Chicago WILDERNESS

EXPLORING NATURE & CULTURE

FALL 2001

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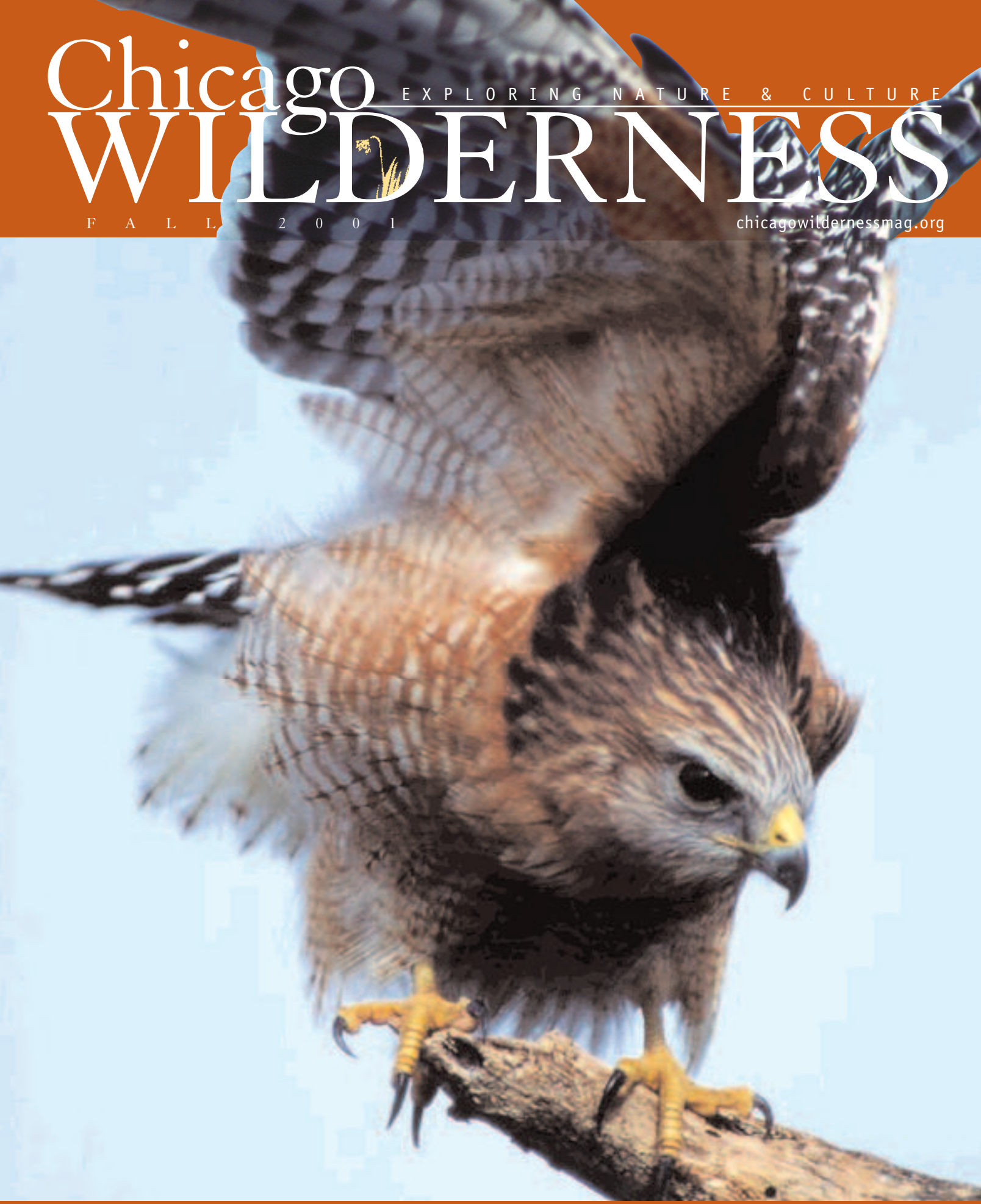
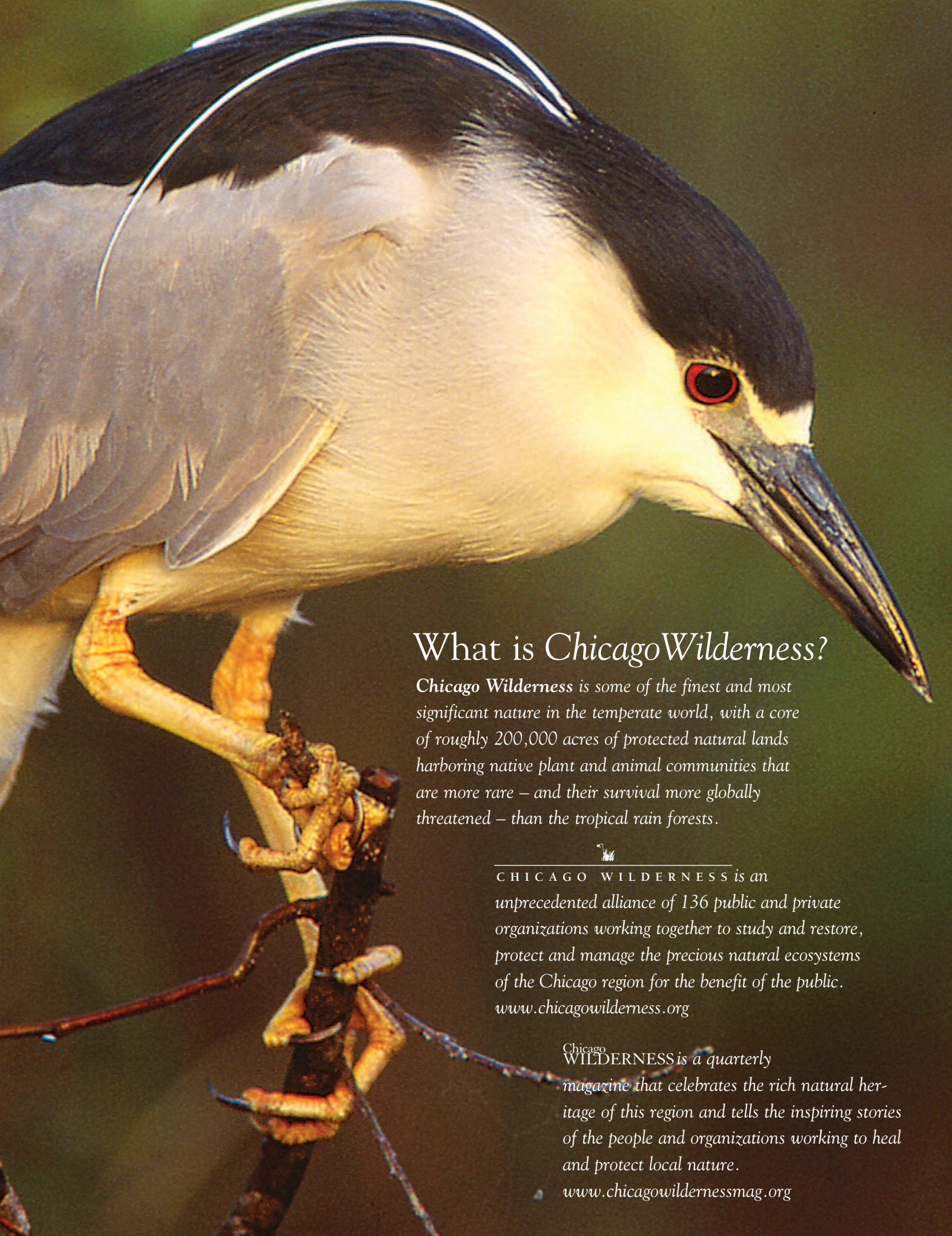


WILDER WOODS? • POST-INDUSTRIAL WILDLANDS



What is *ChicagoWilderness?*

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

CHICAGO WILDERNESS *is an unprecedented alliance of 136 public and private organizations working together to study and restore, protect and manage the precious natural ecosystems of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public.*
www.chicagowilderness.org

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

OPPOSITE: *Black-crowned night heron. The largest nesting colony in Illinois of this endangered species is in the post-industrial Lake Calumet region. Photo by Stan Osolinski.*

Neighbors to Wilderness

This morning I walked in a prairie in all its late summer glory. Tall grasses waved over my head. Birds and butterflies flew about. Flowers bloomed high and low.

I could hear traffic sounds in the background, and soon I would reach the asphalt borders of this small but precious tract. Can this be wilderness, a 90-acre remnant of the vast tallgrass prairie? Isn't there somewhere else where I can truly get away from it all?

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

But increasingly, conservationists and thoughtful citizens have come to recognize that 'it' is us, which is to say, the idea that any natural area no matter how large or how remote exists untouched by "the hand of man" is now a figment, a dream. It is not the story of life on planet Earth in the new millennium.

No habitat for humans or any other species can survive, protected and healthy, without the advocacy and care of people. Wilderness areas are human constructs – protected by legal designations with no potency except the willingness of human beings, generation after generation, to respect and endorse them. John Rogner, chair of the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council (Chicago Wilderness) and a fisheries biologist by training, makes this point eloquently in his essay on page 42.

The wild areas in our region have been hammered, for sure. As you can read in "Wilder Woods?" by Kathleen Kostel, the continuing degradation of our woodlands by the encroachment of invasive species, lack of fire, overbrowsing by deer, and changes in water flow are a cause for concern – and a cry to action. But these places are seasonal homes to species that also live in the Arctic tundra and the rainforests of Ecuador. Our wild places are absolutely critical to the survival of monarchs and lesser yellowlegs, of hairstreak butterflies (pictured here) and noble oaks. These places are different from, but sibling companions to, our country's vast western tracts, where jets hum overhead and acid rains from factories fall. Our wild places, all of them, compel us to recognize that we the people are part of a community of living things.

In this issue you will read about the exciting plans for the Calumet region – a place that many would consider nothing more than a postindustrial wasteland. Yet Indian Ridge Marsh is home to the largest nesting colony of black-crowned night herons in the state of Illinois (where this bird is endangered). Few would have given nature in this area much of a chance to heal. Many would have said these marshes and woods were too far gone to even bother with.

But passionate people like Marian Byrnes (see page 17), Jim Landing, Walter Marcisz, and others, studied and cared and fought and attended countless meetings in order to save and even restore the nature here. In the Calumet region, these visionary heroes had that true sense of community, of living in a place where birds and plants and people could be healthy together.

In this coming season, let us give thanks to Marian Byrnes, to John Rogner, to the red-shouldered hawk, the hairstreak butterfly, the prairie dock, the wild white indigo. They are our neighbors. They will show us the way.

Debra Shore
EDITOR

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COVER: *When all was wilderness, the red-shouldered hawk nested in open forests of bur and swamp white oak in river floodplains. Today this declining species nests in sites scattered throughout the region, typically where floodplain forests lie near open meadows. It eats mostly rodents, snakes, and frogs. Photo by Art Morris/BIRDS AS ART.*

OPPOSITE: *Hogwash Slough at the edge of the oak-hickory woodland of Spears Woods in Cook County's Palos forest preserves. Photo by Mike MacDonald.*

Photo: Joe Nowak

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Photo: Mike Redmer

Photo: Ron Panzer

Letters

Displaced Midwesterner

Dear Editor,

Your editorial in the Summer 2001 edition was very moving. For July 4 this year, I felt a similar literary urge to wed environmentalism to the nation's founding declarations, in a call for the freedom to bike and walk in our North Carolina community without the constant danger of automobiles.

I'm a displaced Midwesterner, delighted to have discovered prairies here in the form of diabase glades surviving as remnants along roadsides. It took five years to come across populations of big bluestem and switchgrass, stunted by poor soil but alive and well in the Piedmont.

Chicago Wilderness and its underlying philosophy is a great inspiration for all of us urbanites working to reclaim a rich natural heritage.

Stephen K. Hiltner
President, Ellerbe Creek Watershed Assoc.
Durham, NC

Bonk?

Dear Editor,

Regarding the story about the red-winged blackbird at Navy Pier (Summer '01, p.4), I just wanted to let you know that I got attacked by a red-winged blackbird in Evanston by the university! I was walking with my headphones on and all of sudden I felt something on my head messing up my hair. I finally swatted it away! Maybe next issue you can feature red-wing blackbird strikes again but in Evanston.

Shirley Bonk
Evanston, Ill.

More bushes

Dear Chicago Wilderness,

Now that Pritzker Park [in Chicago's Loop at Van Buren and State Streets] is being re-opened, I thought this might be a good time to plead for more bushes in it. The old park, with its stands of low bushes, was a great place for migrating birds to hang out.

I used to walk through it on my way back and forth in the Loop. I kept a list of the birds seen either in the park or flying over it while I was in the park. The list is 27 species long! The only American pipit I've ever seen, and only the second sora I've seen, have been in Pritzker Park. Without the bushes, I wonder how many would have been there?

Here is my "Pritzker Park Life List": American pipit, American redstart, Brown thrasher, Catbird, Common yellowthroat, Downy woodpecker, Flicker, Grackle, Herring gull, Hooded warbler, House finch, House sparrow, House wren, Junco, Northern waterthrush, Ovenbird, Peregrine falcon, Pigeon, Pine warbler, Robin, Song sparrow, Sora, Starling, Veery, White crowned sparrow, White throated sparrow, Wood thrush.

James Tibensky
Berwyn, Ill.

Missing Bugs, Marshes

Chicago Wilderness:

I have been wondering for years if it would be possible to create marshland along parts of the Chicago lakefront. I have never seen but have read about Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City.

Last year I was in Florida and I noticed that along the beaches they are trying to return some of it back to a more natural state. Even in Miami Beach there was a long boardwalk that you could walk along and see how it used to be sand dunes and grass, etc. I would think Chicago also could turn over a portion of our beaches to a more natural state. I enjoyed walking along the board walk in Miami Beach – it was very relaxing. Even now that they are making the lagoon between Fullerton and Diversey more natural the very small marsh on the north end had a blue heron. I see more people walking along this lagoon than ever before, which only goes to show people enjoy nature more than mowed lawns. I would think that at least 40 percent of the park could be replanted in a natural state for people to walk along and enjoy. I am sure it's cheaper to allow plants to grow than to mow the lawn every week or so. Plus there are quite a few areas that are always waterlogged most of the time. I would think they could build some observation towers and boardwalks and every one would enjoy seeing nature close at hand. I believe it's time we give back to nature some of what we took.

I remember when I was a kid the night sky was full of nighthawks, also bats. I don't see or hear them anymore. Pretty sad. I hardly see lightning bugs either. I believe Raid has done its job too damn well. I don't see hardly any insects any more: angel flies, ladybugs, moths, millers, June bugs, frogs, toads. We need to help these bugs out too. Maybe they ought to teach kids how to play regular games and

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go for hikes, make some hiking trails through the park. That was a long, long time ago. No, I am not 100 yet, only 53, but I am getting like all the old people.

You hear so many people saying the same thing, how urban sprawl is destroying this country. If you have ever lived in McHenry or Crystal Lake or the Woodstock area, then you know firsthand how destructive urban sprawl can be. Subdivide every field and build non-stop, make all the money you can, then run away to some other location. Greed is a destroyer, that's for sure.

P.M.B.
Chicago, Ill.

Editor's comment: Yes, we agree and so does the Chicago Park District. They're restoring nature in many areas. And that's what Mayor Daley has proposed for Meigs Field. He deserves support.

Nighthawk Spectacle

On the way to Baker's Lake this evening, I came across a big flock of common nighthawks swirling around some big trees at the edge of Deer Grove and Northwest Highway. They must have discovered a big hatch of some kind of insect because they all stayed right in the same 1/4 acre or so. I pulled off the road right up underneath the group and turned on the emergency blinkers. Then I opened up the sun roof all the way and sat back and watched the spectacle of approximately 150 nighthawks swooping to within 10 feet of my head. It was awesome to see their tails open and close with different aerial maneuvers. Every now and then I could focus on one insect for a short time and then watch it disappear as a nighthawk swooped in out of nowhere.

I made it to Baker's Lake before dark in time to see a Cooper's hawk, osprey, and a few blue-winged teal come in with the hundreds of mallards and Canada geese in the evening "arrival" spectacle.

