptoms marring a beautiful ecosystem. They don't necessarily mean death; they're just symptoms of illness. As we are learning to read the landscape, we also are learning to restore good health to the earth around us.

---

*Photograph by Pat Wadecki.  
Words by Stephen Packard.*

Photo: Robert Kuera





## CHICAGO WILDERNESSES MEMBERS :

Bird Conservation Network  
Brookfield Zoo  
Butterfield Creek Steering Committee  
Calumet Ecological Park Association  
Calumet Environmental Resource Center  
Campton Historic Agricultural Lands, Inc.  
Canal Corridor Association  
Center for Neighborhood Technology  
Chicago Academy of Sciences  
Chicago Audubon Society  
Chicago Botanic Garden  
Chicago Ornithological Society  
Chicago Park District  
Citizens for Conservation  
City of Chicago, Department  
of Environment  
College of DuPage  
The Conservation Fund  
Crystal Lake Park District  
The Conservation Foundation  
Conservation Research Institute  
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 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  
Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission  
Northwest Indiana Forum  
Foundation, Inc.  
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning  
Commission  
Openlands Project  
Park District of Highland Park  
Prairie Woods Audubon Society  
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  
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  
The Wetlands Initiative  
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd.

*This issue is supported by a grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation.*





*Photo by Robert Kucera, Niles, Illinois.*

## Chicago WILDERNESS

Chicago Wilderness Magazine, Inc.  
P. O. Box 268  
Downers Grove, Illinois 60515-0268

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT 16  
NEW RICHMOND, WI 54017

Address Service Requested