A couple more nighthawks zigzagged over the lake. I don't think I could get tired of nighthawks, but I've enjoyed trying.

Carolyn Fields
Palatine, Ill.
Posted on IBET– the Illinois birding listserv.

Reader to Reader

We have launched a message board on our Web site – **chicagowildernessmag.org** *– to give our readers a chance to communicate with each other. Post your questions, sightings, nature stories, wild mushroom recipes. Let's talk.*

– The Editors

Wilder Woods?

by Kathleen Kostel

I had recently purchased 10 acres of woods and wetlands in northern Porter County, Indiana. I thought, being an environmentally concerned citizen, that I would not touch the property, but rather leave it in its "natural native" state. Little did I know how unnatural it had become through the years.

Standing on my back deck just few short weeks ago, I looked out and proudly admired a forest of dense shrubs and trees. Since then, I've written this article. Having talked to lots of seasoned land managers in Chicago Wilderness and having walked my property with one, I now look out and see a wooded area of primarily stinging nettle and brush, mixed in with a few oaks. Still wooded, but a lot less healthy than I had thought. For a truly healthy, diverse woodland, I've got some work to do.

A novice bird-watcher, I reach for the binoculars in excitement at the sight of a blue heron feeding on tadpoles on the shore of my one-acre pond. Yet, I can't help but wonder what other kinds of birds I could enjoy seeing if my land were a more inviting habitat.

Slowly I will make it happen – remove the purple loosestrife, cut back the brushy understory. I'm even considering "girdling" a few invasive trees. This, I've learned, is the process of cutting a swath six-inches wide and a quarter-inch deep around a tree's trunk to kill it without the major expense of hiring a tree removal service. Sunlight will slowly filter back to the woodland floor and the standing snag provides habitat for birds and mammals. Had I been asked about girdling a month ago, I would have referred you to Carson's lingerie department. Now I recognize that this process will invite more light for native plants and wildflowers, many of which fortunately still exist on my property.

It all takes time, it all takes resources. But as one land manager told me, "In the end it's worth it."

We grew up in the age of advertising's "Smokey the Bear." We learned that only we could prevent forest fires. A fire in the woods simply spelled disaster.

And yet many public land managers are learning firsthand that too much protection is not necessarily a good

After 15 years of burning, a Cook County forest preserve is a feast of biodiversity all summer long. Photo by Doug Sherman.

Photo: Joe Nowak

Fire controls invasive species and invigorates the oaks and wildflowers.

thing. Thinning a forested area – through fire, removal by machinery, or other means – can restore an oak woodland community to good health and result in a more diverse and sustainable ecosystem.

"There's an incredible rebound when you open up a forested area," says Wayne Schennum, natural resource manager for the McHenry County Conservation District. "Much more diversity in plants, which leads to a more diverse insect population and more types of birds."

The average citizen doesn't have words to distinguish between denser or more open forests. But there are definite differences. Ecologists define natural forests, woodlands and savannas as three parts of a continuum – based on the kinds of animals and plants that live there. These are correlated with the long-term density of a site's canopy cover, or tree top "roof." A long-term canopy cover of 80 percent or more produces a forest. An oak woodland will have developed a canopy cover of 50 to 80 percent, while a savanna has coverage of 10 to 50 percent. Below 10 percent is considered a prairie.

A prairie growing over with brush doesn't become a savanna, then woodland, then forest. It becomes a degraded prairie. If there were savanna animals and plants living nearby, and if it were being regularly burned and if other problems didn't intervene, it could become a savanna in time. But that rarely happens these days. When an oak woodland is invaded by maples, it doesn't typically become a maple forest. The natural maple forest ecosystem needs thousands of interdependent species. Most of them don't fly through the air as easily as maple samaras. The thousands of interdependent species of the oak woodland die in the shade, and the result is a depauperate ecosystem – where often even the soil washes away.

In the last 20 years, land managers at Chicago area forest preserves and other natural areas have been working to restore densely overgrown woods to original oak woodlands. Employing "prescribed" or controlled burns, and in some instances heavy machinery, as well as following with spot treatments of herbicide, they are reducing invasive plant species to a minimum with great success.

"The results have been fantastic," says Ken Klick, restoration ecologist with the Lake County Forest Preserves. "It's exciting to see what returns from the bare earth that had appeared to have died out. Many of our ground layer forbs (wildflowers) responded very well to clearing. And we walk through these areas now and see bluebirds where we didn't see any before, or towhees, and catbirds."

Wayne Lampa, an ecologist now retired from the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, reports similar success at restoration efforts, particularly at Waterfall Glen."Through burning and improving the general habitat, the natural plant species made a dramatic come back," Lampa says. "Some plants had reappeared, like *Cacalia*, pale Indian plantain, which is a big, beautiful plant. We've also seen white wild indigos, a legume highly prized by many animals, which when really in its element can stand four feet tall with very large, white pea-like flowers. And there has been a rebound in ferns, such as the bracken fern. They're now starting to make a good recovery and had almost disappeared from the landscape.

"Once the plants recover we see all sorts of things come in," Lampa continues. "There were times in late '80s we would hardly hear birds at all. But once things opened up again, mice and moles returned. Now we're seeing hawks and owls, as well as bluebirds and great crested flycatchers."

In addition to actual restoration work, Lampa says DuPage land managers have completed a "tremendous amount of monitoring and recording" of the return of diverse native species. "There's been a lot of light monitoring to see what light levels are required for vegetation to come back," he says. "The preponderance of evidence shows the positive effects on diversity."

Success in restoring native oak woodlands isn't always as simple as striking a match. It can require significant resources in terms of time, fire management personnel, and funding. Because of the expense involved, managers carefully select sites based on criteria for restoration. They note certain features and prioritize according to the greatest potential for success.

"It's like a triage operation," Klick says. "You learn to read the landscape of a forested area and look for clues or indications of the vitality or recoverability of the woods. You look to see what

Photo: A. B. Sheldon/Root Resources

Blue-spotted salamander. Their numbers rise as health is restored to a woods.

Two shots of the same woods – Vestal Grove in Northbrook. Here a wall of European buckthorn grows in a section that has not been burned for six years.

Photo: Stephen Packard

kinds of stray plants may be along a trailside or at a 'tip-up', a spot where a tree blew down, where you can see what came up in the light. That will give an indication of what native species may still be viable in the area."

Once managers designate a site as having strong potential for restoration, they decide on the approach. A prescribed burn may be planned, according to the season, usually in the late fall or winter when the availability of natural, dry "fuel" is more abundant. With their splayed, curvy "fingers," oak leaves have an inherent design that allows them to catch fire quickly.

According to Klick, some woodland areas have so few remaining oaks and are so inundated by brushy plants such as Tartarian honeysuckle and European buckthorn, a fire simply won't burn under the moderate conditions of prescribed fire. This requires initial hand clearing or using machinery to rid invasive brush and woody plants. Machines are generally brought in during the winter so as not to tear up the soil. Afterward, sunlight can reach the forest floor, eventually triggering oak regeneration and the growth of grassy vegetation that can fuel a fire.

While fire can keep invasive plants at bay, it often needs help to eradicate them entirely. Land managers described how fires "top kill" or burn off the brush above ground, leaving the roots and stumps to sprout anew, sometimes with even thicker brush. As a follow-up approach, some managers spot spray herbicide on stumps to eliminate invasive plants down to the roots. "At Old School and Grant preserves in Lake County (IL)," Klick says, "we have gone in with chain saws and mechanical equipment and selectively cleared buckthorn, honeysuckles and ash, both native and non-natives. And then we carefully apply herbicides because you can't rely on fire alone to control woody plants."

Photo: Doug Sherman

This invasive green ash was killed by girdling.

Once a clearing is complete, land managers will wait a year or two to see what kinds of native vegetation return. In areas where there are few surviving grasses and wildflowers, Klick says, "we introduce seeds to help the process along."

Besides fire, machinery, herbicide, and seeds, other factors must be considered in a woodland restoration. In the early part of the century, grazing cattle had a tremendous impact on our native environments. Today, without natural predators, the overpopulation of deer is likewise a major threat at some sites (see box page 10).

"Deer can be a problem with browsing if their numbers are high," Schennum says of McHenry County areas. "They will munch away at the native flora. We monitor deer with exclosures, 13 x 13-foot fenced-off areas, to keep the deer out. We then look for the difference in flora inside and out of the exclosure. We also do a winter deer count. We haven't done culls as of yet, but the numbers are certainly building, and that affects the overall balance of the area."

At Waterfall Glen, Lampa describes a "recovery of an incredible number of species of plants" through a reduction in the deer population. "At one point in 1991, parts of Waterfall Glen looked as if they'd been mowed," Lampa says. "There was not a single grass above five or six inches.

"Once we reduced the number of deer, there was an explosion of plants," he recalls. "There are on the order of around 500 to 600 plant species that are now known at Waterfall Glen, where before there was an incredibly small number. The plants probably had been there at one time but were reduced from too much shade and deer browsing. Even trilliums and onions, which deer

Photo: Stephen Packard

This area looked just like the photo on the facing page – just 20 feet away. But this area is part of the fire management unit. It's been burned every two or three years since 1980.

highly prize, were coming back just as strong." Just like too many trees, too many deer will gradually degrade an ancient ecosystem.

Another factor that can affect a successful oak woodland restoration is the site's water – where it comes from and where it flows. "In some situations restoring hydrology is fundamental in protecting the site," Klick says. "Are there drain tiles draining a wetland on the site? This allows ash, elm and willows to grow. The method is to try to restore the hydrology without affecting off-site neighbors."

Jim Anderson, also with the Lake County Forest Preserves, has worked on restoring the natural hydrology to MacArthur Woods. "Within MacArthur is almost 70 acres of northern flatwoods artificially drained by an agricultural drain tile a farmer put in to make a pasture," Anderson says. "Currently we've cleared invasives from 130 acres of the site and now we will go in and disable the drain tile so any water will stay and infiltrate down through the soil or evaporate.

"The wetlands on these woodland sites serve as incredible habitat and breeding grounds for amphibians," Anderson says. "Their reproductive cycle is geared toward how long a pond holds water throughout the year. Because of drainage, their available hydrology periods have been changed and shortened. Once amphibians lay eggs and are hatched, the offspring don't have a long enough 'wet season' to mature to a viable state. We've been very vigilant about monitoring the insect and amphibian populations as we take out the drain tile to see what happens."

Of all the methods and tools for restoring a native oak woodland, consensus among land managers is that the most important element for success is public support. Without it, local officials are less likely to devote the necessary resources."The first step is education," Klick says. "We need to let people know what we're going to do out there. By reaching out to the community we can tell them that a burn may look drastic or severe, but things recover and overall recovery of the ecosystem is increased tenfold."

He continues. "Five years ago, there was concern. People would ask us, 'Why are you cutting trees?' 'What's going on?' We'd answer that it creates a better abundance of plants for insects and birds. Now they can simply compare and contrast. They'll see an area loaded with bur oaks and buckthorn and then look across the street at the Old School Forest Preserve and see a big difference. Our past successes reinforce our efforts."

Lampa agrees that public influence can make or break the success of oak woodland restoration. "Generally people in DuPage County were very supportive," he says. "Commissioners take notice when people are supportive. I would go to a commission meeting and hear a commissioner say, 'I got 14 calls on this last week.' So when the vote comes up, it sticks in their minds and they know which way to go.

"To generate support I would try to send people to a place like Waterfall Glen so they could see results," he adds. "I'd also ask them, 'Please, give us a chance, sit back and see what happens. If you're still concerned after a few years, call me back and we'll talk about it.' I've never had one single person call me. If people are willing to be patient and see what happens, they'll see wildflowers and a greater variety of insects and birds come back where all they saw before was a green wall."

Lampa says that while much has been accomplished, more remains to be done. "There's a large number of remnant woodlands and savannas left, and only a fraction have been touched because resources are not there. I don't think we'll ever touch all of the oak woodlands in this area," he says, "and maybe that's not necessary. Maybe some examples should be left to show in the future what happens to those areas when they're not managed or touched at all. If people really want to learn more about this, they should check with their local forest preserves or conservation district and find out from them the really good sites in terms of prairies, savannas, or woodlands. Good examples of places that show what works."

Lampa says that as local citizens understand the need for

and process of oak woodland restoration, more people volunteer to help. "For the first few years, I was out there doing a lot of stuff by myself because I was the only person available," he says. These days the retired Lampa sees an expanded land management staff and a dedicated volunteer team. "You have to keep working on it or nothing will ever get done. Keep looking at the good stuff and what's been done. Keep plugging away at it. In the end it's worth it."

Kathleen Kostel is a former board member of Friends of the Indiana Dunes and the Shirley Heinze Evironmental Fund. As Director of Communications at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana, she frequently hikes in the dunes. Trail 8 in Indiana Dunes State Park is her favorite "because it's the hardest."

Photos: Doug Sherman

Two shots of the same area in Daniel Wright Woods near Mettawa. On the left – in 1991 – trillium carpet the forest floor. On the right – in 2001 – most of the trillium are gone, and garlic mustard is taking over. Unfortunately, with soaring populations of white-tailed deer in so many suburban areas, this woods is fairly typical of woods throughout the region.

Studying Deer

From December 1994 through December 2000, wildlife biologists from the Forest Preserve Districts of DuPage and Cook Counties have been studying white-tailed deer by marking some with radio collars and by conducting deer management programs. Combined, the districts marked 208 deer (including 16 males and 124 females that were fitted with radio collars) from eight preserves. In 33 preserves where deer were overpopulated, the two Districts culled 4,645 deer (including 1,869 culled from Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve during 1992-2000). Here is what they've learned:

- Vehicles caused more than half of all deer mortality in the Chicago region. Lesser sources of mortality included deer-train collisions, hunting, poaching, and drowning. No adult deer was found to have died from starvation or malnutrition, and none were killed by predators. Deer-vehicle collisions occur most often in the spring and fall when deer are dispersing and breeding.
- Deer control programs reduced deer-vehicle collisions around Waterfall Glen between 1992 and 1998. As the deer population increased again in 1999, deer-vehicle collisions increased as well.
- When high populations of adult deer are not reduced by culling, the death of newborn fawns increases. Annual fawn mortality was 60-to-70 percent in high density areas of forest preserves with coyotes being the primary cause. When adult deer numbers are reduced, vegetative cover increases – providing more hiding cover for fawns – so fawn survival increases.
- High survival, high reproduction, and the sedentary nature of Chicago-area female deer contribute to overabundance in forest preserves. Deer living in preserves less than 200 acres in size likely will use adjacent properties in addition to the forest preserve.
- The amount of vegetative cover, the height, and the survival of 11 selected indicator plant species all increased in preserves where the deer populations were managed.
- Chicago-area deer populations, particularly those at low density, have the potential to double every one-to-two years if left unmanaged.

From "*Population Dynamics of Deer From the Forest Preserves of Chicago, Illinois*" by Dwayne Etter, research assistant, Illinois Natural History Survey, May 2001.

George Johnson and Renee Dankert check out the seed of Canada windflower at her re-created prairie in Harvard, Illinois.

Gardening for Seeds

by Beverly McClellan
Photos by Pat Wadecki

For Perle Olsson, gardening for seeds has helped her transform two acres of former turf grass surrounding her home into native savanna and woodland. Years ago, Olsson began sharing seeds with friends; now they return the favor, or pleasure. One friend created almost an entire prairie garden from Olsson's seeds. "It's been very rewarding," she says. "I've found that gardeners are very sharing and giving people. The people I've met over the last 20 years have become good friends."

It has taken Olsson two decades to convert her Ringwood yard near McHenry. She began in 1980 when she discovered the showy orchids while making a path through the wooded area in a far corner of her property. She soon began working with Bill Wingate, the late natural historian, whose vision guided the transformation of her Kentucky bluegrass lawn.

In the early 1980s, they started restoring the woodland to its native state. In 1981, Wingate invited Olsson to join the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee, a group from the McHenry County Defenders that wanted to learn how to propagate native plants that were becoming scarce. As she tells it, back then one simply could not find books or other resources on gardening with most of our native species, much less a place from which to purchase seeds. The group began sharing information and seeds and, later, sprouting seeds for plant sales. These have evolved into large annual events, drawing more and more people into the seed-sharing community.

During 1984 and 1985, with the assistance of late naturalist Bob Horlock, Olsson began the larger task of converting the hilly sandy area in her yard into native prairie. Given the area's standing oaks, Olsson says it is more accurately termed savanna than prairie. "It's so beautiful in the morning with the spiderwort in bloom," she beams. "It's so amazing, sometimes I can't believe I accomplished that!"

Over the years, Olsson has given away an uncountable number of seeds. She hosts garden walks in her garden every year, so she keeps seeds ready for people who just keep coming back for more. However, she has given most of her seeds (more than she can estimate) to Wingate Prairie in Crystal Lake to honor her naturalist friend. Jim Wigman volunteers for the Crystal Lake Park District as Wingate Prairie's volunteer steward. He explains that seed sharers like Olsson are critical to prairie restoration. Quality seeds are

Seeds wait out the winter in the garage of Perle Olsson.

Perle Olsson in her prairie garden in Ringwood, Illinois.

limited and costly when purchased from nurseries or catalogs, and restoration efforts normally insist on local seed anyway. As a result, prairie managers rely heavily on people like Olsson to donate seeds.

The Ins and Outs of Seed Swapping

Some seed sharers advise newcomers to be discriminate in their seed sharing to preserve natural plant variations specific to a particular area. One theory recommends limiting sharing to within five miles of the restored area, or about the distance a bird could naturally carry and redeposit the seed, especially when restoring a high-quality area. Others say a larger range is more practical. Observing an appropriate limit is especially important if someone hopes to donate seed for the restoration of preserve lands. But if you're just wanting native plants for yourself, and perhaps your butterflies, it may not make much difference.

Several local Wild Ones chapters offer annual seed swaps (see page 13) that continue to grow, though some are restricted to chapter members. Margrit Nitz of the Greater DuPage Chapter of the Wild Ones notes that two years ago more than 100 people attended their seed exchange. "We've had people bring them in by the trash bags full!"

Speaking of trash bags, George Johnson, or "Dr. Nature" as he is known in the seed-swap community, has a reputation for producing huge amounts of seeds for sharing. After getting started on his own restoration in Harvard 25 years ago, Johnson initiated a seed exchange that now involves almost 30 people living in a five-mile area. The endeavor has developed into a rather large seed operation that provides seeds for a diverse plant community, from wetlands, woodlands, and oak savannas to cow pastures, he says. Although Johnson has a degree in agronomy, close to the nature world, he has no formal biological training. "This is what I love to do," he says. "If I can help other people at it, all the better."

Mary Handelsman of the Lake-to-Prairie Chapter of the Wild Ones says they rely on seed exchanges to help new residents of the Prairie Crossing community in Grayslake convert their suburban lawns into native gardens. "When a lot of people first start, they are not 100 percent sold on the idea of native seed gardening," Handelsman says. "We get the chance to try and hook them." In that vein, the chapter will present a seminar on seed collecting in October, given by Scott Horlock, who carries on his father's extensive experience in seed collection and treatment.

Harvesting

Margrit Nitz notes that each plant has its own mechanism for release, which can make harvesting a challenging, but fun, learning experience. She says it is important to pick seed pods before the first frost, while they are still green. (Later they will air-dry to brown.) This is extremely important with jewelweed or spotted touch-me-not, for example. "Once the seed pods show even a little brown, any slight touch – a fingernail or hair – can cause them to explode, making it very difficult to recoup the seeds," she warns. Similarly, it is difficult to capture seeds of the wild geranium, with its rifle-like trigger mechanism, Nitz says. "The four ends curl up and the seeds explode like 50 feet out."

The twin-leaf plant, with a double-leaf asymmetry and white flower, has a "seed-in-a-box," as Nitz terms it. Its cup-shaped pod has a lid that pops up like a jack-in-the-box once the seeds are ripe. Even more ephemeral is Dutchman's breeches. Less than a week after it blooms, it sets seed and then vanishes – leaves, stem and all.

Often seed harvesters will have to compete with insects

Getting Started: Seed & Other Resources

Blazing Star Associates
Woodstock, (815) 338-4716,
www.blazing-star.com
Bluestem Prairie Nursery
Hillsboro, Ken Schaal
(217) 532-6344
Earthskin Nursery
Mason City, Lou Nelms
(217) 482-3524, www.earthskin.com
Genesis Nursery Inc., Tampico
Dennis Lubbs, (815) 438-2220
Ion Exchange
Harpers Ferry, IA, (319) 535-7231
LaFayette Home Nursery,
LaFayette, (309) 995-3311
Landscape Naturally, Inc.
Sycamore, Scott Horlock
(815) 899-7574
McHenry County Defenders
Woodstock, (815) 338-0393,
www.mcdef.org
Northwind Perennial Farm
Springfield, WI, Roy Diblik,
(262) 248-8229
Prairie Moon Nursery
Winona, MN, (507) 452-1362,
www.prairiemoonnursery.com
Prairie Nursery,
Westfield, WI,
Neil Dieboll, (800) 476-9453
Prairie Sun Consulting
Naperville, Pat Armstrong,
(630) 983-8404
Taylor Creek Restoration Nurseries,
Brodhead, WI, (608) 897-8641,
www.appliedeco.com/tcrn
"Prairie Establishment and Landscaping," Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, McHenry/Lake County office, (815) 675-2385 (Natural Heritage Technical Publication #2, 1997)
"Wild Ones Handbook,"
toll free (877) 394-9453,
www.for-wild.org

and birds for seeds. For example, the female version of the citrus-scented spicebush has pear-shaped fruits growing up and down the stem. During her initial experience with the plant, Nitz watched the fruits as they turned from green to green-yellow, waiting until they finally ripened to orange to pick them. Unfortunately, a bird or other critter found them tastiest at that shade of orange too. A few years later, however, Nitz found two tiny spicebushes in her mulch pathways – from seeds that had been distributed by a wild harvester. Similarly, bloodroot seeds must be collected within a week of blooming or ants, attracted to the protein-laden white tails on the seed, will harvest them instead, carrying them into their lairs. This process essentially composts the seeds, potentially causing them to sprout in place.

One last note on harvesting: Do so only with permission! While most people know not to pick seeds on private property, some may not know it is against the law to harvest seeds from county, state, and federal preserves or parks. In addition, it is illegal to pick flowers anywhere in the wild.

Storage

Olsson stores seeds in various plastic containers. She puts my yellow columbine seeds in a labeled, recycled yogurt container for me to take home. I like the clear lid because it allows me to see the seed shape and color. Nitz says that labeling upon harvest is essential because some seeds look the same as others, once they are ripe. She describes her storage method as Cool-Whip-like containers with no lids, precariously balanced around the living room. Johnson's group uses large paper bags, like those used to hold animal feed.

Sharon Yiesla, horticulturalist with the University of Illinois Extension, Lake County Unit also recommends using paper envelopes kept in a cool, dry place, as plastic, may cause the seeds to mold or mildew. A glass jar in the refrigerator will do, too. She suggests a quick test before sowing seeds. Place 10 seeds between two damp paper towels. If about 80 percent of the seeds sprout, then the seeds should reproduce well in the garden. If less than 70 percent sprout, Yiesla says you may want to plant more seeds and give more time to develop than usual.

Sowing

Johnson says seeds are ready for sowing around March 5, "or the first reasonably good day after winter." He advocates what he calls the "sow and mow" method he adopted from Tom Vanderpoel, a landscaper from Fox River Grove. They do not prepare the seed area, except for the rare burn. In the first year of propagation, they sow early in the spring and mow a few times in the summer. Mowing controls weeds, but does not damage the native seedlings. In the second year, they may burn an area, then seed again and mow once. After that, they burn only one-half or one-third of the area. "It's kind of a farm practice," Johnson laughs.

The system clearly is producing results. Johnson is proud to say he has seen a nearby basic bluegrass patch transform into dropseed prairie in as little as five years. "Dropseed prairie is the best you can get because it is such an elegant species that indicates undisturbed prairie, generally," he explains. Johnson's group celebrates the appearance of dropseed and other interim milestone species, such as Turk's cap lily and shooting star, which took about six years to fully develop. "This year we finally saw the pale purple coneflower," he says. "It took about five years."

While gardening for seeds is a lesson in patience, Johnson suggests starting with the more prolific bergamot, yellow coneflower, black-eyed Susans, wild rye, and little bluestem. "These species typically develop by the second year," he says. "They usually diminish as the more conservative species develop."

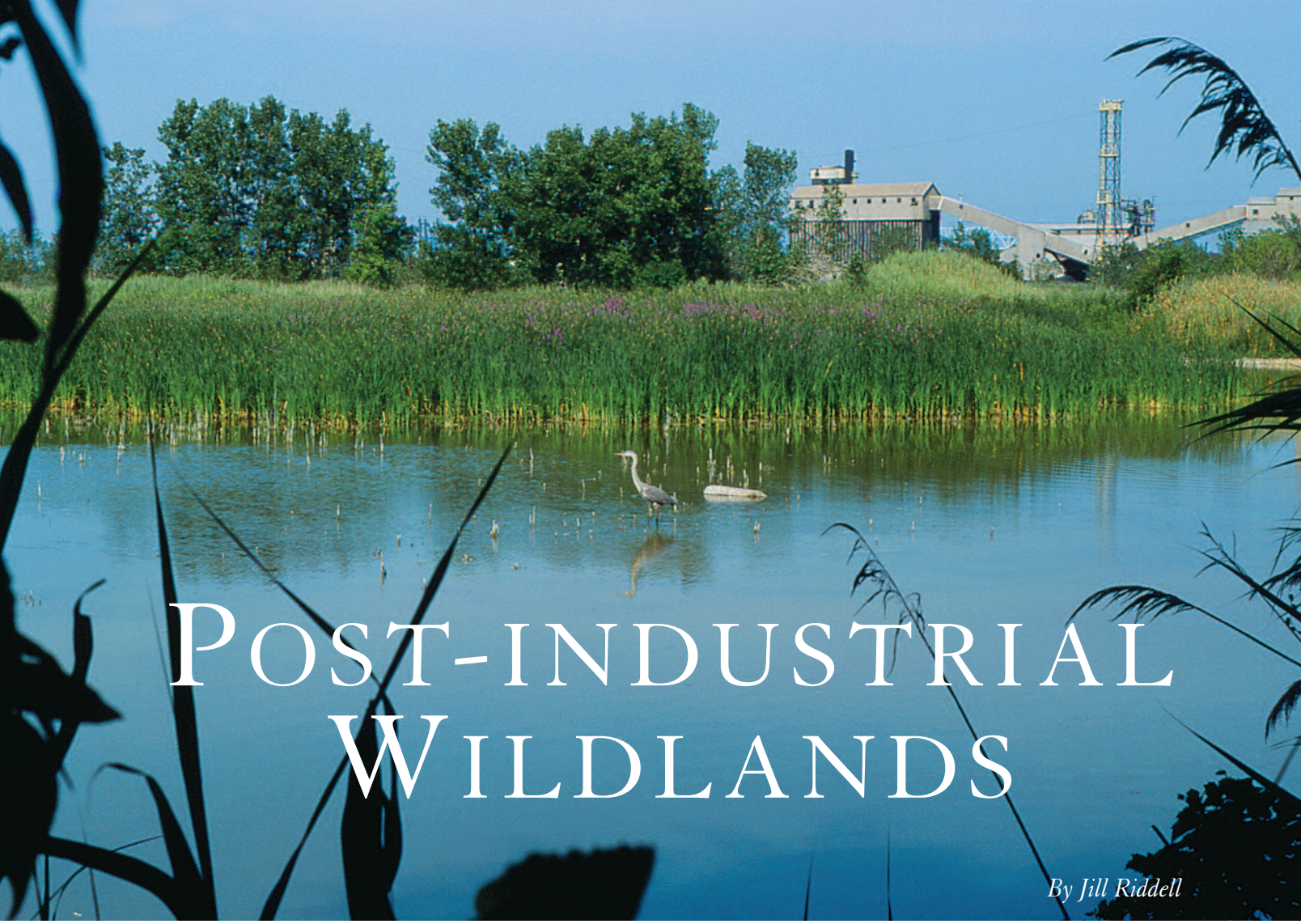
In addition, Olsson advised that, while some naturalists encourage gardeners to seed for grasses first and add forbs later, grasses can out-compete the flowers. "It used to be thought that you should plant a prairie with a ratio of seven grasses to one forb," she explains. "Now I've seen that it's almost the opposite that's needed. And I just did it initially out of preference. I just wanted more flowers."

While creating a small prairie from seed may seem intimidating, the good news is that there is an existing network of people just waiting to share the knowledge and joy they have gained in gardening for seeds. Perle Olsson simply "planted" the seed with me, and now I am out sharing the idea with others. Who knows? Maybe in a few years I will be sharing my seeds with her.

Upcoming Seed Exchanges

Nov. 12, Lake-to-Prairie Chapter,
Mary Handelsman, (847) 546-6622
Nov. 3, Greater DuPage Chapter,
Pat Clancy, (630) 964-0448
Nov. 8, North Park-Chicago Chapter,
Bob Porter, (312) 744-5472

Bags of rare seed, ready to be "processed" to separate the seeds from the clumpy seedheads.



Post-industrial Wildlands

By Jill Riddell

More than 200 species of birds migrate through or stay and nest in the Calumet wetlands. Indian Ridge Marsh supports the Upper Midwest's largest rookery for black-crowned night herons, with more than 800 birds making nests and raising young there. Docking slips along Lake Calumet hold the largest nesting colony of ring-billed gulls in Illinois, numbering more than 5,000 birds. Several pairs of yellow-headed blackbirds, a species threatened with extinction in Illinois and in trouble in much of its natural range, continue to raise young in the wetlands of Eggers Woods and Hegewisch Marsh.

According to Walter Marcisz, past president of the Chicago Ornithological Society, when water levels drop during the often-dry month of August, mudflats are revealed that become "magnets for shorebirds," he says. "Depending on the water levels, birders can easily see 16 or 17 species of sandpipers and plovers, yellowlegs, dowitchers."

The amazing array of bird life in the area around Lake Calumet isn't new – in fact, the natural abundance of birds, fish, and wildlife have been enjoyed for centuries. In the 1800s, well-off Chicago businessmen built sporting clubs in the area where they could hunt and fish. In the 1950s, Jim Landing, an early activist for protection of Lake Calumet, started birding in the region. He recalls that most of the same birds he saw then are still present today, though in dramatically smaller numbers.

The Calumet region would seem a natural spot for early preservation, but efforts for protection launched by Landing in 1980 were hampered in part by environmental advocates' lack of hope for the bird's surroundings. For the other most defining feature of the Calumet region causes traditional nature lovers to turn up their noses: the Calumet area has most of Chicago's garbage and some of Chicago's most pollution-prone industries. Toxins and heavy metals abound, leaving bodies of water highly contaminated. Most of the land that isn't built upon has been used as a dumping ground for slag, a space-consuming byproduct of steel-making. And very little remains of the native vegetation that natural-

Photo: Mike Redmer

Blanding's turtle – threatened and slow – still survives inside Chicago's city limits.

ists tend to seek when setting preservation priorities.

In short, the Calumet area traditionally has been a spot environmentalists were more inclined to describe as a disaster than to single out as opportunity.

Today, however, environmental advocates and government agencies capable of protecting the Calumet area view the Southeast Side with fresh eyes. Four factors have contributed to the current potential for a vast network of preserved lands that the City of Chicago is calling the "Calumet Open Space Reserve": stronger environmental laws, a 20-year downturn in the industry that has resulted in slowed land development, the closing of many landfills, and the concentration of high-quality remnants, such as Burnham Prairie, Calumet City Prairie, and Powderhorn Marsh.

As proposed in documents released in May by the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development (DPD), the Calumet Open Space Reserve will consist of 4,877 acres of open lands to be used for nature preservation and, in some cases, recreation. Of these, 4,186 acres are in Chicago, and 691 are in the near south suburbs. More than a third of the land in the Reserve (1,440 acres) is already protected. Most of the preserved land is in Cook County forest preserves and at Wolf Lake, owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Yellow-headed blackbirds – a threatened species – nest in the wetlands of Eggers Woods and Hegewisch Marsh.

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

But another 2,977 acres are targeted as appropriate for acquisition, and efforts are already underway to begin buying property. Illinois Governor George Ryan committed $4 million of funds from the Open Land Trust Program for land acquisition in the Calumet area for 2000 and 2001, and more is anticipated. The City of Chicago is in the process of acquiring about two-thirds of Indian Ridge Marsh North and Indian Ridge Marsh South, Heron Pond, and Hyde Lake Marsh through the 1999 Tax Reactivation Program. This land will likely be transferred to IDNR, which is expected to be the major landowner and manager of new properties in the Calumet Open Space Reserve.

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County has recently completed the acquisition of Burnham Prairie, and the city is also likely to receive a donation of Van Vlissingen Prairie in the next few months as part of a mitigation settlement with Belt Railway Corporation, the current owner.

A long-time neighbor of the prairie and proponent for its preservation, Marian Byrnes (see page 17), notes the cultural and natural significance of this acquisition. "Van Vlissengen Prairie will be an educational resource. There are five schools within walking distance of it," she says. "And the birds feed there. At the end of May, I see a bird on every square foot of land."

Private industry is also getting into the act. As the Ford Motor Company lays plans for its new production facility in the region, it will provide funds to reconfigure the north/south-running branch of Indian Creek. Consultants from the US Forest Service have created a design that will transform the present straightened channel into a more natural stream, complete with meanders, ripples, and wetlands. These features are crucial for survival of aquatic insects and fish.

The Chicago Department of Transportation and other partners are also committed to the cause, planning a bikeway along Indian Creek and creating other new paths that will link the various parcels of the Calumet Open Space Reserve. These trails will connect with the Burnham greenway and the bike path along Lake Michigan's shore.

Landfills provide a particularly interesting challenge for the Calumet Open Space Reserve. Some still operate, but as the permits for these landfills expire, they are being closed down and sealed. The Illinois Port Authority converted one capped landfill into the Harborside International Golf Course. The plan for the Calumet Open Space Reserve calls for landfills to become open space, and eventually to be planted to native upland prairie where possible. Though no such hills were found originally in the vast flats of the Calumet region, the increased topography will provide additional diversity of habitat likely to attract bobolinks and other birds not presently found.

The city's Department of Environment (DOE) and IDNR worked together to create an Ecological Management Strategy, garnering input from 200 scientists and other experts. The strategy guides the scope and pace of restoration work in the Calumet area, and DOE is already in the process of implementing the early phases of restoration on some sites. "Ecological rehabilitation has already begun for Indian Ridge Marsh," says Suzanne Malec, deputy commissioner of natural resources for DOE. "The dredging spoils that were dumped on the marsh helped it qualify for funds from the Army Corps of Engineers for rehab."

DOE also received $6 million from Ford to help build and provide programming for an environmental education center that will be located somewhere within the open space reserve. It's intended to provide the sort of programs enjoyed by north-siders at the City of Chicago's North Park Village Nature Center.

The Calumet Open Space Reserve was created as an outgrowth of a land use planning effort intended to emphasize industrial redevelopment. Almost 60 percent of land available for industrial development is found in the Calumet area, and DPD's Calumet Land Use Plan promotes 1,000 acres

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

as ripe for industrial redevelopment. Much of this land was already once used for industrial purposes but has been abandoned.

"The open space component of the land use plan stems from the CitySpace plan [a joint project of DPD, Chicago Park District, and Forest Preserve District of Cook County published in 1998]," says Kathy Dickhut, deputy director of DPD. "We picked up on CitySpace's emphasis that the Calumet area had the most important wetlands in the city, which made it essential to consider industrial use and wetland protection together when developing directions for land use."

DPD took the idea of protecting wetlands along with industrial sites and ran with it. The result is that even industrial sites are encouraged to landscape in a way that enhances the natural attributes of the Calumet area by using native plants, implementing ecologically friendly approaches to stormwater management, and by creating environmentally appropriate erosion control along waterways. "Industry is embracing the idea," says Malec. "We're looking for incentives for industry to do more in this regard, but one of the best incentives is when I can tell them that [environmentally sensitive approaches] don't have to extend costs and time. It just requires a different way of planning."

Gerald Adelmann, director of Openlands Project, believes the city's plan for the Calumet area will be an important model for industrial parks. "Industrial communities throughout the country and the world are facing some of the same challenges as Lake Calumet," says Adelmann. "Generally planners have taken a pedestrian approach – calling for new sewers, new roads – but not taking a holistic approach as this plan does."

Adelmann points out that industry originally set up shop in the Calumet area because of material concerns such as transportation and the availability of raw materials. "While those features are still important, quality of life is key today when businesses choose where to locate. It's an increasingly important factor in a global economy where industries can go anywhere," he says. "In the Calumet area, we have an extraordinary natural resource in the heart of a major city. If properly restored, we can create an environment few other cities can compete with."

Map: Courtesy of The Wetlands Initiative and US EPA, Region V

This is particularly true when one looks beyond the plan for Chicago and immediate suburbs, and observes the wide swath of green that can be created by linking the Calumet Open Space Reserve with the Illinois National Heritage Corridor to the west and to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore on the east. Though the National Park Service examined and ultimately decided against creating a Calumet National Heritage Area for this bi-state region, it's clear that establishing land and water links between these sites areas are important both for maintaining biodiversity and for attracting ecotourism.

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Photographer Greg Neise captures an immature black-crowned night heron near Lake Calumet.

Visiting the Calumet area also provides an opportunity to rethink nature, and what constitutes the natural world. Most of us have been raised to see factories as ugly blights on the landscape – yet we enjoy the products and standard of living such manufacturing provides.

At Calumet, there's a chance for visitors to move past aesthetic prejudices against factories, smokestacks, and landfills and to truly view a landscape with fresh vision. "There is a certain majesty to some of the industrial artifacts," says Adelmann. "And they tell the story of so many people's lives. Not famous people, but the lives of workers. They also tell the incredible story of the growth and development of Chicago."

Dickhut agrees. "I like plain old nature – you know, the top of the Tetons thing," she says. "But I love it when culture and nature mix. The way the landfills loom on the landscape reminds me of Mayan mounds I've seen in Mexico and Belize. And they'll probably be there just as long."

Copies of the *Calumet Area Land Use Plan: Sustainable Development for Industry and Nature*, the *Calumet Open Space Reserve Plan*, and *Calumet Area Design Guidelines* will be available later this year from the City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development. Call (312) 744-1074 for more information.

Marian Byrnes: Conscience of the Calumet

In 1979, Marian Byrnes found a notice in her mailbox that the Chicago Transit Authority planned to build a bus barn on the north half of Van Vlissingen Prairie, a 160-acre parcel located in the Lake Calumet region on Chicago's far Southeast Side.

"When I moved to my house with the Van Vlissingen Prairie in my backyard, it was like a miracle to find a territory like that within the city limits – a large expanse of wetlands and open space of any kind of ecological value whatsoever, and so big that when you're out there you don't even know you're in the city. With all kinds of birds – herons and egrets. And a big pond – about 11 acres. The neighborhood kids would go skating there Christmas morning."

Photo: Arthur Melville Pearson

Byrnes attended the CTA public information meeting and discovered that there were several of her neighbors present with the same thought – no bus barn. Together, they formed the Committee to Protect the Prairie. So began a successful grassroots campaign to save their prairie, and the apprenticeship of Marian Byrnes in her efforts to save the larger Calumet region.

"About the time of our first campaign, Dr. James Landing of the University of Illinois-Chicago formed the Lake Calumet Study Committee, a coalition of regional environmental organizations dedicated to protecting wetlands throughout the Calumet region. I was the only local representative, the only "non-professional" invited to participate. I remember at one of the first meetings, I was asked to describe the Van Vlissingen Prairie, and I replied that it was filled with the most beautiful Queen Anne's lace. I thought everyone was going to vomit. 'That's a Eurasian invasive!'"

Even today, the retired Chicago Public Schools teacher with a master's degree from the University of Chicago confesses to not being an expert naturalist. "I love the big birds, especially great egrets. But I'm not a professional birder. I could be looking at a bird from a distance and not tell whether it is a Canada goose or a double-crested cormorant. I haven't spent that much time to learn things like that because there's been such a variety of other things to learn – primarily the contamination of the area and possible ways to address that contamination."

In a region plagued by more than 150 years of wholesale industrial degradation, there is an overwhelming amount of information to learn. But according to Lynn Cunningham, president of the Southeast Chicago Development Commission, "Marian is incredibly self-taught. Today, I think she can run circles around most people about the science in the Calumet."

Explains Byrnes, "I learned what I felt I had to learn to direct the work of protection and preservation sensibly. The "green" side – birds and plants and all – although certainly my primary interest, wasn't the part that I had to direct because that wasn't going to get the job done."

The "job" for most of the past 20 years has been to battle a nonstop onslaught of proposals that would have eliminated the Calumet's remaining wetlands and open spaces. Grassroots groups like the Committee to Protect the Prairie were springing up throughout the Calumet to fight this dump and that development. In 1985, realizing there was more strength in working together, Byrnes coalesced several local grassroots groups under the umbrella of CURE – Citizens United to Reclaim the Environment.

"Our first campaign was to defeat the proposal to place a landfill in Big Marsh, one of Chicago's prime birding locations and Calumet's second largest body of open water after Lake Calumet itself." In 1989, CURE evolved into the Southeast Environmental Task Force, a coalition of 30 grassroots organizations that successfully opposed placement of a garbage incinerator on the former Wisconsin Steel site. From 1990 to 1992, Byrnes and dozens of local groups succeeded in defeating "the bomb," the city's proposed Lake Calumet airport. "Lake Calumet would have been filled in, the entire neighborhood of Hegewisch razed, and instead of birds, the region would have become a flyway for airplanes only."

"She's always been good in rallying people to the cause," observes Lynn Cunningham. "People see her as a leader. She listens to them. When I've seen her in meetings being asked for opinions, she always says, 'I have to get back to my peo-

R E S E A R C H W A T C H

• Researchers from the US Forest Service are studying the ability of black willow and cottonwood seedlings to absorb contaminants from soil and water in the Calumet region. If successful – the process is called phytoremediation – more trees will be planted as a buffer between Indian Ridge Marsh and a contaminated site nearby.

• The Illinois Natural History Survey has been studying the effectiveness of Galerucella beetles in reducing purple loosestrife in wetlands. This loosestrife is considered one of the worst invasive plants in the region and the thousands of beetles now munching away in the Calumet stands are producing promising results.

• Field Museum anthropologists are supervising a study of attitudes about and uses of the Calumet area by residents of the East Side and South Deering neighborhoods.

• Other studies underway are looking at the effects of contaminants on the nesting success of the state-endangered black-crowned night herons at Heron Pond and at insect populations at Hegewisch Marsh and other wetlands.

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Immature black-crowned night heron finds a home where nature and culture mix in the Calumet marshes.

ple and check.' That's the mark of a leader who respects and understands her constituency."

Consequently, leaders outside the community, including Jack Darin, director of the Sierra Club Illinois Chapter, respect and listen to Byrnes. "Marian speaks with a certain moral authority as a long-time resident and as someone who has toiled in relative obscurity in one of the region's most forgotten landscapes. That dedication commands a certain respect among regional leaders. But also, as a more or less average member of the community, she knows how to communicate to the local residents in a way that is meaningful to them."

"Marian understands that she is a key bridge between community organizations and government agencies, foundations, environmental groups," says Suzanne Malec, deputy commissioner for the Chicago Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and one of the principal shapers of the city's Ecological Management Strategy for the Calumet. "She can speak both languages, and has done an amazingly good job making connections viable and sustained."

Byrnes' ability to be a bridge has helped the image of the Calumet region progress from dumping ground and industrial wasteland to land of environmental and economic opportunity. At the instigation of Dr. James Landing, in 1993, the Calumet Ecological Park Association was established, its primary focus to petition Congress to conduct a feasibility study to designate the Calumet region a National Park Service (NPS) site. As the Association's president, Marian eventually convinced then Congressional candidate Jerry Weller to sponsor the feasibility study legislation, which he did once elected.

In 1998, the National Park Service determined that the Calumet region was potentially suitable for designation as a National Heritage Area due to its natural, cultural and recreational resources. Less than the recommendation as a full-blown natural area that many had hoped for, nonetheless Marian believed that "The NPS study was critical, a turning point."

In May 2000, the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois announced a joint initiative to preserve 3,000 acres of Calumet open land for ecological purposes, and to develop 3,000 acres of brownfields for industrial use.

Byrnes, herself observed, "I think the most Jim Landing and I and others expected to do was to keep the Calumet open spaces protected in our lifetimes, and that eventually some government or group would come along that would understand about the necessity for their preservation and restoration. The city/state initiative is almost like icing on the cake."

At the age of 75, her voice seldom rising above a scratchy sotto voce, Marian continues to advocate as relentlessly for the Calumet as she did the first time she helped save her backyard prairie. She attends an average of five Calumet-related meetings per week, taking the bus wherever she needs to go. She is the volunteer executive director of the Southeast Environmental Task Force, and leads several of its "Good Neighbor Dialogues" with local businesses such as Ford Motor Company, Safety-Kleen, and Chicago Specialties, Inc. She is public affairs director for the Calumet Ecological Park Association, and a board member of the Chicago Recycling Coalition. Most recently, she was appointed by Mayor Daley and Governor Ryan to the Calumet Sustainable Growth Advisory Committee. Once again, she is the only local, non-professional member invited to participate. But this time, she knows her native from her nonnative species, and more.

"In our many campaigns, we have become too aware of all the other communities across the country that are fighting hazardous waste dumps and landfills." she says. "So we cannot in good conscience just ship our garbage off to them. We have to develop the technologies and the will to deal with it locally. And for many years, we had to say 'Not In My Back Yard' to any kind of development just to be heard at all. And although I would fight development of the Van Vlissingen prairie to the last inch, we can't be absolute NIMBYs anymore. We need to favor sensible economic development on brownfields, which don't have much ecological value, because people in our region need the jobs, and manufacturing has to go somewhere. And it's certainly much better that it go on brownfields than sprawling out into the greenfields of the suburbs and beyond."

Thinking globally, acting locally, Marian Byrnes has become, as Lynn Cunningham well observes, "the environmental conscience of the Calumet."

– Arthur Melville Pearson

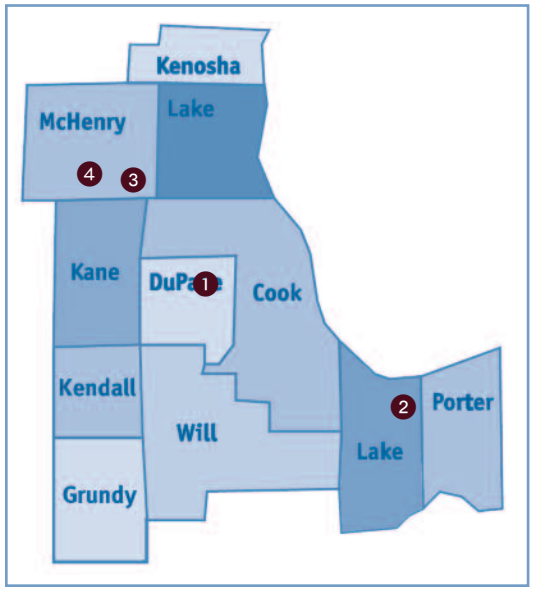
Calumet Resources & Information

Calumet Ecological Park Association,
(773) 374-8543
www.lincolnnet.net/cepa
Grand Calumet Task Force,
(219) 473-4246
www.grandcal.org
Friends of Wolf Lake,
(773) 646-6373
Calumet Environmental Resource Center,
(773) 995-2964
www.csu.edu/cerc
Open Space Alliance – Governors State University,
(708) 534-4487
www.lincolnnet.net/calumet
Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter,
(312) 251-1680
www.sierraclub.org/il/calumet
National Park Service,
(312) 353-1613
www.nps.gov/rtca

Into the Wild

OUR GUIDE TO THE WILD SIDE

Photo: Jim Nachel



❶ MEACHAM GROVE FOREST PRESERVE - DuPage County

❷ CRESSMOOR PRAIRIE - Lake County

❸ SILVER CREEK CONSERVATION AREA - McHenry County

❹ WINGATE PRAIRIE - McHenry County

Maps: Lynda Wallis

Designing the Burn

by Joe Neumann

I'm on the phone with the Palos North fire department in southwestern Cook County. "Is McMahon Woods in your jurisdiction?" After checking the location, the woman quickly confirms that I have called the right place.

The preparation for a controlled burn begins long before the day the fire is set. Each site needs a written burn plan. As volunteer steward, I find phone numbers for an extensive list of fire, police, and district departments that need to be informed when a burn is scheduled. The burn plan includes these phone numbers along with the procedures, conditions, equipment, and crew needed to carry out the burn. To prepare this section of the plan, I walk McMahon Woods with John Raudenbush, restoration forester for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

Photo: Brook Collins, Chicago Park District

Much of McMahon Woods is now a formidable thicket. But it was once one of the most open sites in the district. A wave of non-native viburnum drowned the formerly open oak savanna. European buckthorn swallowed what was once prairie. Fire would have kept the invasive brush under control. John and I make our way into the interior along a brush-choked footpath. Once we leave the footpath, conditions get worse. We duck or crawl under the often thorny branches.

Our destination is the most significant natural feature of the site – a specialized wetland called a fen. The fen's alkaline waters seep out of the ground after making a subterranean journey from the uplands to the north. When people emerge into the fen, after navigating the thicket, they often gaze around in relief and declare: "I can breathe again!" Nature has a similar reaction. The thicket has a stifling lack of diversity, while the fen bubbles with butterflies and wildflowers.

As we make our way through the thicket, John and I discuss details for conducting a burn here: crew members (8), temperature (maximum 70° F), relative humidity (at least 25 percent), wind speed (no more than 20 m.p.h.). One of the most important factors is wind direction. The nearest roads are to the west and north. A wind from these directions will ensure that smoke stays away from traffic. The crew will be equipped with drip torches to light the fire. Flappers and backpack pumpers will be used to control the fire. Two-way radios will keep everyone in communication. A 50-gallon pumper truck will be stationed along 104th Avenue where it can wet down the nearby cattails if necessary.

As we stand on the north side of the fen, John's gaze crisscrosses the wetland's width of a few hundred feet. His eyes sweep out along the extended length of the fen that trails away into the distance to the west. He glances back at the thicket to the north and east that we passed through. He glares at the low-grade woods to the south where a massive marsh once existed until it was devastated by the construction of the Sag Channel canal. "On the day of the burn we'll start in the southeast," John says as his arm sweeps the eastern end of the fen. "One crew will take the north side and the other the south." As he talks he seems to see phantom crews moving into position. "The south crew always has to stay in front of the north crew – that's a must."

Back in the parking lot, John is soon on his cellular phone. Some assignments on the district's expanded burn crews have not been finalized yet. Burn season is almost here. Time to put plans into action.

MEACHAM GROVE FOREST PRESERVE - DuPage County

Meacham Grove Forest Preserve in Bloomingdale offers the best of two ecologically diverse worlds: a 40-acre mature forest west of Roselle Road and 200 acres of forest, savanna, and wetlands on the east side.

In 1920, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County acquired the west sector, now one of the best examples of native woodland in the county. Fifty-four years later, the district acquired a gravel pit and landfill across the road and over the years has transformed it to benefit the environment and people: created wetlands and other structures now provide wildlife habitat and flood protection for local communities. Originally called Bloomingdale Grove, the preserve was renamed in 1976 for the Meacham brothers who helped settle Bloomingdale in the early 1830s.

As volunteer steward Bob Flesvig and I biked through one of the two short trails (about .5 miles each) in the west sector, towering trees filtered the light and muffled the surrounding city sounds. Removal of invasive buckthorn has made room for butterfly weed, with hot-orange flowers contrasting against the cool green forest floor. Since Flesvig began working here a decade ago, he has been on a buckthorn crusade. "There is no standing buckthorn on the west side now," he said, "and none have gone to seed. Over the years, you see a difference. It's really amazing. A healthy Midwestern forest is something you can see through, like here on the west side. It has open spaces."

This mesic upland forest is moderately damp, with puddles that occasionally dry, leaving a thin layer of soil above about 8" of gravel. Periodic burns are essential to the forest's life cycle, mimicking the effects of Potawatomi Indians who burned here to attract buffalo with tender green shoots of regrowth. During late summer and fall, visitors can see Short's aster, a conservative species on the east side. Other more common species are side-flowering aster, blue-stemmed goldenrod, pale sunflower, and wild goldenglow coneflower, which is found in wetland areas.

When we crossed Roselle Road to the 1.71-mile loop trail, I couldn't help thinking the east sector, with its industrial history, simply would not live up to the woodland's beauty. However, as we emerged from deep shade, a beautiful wetland opened to the left, offering up great egrets, great blue herons, and a bullfrog greeting. The growing amphibian population, including the American toad, western chorus frog, and green frog, signals this former gravel pit site is becoming a healthy wetland.

A few yards down on the right, another wetland revealed unexpected signs of success. Seven young wood ducks swam by, loudly munching on green algae. A muskrat towed grasses to a new home. Numerous birds captured our attention, including a red-headed woodpecker, a pair of nesting brown creepers flitting in and out of a dead tree hollow, an eastern bluebird, and an eastern kingbird. We continued around Maple Lake, a 32-acre fishing lake, to the hill, a former landfill, where savannah sparrows reportedly nest. When Flesvig said, "This is a birder's heaven," he read my mind.

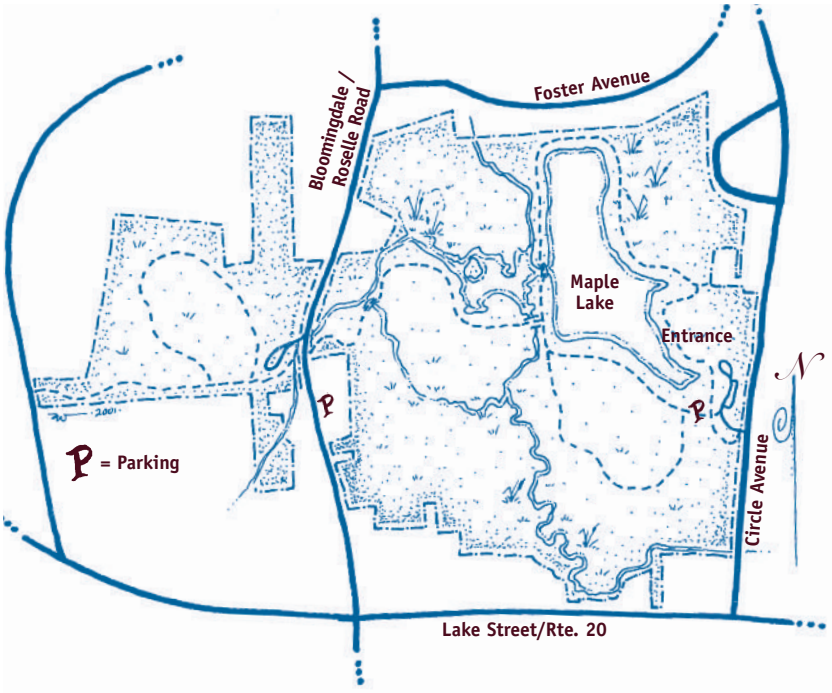
In the fall, visitors can find blackberries and raspberries on both sides of the preserve and vivid colors on the maples, oaks, walnut, and hickory trees.

All trails are suited for bikers, hikers, and leashed dogs. Cross-country skiing is permitted and more appropriate in the east section, but trails are not groomed. Each parking area has water fountains and restrooms; picnic tables are located near the west parking area only. Contact volunteer liaison Cindy Hedges at (630) 876-5929 or chedges@dupageforest.com for information on tours and workdays.

— *Beverly McClellan*

DIRECTIONS

Take I-290 west to Lake St. Head west on Lake St. and go right on Roselle Rd. Look for the west parking area about .25 mile on the left, with access to west and east sectors of the preserve. For east sector parking, from Lake St. go north on Circle Ave., about .5 mile east of Roselle Rd. The parking lot is two blocks down on the left.



Weekend Explorer

Cressmoor Prairie, Lake County, Indiana

by Warren Buckler

What's perhaps most remarkable about Cressmoor Prairie in Hobart, Ind., is that it exists at all. Against all odds, this once forgotten piece of land continues to offer visitors a view of northwest Indiana's landscape much as it did when white settlers arrived in the early 1800s.

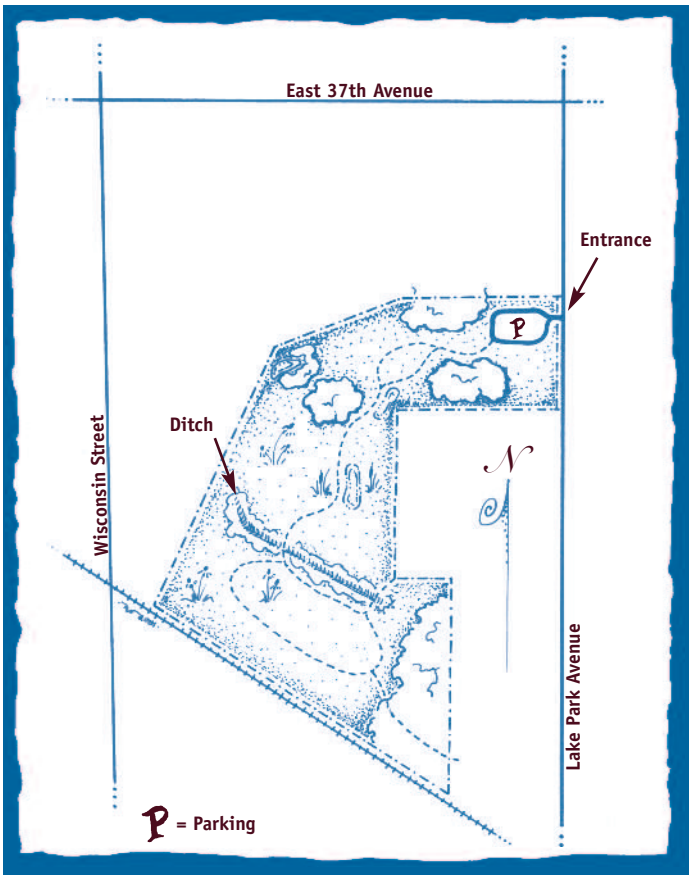
Virtually all Indiana's black soil prairie, of which Cressmoor is a prime example, has been converted to agricultural use or, more recently, consumed or degraded by industrial and subdivision development. Had Cressmoor's previous owners not left it alone, and had it not been "discovered" by a knowledgeable passerby, the 38-acre site likely would have fallen into the hands of commercial or residential real estate interests.

Happily, fate intervened. In 1988, a plant enthusiast and school teacher from Bremen, Ind., named Keith Board just happened to be driving by when he caught sight of a compass plant flower stalk. Knowing that the plant usually doesn't occur far from a true prairie, he investigated and, indeed, soon found himself "in the middle of a beautiful prairie." His findings were a revelation even to some local conservationists.

The privately-endowed Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund – a Chicago Wilderness organization that buys, protects, and restores significant natural areas in Indiana's three lakefront counties – negotiated the purchase of the land with state backing and continues to own and manage it. Cressmoor was designated an Indiana Nature Preserve in 1996. (For more information about the Heinze Fund, visit www.heinzefund.org/ or call (219) 879-4725.)

The Cressmoor preserve is bordered by a golf course, an apartment complex, a railroad track, and a busy road. New houses are going up across the street, and downtown Hobart (often pronounced HO-bert) is about a mile away. Indeed, the proximity of homes, highways, and manufacturing plants typically adds to the challenges of maintaining high-quality natural areas in urbanized northwest Indiana.

But a short walk along the trail that leads from the small parking area off Lake Park Avenue allows visitors to leave most of the man-made world behind. And deep into the prairie visitors can find vistas that convey a powerful sense of the plant and animal communities that prevailed in this region centuries ago.



In a leisurely one to two-hour hike (the mowed trail is about two miles long), beginning botanists can test their skill at recognizing some of the 184 native plant species identified so far at Cressmoor. Veteran plant hunters should be on the lookout for purple milkweed, prairie lily, ragged and green-fringed orchids, prairie sundrops, and the imposing and intriguingly named rattlesnake master. Much of the preserve is typical of pure prairie habitat, with large stands of big and little bluestem, Indian and other grasses interspersed with a wide variety of flowering plants. Cressmoor also has some savanna and low-lying wet areas. Amethyst aster was recently found in the savanna, making its first known appearance in Lake County, Ind. American hazelnut is abundant in the transitional zone between Cressmoor's savanna and prairie.

The prairie wildflowers, including six types of goldenrod and blue and white varieties of aster, reach their peak in late summer and fall. But midsummer, when coreopsis, sunflowers, blazing star, ironweed, gray-headed coneflower, and eight species of milkweed are in bloom, is

Directions

Cressmoor Prairie is on Lake Park Avenue in Hobart, Indiana. Exit I-80/94 at State Road 51 South. Follow Hwy. 51 for two miles to E. 37th Ave. Turn right/west on E. 37th for one mile to Lake Park Avenue. Turn left/south on Lake Park .25 miles to parking lot on right/west side of street.

nearly as rewarding. Birds, butterflies, and small mammals and reptiles abound. Five rare remnant-dependent insects – leaf hoppers, a skipper and a butterfly – have been found in areas of Cressmoor with a history of fire.

About a third of the prairie is burned each year, explains Jan Hunter, the stewardship program manager, restoring a natural cycle that was interrupted by settlers' fire suppression efforts. The prescribed burns remove layers of dead leaves and grass, return nutrients to the soil, help with seed germination, and discourage large woody plants.

No less important is the effort to promote respect and understanding for the preserve among nearby residents, some of whom in times past may have regarded the land as a convenient dumping ground, play area, or a place to ride off-road vehicles. Vandalism remains an occasional problem. But the larger Hobart community has been supportive, and busloads of visiting students down to Kindergarten age are helping to turn the prairie into an outdoor learning laboratory. Cressmoor is becoming a community asset, a living example of one of Indiana's rarest ecosystems, and one of a few sizable remnants left in the state.

Pets on leashes are allowed at Cressmoor, but bikes and horses are not.

Foraging

If a couple of hours on the prairie whets your appetite for lunch (or breakfast or dinner), or for exploring a different kind of landscape, the area offers a number of attractive options.

If nutrition is the first priority, head south on Lake Park Avenue, turn left at the national headquarters of the Croatian Catholic Union and you'll find yourself at **J. K. Michael's Family Restaurant,** 7 E. Ridge Road, (219) 947-7800, where the Athenian chicken, Grecian pork chops, and spinach pie come highly recommended. A local connoisseur proclaims the lemon rice soup the "best in the county" – or maybe several counties. Lunch specials average $6.50, dinner specials $10.50.

Or head up to 332 Main Street, past the Art Theater that shows current movies (showtime 7:30 p.m., no children under 17 allowed without parents, (219) 942-1670) and looks a lot like the neighborhood movie houses some of us patronized in the 1950s. There you'll find the Bright Spot Restaurant, (219) 947-1196. The décor and ambiance live up to the establishment's name, and the menu offers almost everything you can think of, including Greek specialties. Hungarian goulash, a special one recent afternoon, was delicious and ample. Daily specials average $6-$8. The Bright Spot does not accept credit cards.

Or you can grab sandwiches from Coney Island Express, (219) 945-0885, at the corner of Front and Center, and walk a block to the community's expansive and attractive Festival Park on the shores of Lake George, adjoining downtown. Visitors of the Unitarian persuasion who feel a need for spiritual nourishment might look in at the First Unitarian Church, Fifth and Main, which dates to 1874.

If your taste runs to fresh fruits and vegetables – and succulent desserts – head north from Cressmoor on Lake Park and turn right on 37th Ave. After about 1.5 miles you come to a couple of produce stores on the north side. Marilyn's Bakery (open Feb. 1 - Dec. 24), adjoining Johnson's Farm Produce (open mid-March to Halloween), offers scrumptious fresh-baked apple, blueberry, and other fruit pies ($4-$8) and kolaches, and will pack you a box lunch ($5.25). At Remus Farms (open year-round) up the street, the counters overflow with corn, green beans, melons, zucchini – in season, of course.

Touring/Roaming

An afternoon is time enough to get at least a taste of Indiana's famed **Lake Michigan Dunes,** (219) 926-1952. Head east on I-94 to the exit at State Road 49 (Chesterton), turn north, and you'll soon enter the 2,182-acre **Indiana Dunes State Park.** Trail maps are available at the Gate House and the Nature Center. The shifting sands and stiff climb on Trail 9 will test your conditioning, but you get great views of the dunes and the lake. Trail 2 is flatter and leads through wooded wetlands, an important habitat and distinctive feature of the Dunes landscape.

The 15,000-acre **Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore,** (219) 926-7561, also offers many hiking opportunities. Good trail maps are available at the Visitor Center on Kemil Road, just off U.S. 12, east of the state park entrance. Check the schedule of ranger-led activities while you're there. On the way, sample the wares at **Schoolhouse Shop and Antiques,** (219) 926-1551 (closed Tuesdays), on Furnessville Road between U.S. 12 and U.S. 20. **The Cowles Bog** (actually a fen) **Trail,** accessible from Mineral Springs Rd., is not only scenic but serves as a link to scientific history – Botany Professor Henry Cowles' celebrated discoveries about plant succession early in the last century.

Another option: Forget the hike and pick a spot along miles of lake beach for a refreshing swim.

Bedding Down

In addition to all the usual motels on major highways, several bed and breakfasts are available in the area. These are especially well known: **The Gray Goose Inn,** Chesterton (800) 521-5127, $80 - $165; **Creekwood Inn,** Michigan City (219) 872-8357, $118-$173. The Inn at Aberdeen, Valparaiso (219) 465-3753, $94-$157. Check with the Indiana Bed and Breakfast Association, (800) 814-7478 or www.indianabedandbreakfast.org, for more options.

Campers can nestle in sleeping bags at both Dunes parks; campgrounds tend to fill up early so check availability. **Indiana Dunes State Park** (219) 926-4520: access from State Road 49. Reservations Memorial Day to Labor Day, available in person or by mail up to 48 hours in advance. $12 per night, with electricity $15. Open year round, limited services in winter. **National Lakeshore** (219) 926-7561: campground on U.S. 12, four miles east of State Road 49. April 1 – October 31, $10 per night for up to two tents, eight people. No electric hookup. Reservations not accepted.

Events

Oct. 19-21: Northwest Indiana Storytelling Festival

Indiana Dunes State Park Nature Center, State Road 49, north of Chesterton. Varying times over three days. (219) 926-1390.

Oct. 20-21: Kids' Fall Funfest

Same location.

Directions

To Silver Creek Conservation Area: Take I-94/294 north from Chicago to Rte. 176, go west 15 miles to the stoplight at Roberts Rd. in Island Lake. Turn south (left) to Rawson Bridge Rd. east (right).

To Prairie View Conservation Center: Head east (left) from the Silver Creek Conservation Area parking lot 1.5 miles to Roberts Rd. Turn left on Roberts Rd., drive 2.5 miles to Rte. 176, turn left and drive 3 miles to Buhl Rd. on the left. Take Buhl to Behan Rd., drive southeast. 9 miles.

If you fantasize about discovering new wild places, Silver Creek Conservation Area is for you. Since it opened in March, 2001, this brand new site belonging to the McHenry County Conservation District near Cary in northeastern Illinois is still too young to attract many visitors despite its sweeps of great angelica crowned by towering 100+ year-old bur oaks. Part of the Oakwood Hills complex, a 1,000-acre preserve including Silver Creek and Hickory Grove on the southeast and the Prairieview Education Center to the north, the reserve was born years ago on farms stretching along the Fox River, from pastures near Crystal Lake, to a tree farm on the southeast where you'll spot lonely rows of sugar maples marching in stiff precision toward the Fox River. In 1999, the Conservation District began a 10-year restoration project by removing non-native sedges and buckthorns from the broad wetlands surrounding Silver Creek in the center of this scenic area.

After pulling into the parking area off Rawson Bridge Road in Cary, grab a map to guide your brief tour on foot or cross country skis past virgin oaks, shagbark hickories, and black cherry trees and sweeps of New England asters and sawtooth sunflowers in late summer. You may spot egrets, mallards, teal, and nesting sandhill cranes before you look skyward for the heron or redtail hawks soaring overhead. At quiet dawn or dusk, look for beaver and muskrat bustling through the fens.

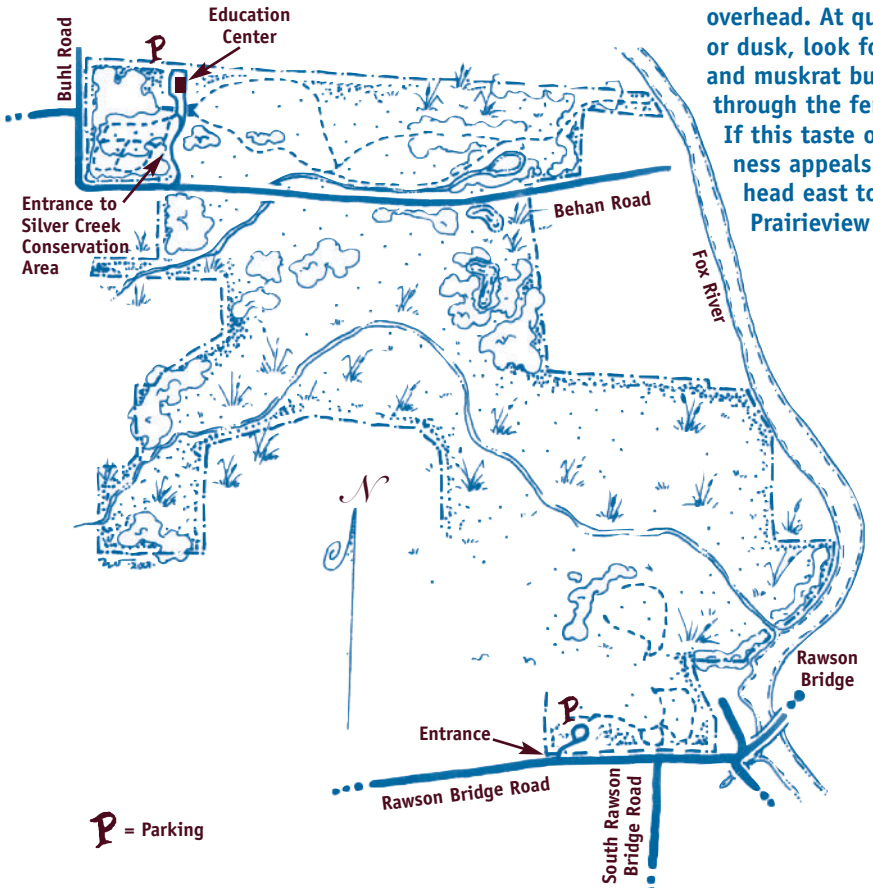
If this taste of wilderness appeals to you, head east to the Prairieview Education Center in Crystal Lake. Once the home of wealthy residents, the Center was opened in 1999 to centralize services to the county. It occupies a 280-acre prairie and savanna on the northeastern boundary of the conservation area.

There's a grand view from the upstairs windows overlooking Silver Creek to the southeast. Try an ambling hike through little bluestem, sideoats grama, prairie dropseed, and other native grasses planted in the spring of 2001. Start your walk on the brand new three-mile trail through the savanna restoration to the river where sunflowers nod near the water's edge. With luck, glimpse a red or gray fox digging grubs for dinner or a coyote or badger stalking beneath Joe Pye weed or cottonwoods. Spring will bring a spate of prairie violets, blue-eyed grass, fringed puccoon, May apple, and plumed avens.

"A lot of 4th and 5th graders did a great job this spring restoring the savanna by cutting brush and pulling garlic mustard with the Mighty Acorns school groups projects," said Deb Chapman, education service manager. "It was gratifying to start the work of returning the area to its natural state."

Neither site permits horses or bikes; both offer picnic areas, drinking water, and restrooms, and permit cross-country skiing. Pets must be leashed. For more information, call (815) 338-6223 or visit www.mccdistrict.org.

— Barbara Phillips



WINGATE PRAIRIE - McHenry County

Over 60 years ago, Crystal Lake Park District acquired property that would later prove to be pivotal to the area's environmental movement. The 140-acre parcel, slated for open space recreation use, was named Veteran Acres in honor of the homecoming veterans of World War II.

"Unfortunately, the natural beauty of this site was not always enjoyed by the residents of Crystal Lake," said Ellen Riedl, Crystal Lakes's public information coordinator. "Some of the land was once farmed, and later groomed as a golf course." In 1969, School District 47, in cooperation with Crystal Lake Park District, built a nature center (now a multi-use facility) just west of Wingate Prairie, making the area an outdoor classroom for the next 10 years.

Bill Wingate, a teacher who had grown up in the area, reconnected with the prairie and eventually guided more than 150 volunteers in efforts to restore this site over the next 27 years. "Bill literally inspired and shared his knowledge and love for this site with three generations of the region's citizens," said Steve Byers, field representative for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

In recognition of his service, the 33.5 acre prairie within Veteran Acres was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1994 and named in honor (posthumously) of Mr. Wingate. "Crystal Lake Park District demonstrated leadership in seeking formal protection of Wingate Prairie and the adjoining Sterne's Fen through the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and spawned a whole new generation of restoration in McHenry County," added Byers.

A high quality dry-mesic gravel prairie, Wingate Prairie offers a refreshingly expansive view. Amid the gently rolling hills of billowing grasses, a small patch of queen of the prairie and some purple-flowering raspberry in a small pine forest can be appreciated on a summertime stroll. A flat moraine at the northern end of the site is home to yet another variety of plants not requiring the well-drained soil of the hills or the damp hollow areas.

This unique prairie land, with its rolling terrain, oak savanna and conifer groupings, is home to several rare and endangered plant and animal species including prairie buttercup, pinweed, queen of the prairie, pale vetchling, purple flowering raspberry, silvery blue butterfly, and the Franklin ground squirrel.

Approximately four miles of multi-use trails are open to hikers and mountain bikers year round with cross-country skiing available in winter. A nature center operated by Crystal Lake Park District offers hands-on exhibits as well as a variety of programs. The center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Saturdays noon – 5:00 p.m.

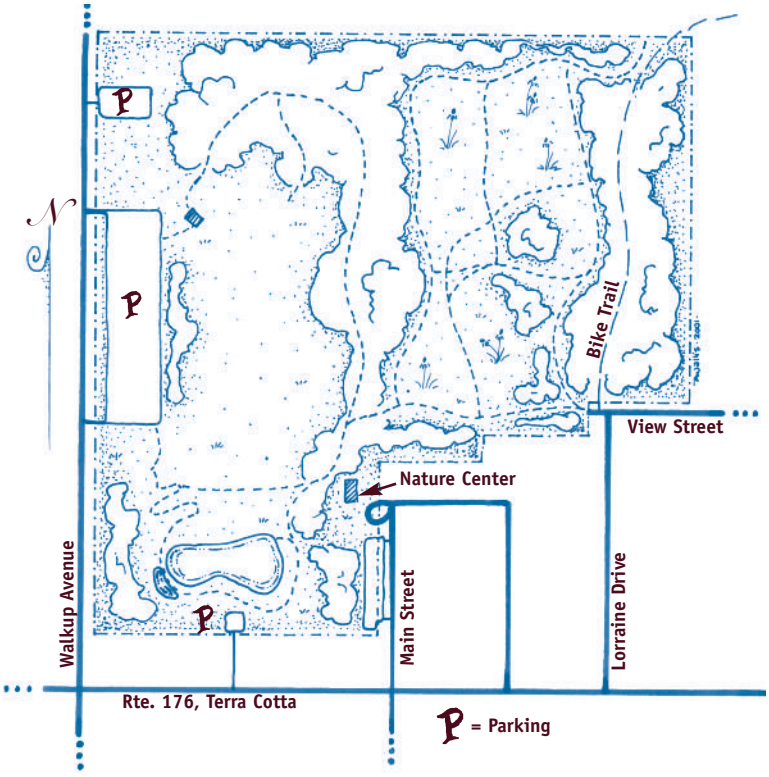
A volunteer work group meets at the nature center every Tuesday from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. and the 1st and 3rd Saturday from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. or by appointment. For more information call Jim Wigman, (815) 337-3431 or the nature center, (815) 455-1763.

Volunteer-led "Wanders at Wingate" are offered the last Sunday of each month from May through September for adults and families wanting to learn more about the prairie. These free hikes begin at 2:00 p.m. and last for approximately one hour. Insect repellent and sunscreen are strongly recommended.

— April Anderson

DIRECTIONS

Take I-90 to Rte. 31 north, then follow Rte. 31 north to Rte. 176 and head west to Main Street. The trailhead is at the north end of Main Street behind the nature center.



Natural Events

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

FALL 2001

September and October

Seedy Business

Unless you want funky tasting burritos, you won't want to confuse habañeros (the stunningly hot chile peppers) with habeneria (a stunningly beautiful group of fringed orchids). Faithful readers of this magazine know our special region is home to many orchids, although none are found in sizeable numbers. The sad truth is the populations of some local orchids can be counted on your fingers. While their showy blossoms are summer delights, autumn is the time for orchids to disburse their microscopic seeds; a stiff wind will blow tens of thousands of dust-like seeds away from the parent plant. Only on the rarest of conditions will an orchid seed produce a new plant. In addition to the basic (but little understood) requirements of moisture and sunlight, fringed orchid seeds require soil with the appropriate endomycorrhizal fungi that will establish a symbiotic relationship with the embryonic orchid. The fungus will supply the new plant with sugars necessary for growth, effectively replacing photosynthesis during this stage of development.

Wild Rice-a-Roni

Centuries ago during warm, early fall days, local women would maneuver large, ungainly dugout canoes — burned and chipped from cottonwood logs — through our marshes. The ladies might have been collecting wild rice, an emergent grass with nutritious seeds heads. Wild rice may not have been the food staple it was in native villages to the north, but around here it might have been served as a side dish with venison, roast duck, turkey, cranberries, corn, beans, squash, smoked fish, and steamed mussels. Dessert may have been wild plum compote served on hickory nut bread. Dang! A Chicago Wilderness meal of 400 years ago certainly sounds more appetizing, let alone healthier, than the mutton, haggis, and shortbread my ancestors were eating in the west highlands of Scotland.

October and November

Air Offense

Jaegers are hawk-like sea birds. They specialize in mid-air assault and theft of fish that were caught by other bird species. Ornithologists call this behavior kleptoparasitism. Joe Friday would call it strong-arm robbery. Most of the time, jaegers are far away, patrolling the oceans. But during autumn, a few parasitic jaegers (and even less frequently pomerine and long-tailed jaegers) are spotted as they migrate south over Lake Michigan. Inevitably, these wandering jaegers are funneled over points along the north Indiana shoreline, where their swift appearance in the sky scatters the resting gulls and ducks like a fox in the barnyard.

Jaegers — and other notable migrants such as red loons and assorted diving ducks — may be seen during October and November at the parks found along the Indiana lake shore (e.g. Miller Park in Gary), especially on the days immediately following a cold front. Bundle up! The best days for jaeger spotting are also some of the coldest, as the north winds blow uninterrupted down our great lake.

Winter Roommates

It doesn't sound the least bit cozy, but those chimney-topped tunnels constructed by prairie crayfish might be getting crowded soon. An assortment of animal life use crayfish holes as hibernation sites. The special creatures that join our clawed crustaceans in their dank lairs may include endangered reptiles such as Graham's crayfish snake (who may eat his hole-mate come spring) and the little Massassauga rattlesnake.

November and December

Mouse Details

Other than a few hockey players, meadow jumping mice are our only local mammals with 18 teeth. (Most rodents have 16 teeth, you know.) But while the winter athletic season is just getting started, our little, long tail rodents are done with their jumping for the year and now ready for a long nap through the winter. During November, meadow jumping mice will retire into a deep tunnel that leads below the frost line, where they will curl into a tight ball, and remain cold and motionless until next spring. Not abundant, but found in a variety of natural habitats, meadow jumping mice escape danger by leaping away like bite-sized kangaroos, rather than scurrying, as most mice tend to do.

Hawk Eared

Early winter is a good time for spotting northern harriers as they hunt over our open grasslands and marshes. Soaring low on their long wings, these sleek hawks sweep back and forth, methodically and efficiently covering miles of unbroken prairie. Surprisingly, harriers are not looking for their prey; they are listening for it. Noisy rabbits, voles, and mice are easy targets for the acrobatic harriers, which are able to swoop in swiftly after locating their meal by ear.

Some northern harriers enter our region after spending the summer in the treeless areas of northern Canada. They are prairie predators that roost on the ground, sometimes in small groups. They probably benefit from the removal of the box elder trees from the old, overgrown fence rows that crisscross our natural areas.

Hollywood Owl

I have been inundated with requests from young readers to write about the "guaranteed" sighting of "white owls" throughout the area after November 16. Of course, they are referring to the opening of the new Harry Potter film, in which Harry acquires a pet white owl named Hedwig (played in the film by Ook the Snowy Owl). All right, to be honest, I have received only two requests, those being from my two boys.

It's doubtful that Steven Spielberg is aware that the premier date for the film is also the approximate date for people to start seeing snowy owls in our area. Last year around this time, a magnificent immature snowy owl hung out in Lincoln Park, where it was admired by hundreds of park visitors for a few weeks before taking off for parts unknown. (See CW, Winter '01 for photographs.)

Illustration by Shirley Bonk

Waid and Tom Vanderpoel: restorers of lost lands


Waid Vanderpoel

Photo: Cindy Mehallow

Waid Vanderpoel and his son Tom both share a passion for preserving and restoring land. Waid's love of the outdoors took root as he explored the ponds and meadows near his childhood home in Norwood Park. For Tom, the seed was planted during family outings, seining for fish in local creeks and wandering through woodlands filled with spring wildflowers.

As volunteer chair of the real estate committee of Citizens for Conservation (CFC), Waid devotes a large portion of his time to acquiring conservation land. Dedicated to "Saving Living Space for Living Things," CFC recently acquired 65-acres of farmland adjacent to its largest restoration project, Flint Creek Savanna near Barrington. The purchase was the culmination of 13 years of patient, persistent negotiations. Conservation is not for those who need immediate gratification.

Walking along the banks of Flint Creek, Waid kicks a buckthorn stump – cut by CFC volunteers. "Two years ago you couldn't see from one side of this stand of oaks to other, the brush and buckthorn were so thick," he recalls. "We wanted this additional parcel because it encompasses so much – oaks and hickories, 2,500 feet of Flint Creek, rolling hills, low farmlands ideal for restoration as wetland, and upland fields for restoration as prairie," Waid explains. "On this one parcel, CFC will be able to restore each of the landscape types found in pre-settlement Barrington – prairie, creek course, oak savanna and wetlands."

Standing behind the old farmhouse that serves as CFC's new headquarters, Waid gestures at the concrete silo and notes, "We'll remodel this and use it as an observation tower for our educational classes and for planning our restoration efforts."

Since retiring from the First National Bank of Chicago more than 20 years ago, Waid has immersed himself in preserving land, while also advocating a conservation ethic to local communities, and helping with restoration. His efforts to protect land have resulted in the acquisition of over 1200 acres of forest preserves in the Barrington area. In the shade of a towering oak, watching the swallows dart and skim over the sparkling creek waters, Waid reflects on his career. "When you're working at a regular job, you do something because it needs to be done, but then you wonder what you've accomplished," says Waid. "Here we can see our accomplishments. We're giving nature a chance to survive."

Waid's son Tom is one of the region's most highly respected restoration practitioners. Initially, Tom had a landscaping business and did restoration in his spare time as a CFC volunteer. But gradually his vocation and avocation merged. His company, Savanna Landscaping, has done restoration landscaping for conservationist clients throughout the North Shore. He's also land manager for CFC, where he has logged thousands of hours researching, restoring, and reseeding Flint Creek and other sites. There are few records of certain types of native plant communities, so Tom has developed a knack for finding and developing templates. "Prairies are pretty well documented," Tom explains, "but we have less information on savannas and creeks beds. It's a real hunt – detective work – to determine which plant species we should include. I walked up and down the creek documenting the plant species." The resulting list will guide CFC as it restores the creek bed native plant community.

Victories like the CFC's latest acquisition encourage Tom. "Ecosystems are very quickly disappearing," he notes. "It's a battle, but we're winning. If you work hard at restoration, you can reverse some of the damage."

Tom provides the direction for hundreds of Barrington area residents who work as CFC volunteers. Workdays occur three times a week during seed collection season and twice during the rest of the year. Last year CFC volunteers logged over 800 hours collecting rare seed valued at over $50,000. Tom's dedication is shared by many hard-working volunteers: more than 15 of them came out to 30 or more workdays each in the past year.

For Tom and Waid, conservation is also a family affair. Often they are joined in their work by Gail, Ruth, and Cooper Vanderpoel. Together, their efforts are crafting a lasting legacy for future generations of Vanderpoels – and all of Chicago Wilderness.

— *Cindy Mehallow*

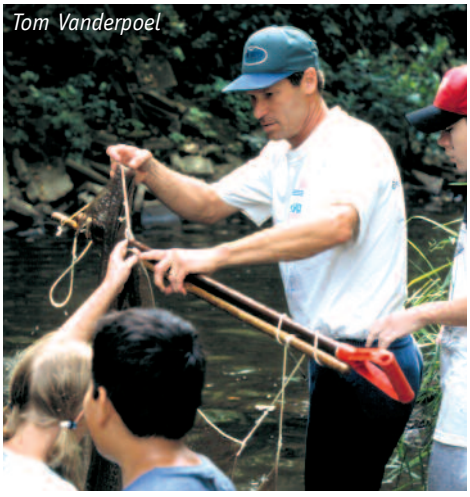

Tom Vanderpoel

Photo: Donna Lee

The Oaks: family trees

Photo: Willard Clay

For centuries they have been symbols of grandeur, antiquity, and rugged endurance. They have been the subjects of countless proverbs, myths, and poetic allusions. In our region, they are the lords of the land, raising their broad and stout-limbed forms over a varied landscape of moraines, dune ridges, and bottomland.

Still, the more than 400 species that make up the world's allotment of oaks are a diverse assemblage of woody plants. While many oaks are tall-growing forest and woodland trees of temperate North America and Eurasia, others assume lower, shrubby shapes that populate more challenging regimes – the volcanic highlands of Central America, the sundrenched Mediterranean maquis, the salt-encrusted thickets of Cape Cod.

How far back into mists of geologic time does genus *Quercus* go? The fossil record suggests the oaks so back at least to the Eocene epoch, 56 to 35 million years ago. Paleobotanists and other collectors have discovered many oak fossils, aged Eocene and younger, from such far-flung locations as the Pacific Northwest and Bulgaria. These remains take the form of either petrified stems, often retaining an almost unbelievable amount of detail down to the cellular level, or leaf compressions, thin carbon films preserved in rock layers that still show the lobes and veins characteristic of long-extinct oak species.

In modern times, at least, the oaks are found almost exclusively in the Northern Hemisphere; only in Colombia can one find them south of the equator. While oak trees are certainly prominent members of the United States flora – our country boasts about 90 native species – the true locus of the oaks' genetic diversity is Mexico, where about 125 native species are present. Within the borders of the United States itself, the greatest concentration of species is located in

Although all the oaks depend on bright light as seedlings and saplings, there's a "pecking order" among them. Bur oaks are dominant in the lightest (and most fire prone) areas. Red oaks rule in the darkest and least fire prone areas. White oaks are in the middle.

the southeastern states. However, these statistics do little to suggest the true span of oak diversity. Nor do they indicate just how hard it can be, in certain circumstances, to identify which species is which. This is the result of the oaks' own proclivity for hybridizing even without human interference. As any veteran tree-identification instructor can attest, the best way to adjust the overconfidence of botany students is to have them scrutinize an oak, seemingly so inoffensive at first glance, that combines the traits of at least two different species. In one sense, it's a frustrating exercise; in another, it is an invaluable lesson in nature's occasional avoidance of crisply defined categories.

Oaks have provided a variety of products and traditional medicines. These trees have yielded up untold thousands of board-feet of wood for barrel-making, shipbuilding, flooring, fencing, dyes, and tools. Their acorns, though usually much too bitter to eat without a thorough soaking or boiling first, have been an important source of food for centuries. Their bark, famously rich in the acidic compound tannin, has been used extensively in leather making and in a host of traditional cures that make use of its antiseptic and astringent properties. Among the ailments that have been treated with oak-based remedies are skin rashes, sore throat, indigestion, respiratory problems, dysentery, chills, fevers, and even broken bones and cholera.

Nor is this abundance of the oaks appreciated only by our own johnny-come-lately species. Untold multitudes of animals, from such arthropods as insects and spiders to the amphibians and birds that feed on them, are directly dependent on the bounty of the oaks – on their shelter, acorns, foliage, and bark – and have co-evolved over millions of years with them. And in an even grander ecological sense, oaks play a defining role in the continuance of that grand determinant of the Illinois landscape – fire. Where the fallen leaves of such competitor species as maples form a moist, gluey, and fast-decaying mat on the forest floor that discourages fire, oak leaves have a persistent, curly, dried-up texture that does the opposite. The cleansing fire readily spreads through oak leaf litter; and it is probably no coincidence that many oak species have a thick, heat-resistant bark that allows the trees to survive the blaze.

Photo: Louise K. Broman/Root Resources

The insects that eat oak leaves are an important food source for many species of songbirds.

The Chicago Wilderness region has nine species of oak. The types present here are among the most aesthetically impressive and also the most abundant in the food and materials they've provided. Modern taxonomists divide the genus *Quercus* into three subdivisions, or sections: the red or black oaks, the white oaks, and the intermediate or golden oaks. Of these, only the first two sections are represented in Eastern or Midwestern states.

White Oaks

For the most part, the general characteristics of this group are distinguished easily: its leaves have rounded lobes that are not bristle-tipped; their mature bark tends to be scaly or flat-ridged rather than furrowed; the inner surface of their nutshells is smooth; the meat of their acorns is white and not as bitter as others'. Usually leading their roster is what is now the official state tree of Illinois, the Eastern white oak (*Quercus alba*). This handsome species, incidentally also the state tree of Connecticut and Maryland, is quite adaptable to different soils and terrains, but is generally most at home in mesic to dry woodlands. Its wood – hard, close-grained, and tan with a faint gray tint – has been prized for centuries. Among its most highly praised virtues is its nonporous nature, the result of tiny, balloonlike swellings in its inner tissue that plug up openings that might otherwise cause leakage.

The other august member of this section that could rightly dispute the title of Illinois' state tree is *Q. macrocarpa*, the bur oak, a species of unsurpassed shape, impact, and character. Take a trip on a windy and well-lit day to our region's savannas or farmland, and you'll sense at once the great extent to which bur oaks still define the land-

scape. Their distinctly two-toned leaves (darkest forest green above and pale white below) are clustered toward the stem-tips. That, and the sparseness of internal branching, produce a certain airiness in this otherwise most stolid plant: breezes and the light of day pass almost unimpeded through the crown. At some distance, the bur oak is easily mistaken for the eastern white, but in the warm months its fiddle-shaped leaves, and its acorns with bristly cups almost wholly enclosing the nut, reveal its real identity. This species is the most sun- and cold-tolerant of all North American oaks. Its natural habitats include prairies, savannas, and open woodlands.

The two other native species of this section are less well known to the nonbotanist. They, too, can be confused with the Eastern white oak, even though their leaves usually bear rounded teeth rather than more deeply incised lobes. The swamp white oak, *Q. bicolor*, lives up to its common name by inhabiting floodplain forests where water stands at the surface for parts of the year. In contrast, the chinquapin oak, *Q. muhlenbergii*, prefers stony uplands where our area's calcareous glacial till and bedrock engender alkaline soils.

Red Oaks

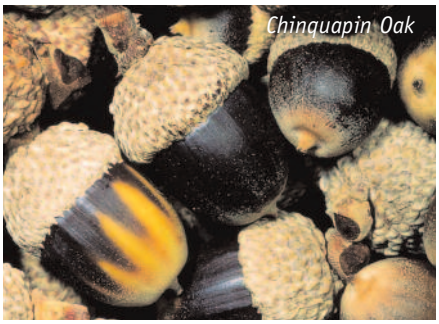
If distinguishing its individual species is often frustrating, at least it's no great challenge to recognize this section as a whole. Its trees have leaves armed with bristle-tipped lobes or tips; its acorns are especially bitter; the nutshells have hairy or fuzzy interiors; the mature bark is deeply and vertically furrowed. By far the most prevalent representative is *Q. rubra*, the Northern red oak. It, with the Eastern white oak, is co-regent of our rich-soiled, mesic forests. Originally considered quite inferior to the white oak because of its porous wood – those who injudiciously made rum casks of red oak lost much of their cargo en route – this tree is now the apple of the lumberjack's eye. The manufacture of modern, pressure-treated lumber requires woods that absorb preservative compounds well; here the red oak's former detriment is transformed into a distinct asset – if not for the tree itself, for the ever-ravenous lumber industry.

Perhaps the northern red oak's closest look-alike is *Q. velutina*, the black oak. Fortunately for budding tree-identification experts, this species tends to grow in the wild in distinctly different conditions. The best places to get a hint of the once-extensive tracts of Chicagoland's black-oak community are the magnificent lakeshore savannas of Miller Woods, on the Gary side of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, and Illinois Beach State Park, just south of the Wisconsin border. These sites, originally formed by surf- and wind-deposited sand, show a different aspect of the oak genus. Instead of towering individual trees you'll see a sun-dappled expanse of smaller forms, often distinctly shrub-like. Still, though they do not compete with the bur oak's majesty, the black oaks somehow impart the same sense of venerableness. On a more practical level, the bark of these trees, called quercitron, yields the highest concentration of dye and tannin, and was much sought after in earlier times.

Among the remaining species of the red oak section is one easily identified standout, the shingle oak (*Q. imbricaria*). The margins of its elliptical leaves lack both lobes and teeth – a unique trait among this region's oaks. This species takes both its scientific and common names from the fact its wood was once used extensively for house shingles. It prefers dry woodland habitats and is not a particularly frequent sight in this area. The other species, all of which have deeply lobed leaves, are the all-too-similar pin, scarlet, and Hill's oaks (*Q. palustris*, *Q. coccinea*, and *Q. ellipsoidalis*, respectively).

The pin oak, widely if not always successfully planted as a street tree, in this region is found primarily in sand savannas and sand flatwoods and is best identified by its distinctive branches: drooping at the bottom of the crown, horizontal in the middle, and upward-pointing above. In contrast, the scarlet and Hill's oaks are trees of well-drained high ground. So minute are the distinctions between these two that some naturalists, have been tempted to combine them into a single species. In this way, they are rather emblematic of the oaks as a whole: even if they sometimes cannot be defined with perfect clarity, they are among the great definers of our region's landscape.

– Raymond Wiggers


Chinquapin Oak


Bur Oak


White Oak

Photos: Mike Redmer

Butterflies that need oak leaves as food for their caterpillars include the Edwards, banded, northern, and striped hairstreaks. Many other butterfly species depend on wildflower and grass species that thrive best in open oak woods.

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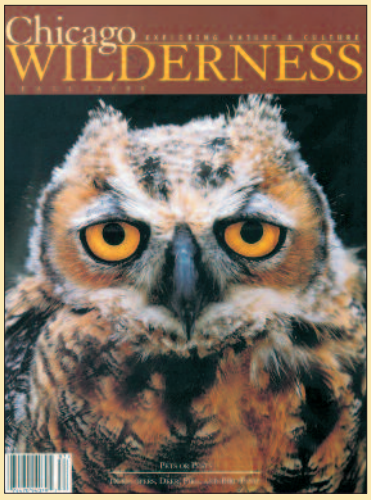

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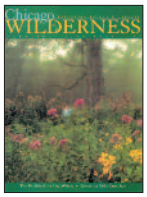
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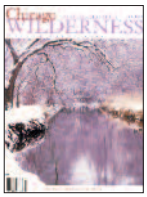
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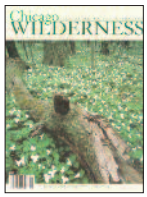
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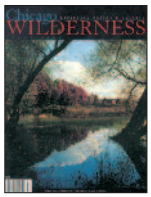
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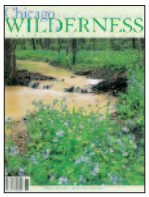
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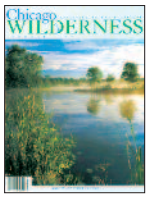
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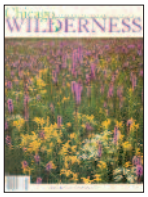
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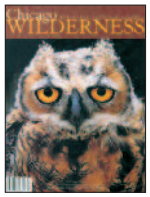
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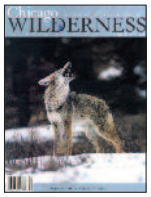
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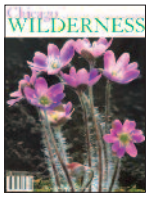
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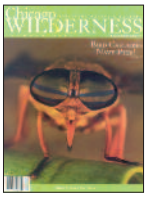
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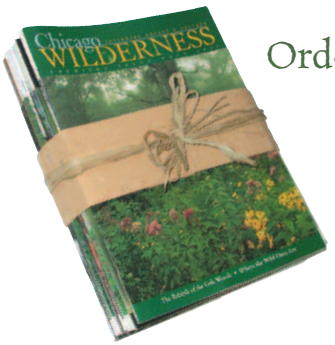

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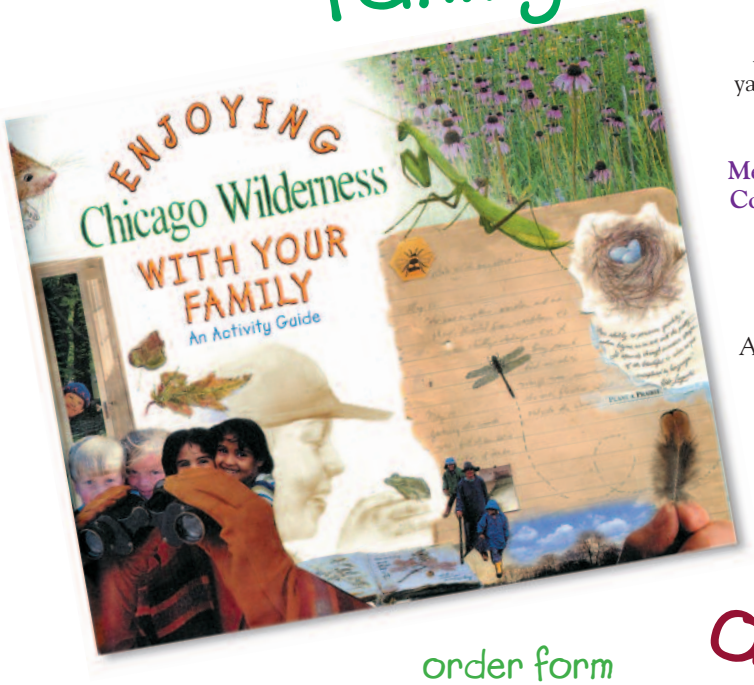

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In old aerial photos, the Calumet region looked like a washboard. The landscape consisted of 117 beach-ridge dunes that parallel the lake front and extend from southeast Chicago to Gary. The ridges were left behind as Glacial Lake Chicago slowly shrunk the size of the present Lake Michigan.

1 AGENCIES SCRAMBLE TO PROTECT ISOLATED WETLANDS

A new Illinois task force is scrambling to protect the state's isolated wetlands, according to Ward Miller of the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission. In January the US Supreme Court ruled that owners of isolated wetlands no longer need to get a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to fill them in (CW, Spring 2001, p. 32).

The ruling, it seemed, finally put to rest a 16-year battle over whether a heron rookery and bordering wetlands in Bartlett, Illinois, would be converted to a garbage dump. With the Supreme Court ruling, isolated wetlands were no longer the federal government's responsibility. Now the state of Illinois has recently decided to acquire a portion of the proposed "Bartlett Balefill," which triggered the issue of isolated wetland protection. The state hopes to acquire 283 acres in Cook County for a reported $21 million, to preserve the site where great blue herons have bred for years.

But that wise move doesn't protect the rest of the state's lonely wetlands. Consequently, many independent agencies have begun to act.

The Lake County Stormwater Management Commission wasted no time amending its watershed ordinance to protect the nearly 7,000 acres of isolated wetlands that lost federal protection as a result of the Supreme Court decision. The new regulations, passed by the Lake County Board in August, authorize the Commission to require permits for anyone wanting to fill in isolated wetlands one-quarter acre or larger. Developers must reconstruct wetlands on the site equal to or greater in size than those they fill in, or contribute funds to recreate or restore wetland habitats within Lake County.

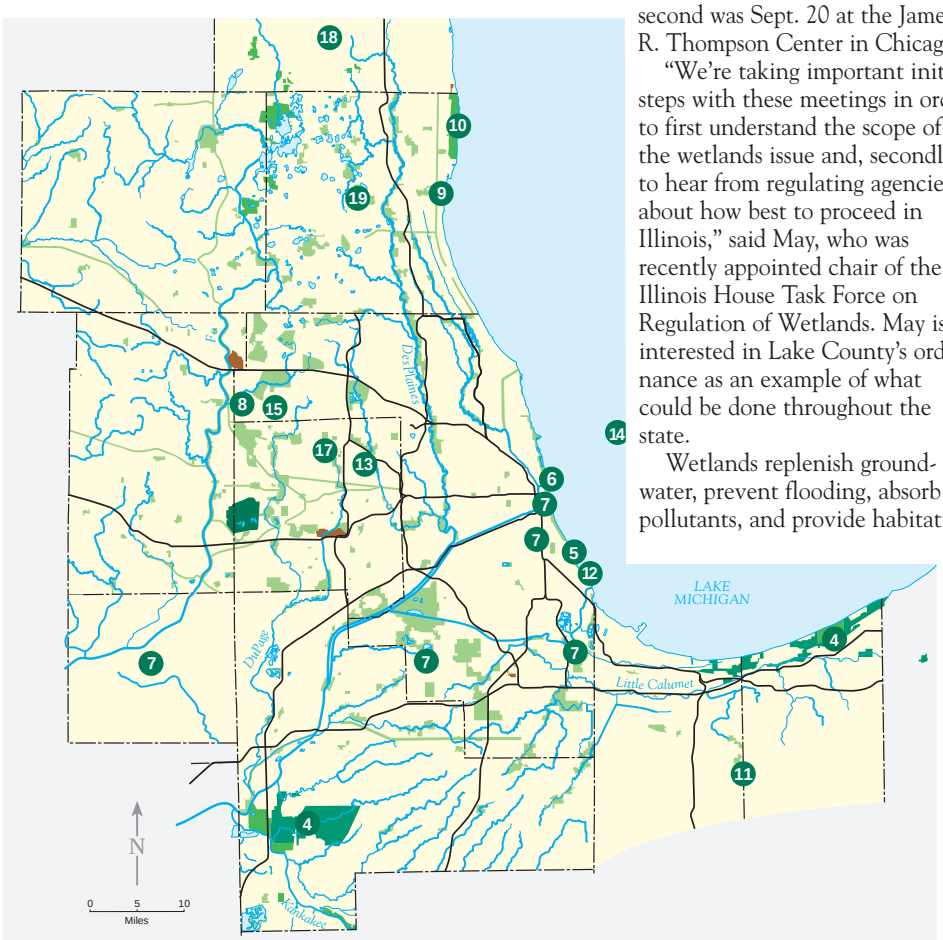
DuPage County also has strict wetland protection ordinances, and Kane, McHenry, and Will Counties are also working toward that end. Illinois State Rep. Karen May, of Highland Park recently scheduled meetings in Lake and Cook counties to discuss legislation protecting all Illinois' isolated wetlands. The first hearing was on Aug. 24 at Ryerson Conservation Area in Deerfield, and the second was Sept. 20 at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago.

"We're taking important initial steps with these meetings in order to first understand the scope of the wetlands issue and, secondly, to hear from regulating agencies about how best to proceed in Illinois," said May, who was recently appointed chair of the Illinois House Task Force on Regulation of Wetlands. May is interested in Lake County's ordinance as an example of what could be done throughout the state.

Wetlands replenish groundwater, prevent flooding, absorb pollutants, and provide habitat for some of Chicago Wilderness region's rarest birds, including the state-endangered yellow-headed blackbird and black-crowned night heron.

"Local and regional protection efforts are needed immediately if we are to minimize the loss of critical isolated wetlands," said Dennis Dreher of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission. Dreher recently drafted a position paper for Chicago Wilderness urging action on behalf of wetlands – and it seems state and local officials agree the time to act is now.

– Sheryl De Vore



2 CHICAGO WILDERNESS BIODIVERSITY RECOVERY PLAN WINS ANOTHER AWARD

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) has bestowed its 2001 National Achievement Award for major metropolitan areas to the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission for the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan. This is the first time this national group for regional planning agencies has given such an award to the Chicago region. Already the recipient of the annual award for Outstanding Plan from the American Planning Association (CW, Spring 2001, p. 32), the Recovery Plan has now snagged two top planning awards. John Rogner, chair of the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council, and Herb Schumann, commissioner of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and a member of the NARC and NIPC boards, traveled to Omaha, Nebraska, in June to receive the award.

3 ORCHID RECOVERY SUCCESS BODES WELL FOR OTHER SPECIES

Both people and orchids are going bonkers this summer. That's the word

Photo: Carol Freeman

from the Orchid Recovery Project – volunteers assisting the federally threatened prairie white-fringed orchid in one of its major strongholds, northeastern Illinois. "An original site that I characterized as having a small population had almost 500 orchids this year," reported June Keibler, project coordinator. "Many of our assumptions are thrown into chaos as the project unfolds."

"This data tells us how important it is to look at a population over a long period of time," commented Marlin Bowles, research botanist at the Morton Arboretum, who wrote the draft recovery plan for the plant. "Then you can begin to get a sense of what the dynamics of this plant really are."

In 1993, when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service began the project, 199 orchids were counted at 28 sites. In 1999, monitors found 887 orchids. This July, more than 800 orchids were counted on two sites alone. "We have over 1,000 orchids this year," Keibler said.

Most Recovery Project sites are now managed by burning and brush control, which may partly explain this year's high numbers, said Bowles.

Plants have been hand-pollinated at many sites, since natural pollinators often don't find these small populations. Seeds from those pollinated plants have been collected and dispersed into additional sites, where plants had either been known to exist or where surviving species that are often associated with this orchid indicated that the habitat might be suitable. This season, one of these dispersal sites had almost 50 orchids.

Six new populations have been identified since the project began, including two new ones this year. The procedures used in this project were pioneered by one of the early stewardship volunteer groups, the North Branch Restoration Project, in the 1980s. One of this year's new populations was discovered at Somme Nature Preserve. Seeds were dispersed at the preserve in 1993 and 1994, but other grasses and plants easily camouflage orchid plants until they flower, which can take four to five years. "This year we were ready to give up," said Laurel Ross, steward at the preserve and Chicago Wilderness area director, The Nature Conservancy. "In the very last place we looked I found a big, healthy flowering plant. I started screaming."

"I'm very hopeful that we'll find more orchids at this site. There is no reason to think there is only one plant," Ross added. The plant has since been pollinated by hand with pollen from four or five plants at an adjacent site. The flowering orchid, a delicacy to deer, is also now surviving in a cage. Deer overpopulation is one of the reasons orchid populations have declined.

Plans are underway to expand the project downstate. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is collecting seeds and identifying suitable habitat sites. Sites that are managed and protected, are of sufficient size to sustain a population, and have the right plant community and hydrology are candidates for the program. The project is funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, IDNR, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, the Morton Arboretum, and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

To volunteer for the Orchid Recovery Project, contact June Keibler at (847) 428-5567 or jkeibl@aol.com.

– Alison Carney Brown

4 CORPORATE NEIGHBORS HELP NURTURE MIDEWIN

Several corporate neighbors have helped nurture Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie since the 19,000-acre preserve was created more than five years ago. In that tradition, this summer 15 employees from Alcoa Engineered Products, Morris Operation put on heavy-duty work gloves and for four hours pulled the invasive Canada thistle from Midewin's purple prairie clover and prairie dropseed nursery beds. The 60-hour investment in the prairie earned a matching $3,000 donation from Alcoa to the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Alliance. "It was great to be a part of bringing back some history," said Jerry Prindiville of Alcoa. "We mostly just pulled weeds, but we saw the end results of that work. We saw the prairie plant seedlings that were originally in this area. Many of us had no idea that these plants grew on the original prairie."

Photo: Courtesy Alcoa

Another caring corporate neighbor, ExxonMobil's Joliet Refinery, has been a Midewin supporter from the start, participating in both corporate and public workdays; providing a lunch wagon for several events; and matching employee volunteer hours at Midewin with cash grants that have helped support interpretive and restoration projects.

"I have seen several volunteers come to workdays and proudly point out the nursery beds they had worked on before," said Connie Heinrich, treasurer of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Alliance. "With a little imagination, we can picture what Midewin will become in the years that follow." To volunteer at Midewin, contact Connie Heinrich at heinrich790@cs.com.

– Alison Carney Brown

5 RESTORING WOODED ISLAND FOR THE BIRDS – AND BIRDERS

Restoration began this summer on the perimeter shore of the lagoon around one of the region's most famous birding spots – Wooded Island in Chicago's Jackson Park. Sections of the lagoon's shoreline will be rebuilt or re-graded and several islets that have either severely eroded or have disappeared entirely will be reconstructed.

The $2.5 million Chicago Park District project will heal and enhance an area that has long been a Chicago hotspot for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. The lagoon was originally connected to Lake Michigan in a loop that flowed through the various Jackson Park harbors. The flow was either cut off or diminished decades ago, and the lagoon's water source has been primarily rainwater ever since. To help stabilize fluctuating water levels that cause erosion, a water control structure will be re-built just under the Music Court bridge (next to the 59th Street marina). A six-inch force main will allow fresh lake water to be drawn in and excess water to flow out to improve water quality and to minimize stagnation.

The lagoon's islets, inaccessible to humans, dogs, and rats, serve as nesting sights for a number of bird species and will be returned to their original dimensions. Two temporary earthen bridges will be constructed to allow access for heavy machinery. Trees, including Ohio buckeyes, maples, riverbirch, redbud, hackberry, hornbeam, and oaks will be planted on the islets and edges. Swamp milkweed, bottlebrush, various sedges, sneezeweed, frogfruit, blueflag, waterwillow, common arrowhead, and other aquatic plants will be established along the shores.

Parts of the shoreline will be re-graded or rebuilt with limestone that

In the highly respected Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, conducted in the 1970s, the Calumet region had the state's highest concentration of high-quality prairies, savannas, and wetlands.

was salvaged from the Lincoln Park Zoo's Rookery, allowing direct access to the water's edge. Many dead trees and nonnative trees will be removed. Some snags, valuable habitat for fish and birds, will remain. Many species of woody plants including buttonbush, spice bush, American filbert, blackberry, elderberry and bladdernut will be planted.

Work will continue on the project through next year. "While this project will initially be a disruption, in the long run, we'll have a better habitat and ecosystem," stated Ross Peterson of the Jackson Park Advisory Council. The council is looking for volunteers to help out with various aspects of this and other projects. Contact Ross at (773) 975-1101.

– Michael Graff

6 CHICAGO WATER PLANT BECOMES A BIRD SANCTUARY

Chicago's James W. Jardine Water Purification Plant, the largest purification plant in the world, was completed in 1965. Today, the aging infrastructure, located just north of Navy Pier, needs work. So Chicago's Department of Water has begun the revamping, which includes some unusual landscaping. "At the mayor's direction, we took the opportunity to add to our bird sanctuary," explained Water Commissioner Richard A. Rice. Parts of adjacent Olive Park have been planted as bird habitat, and now the replacement of mowed lawn with savanna and woodland will extend to the neighboring treatment plant as well.

"Our model is Montrose and the Magic Hedge," noted Ted Wolff, landscape designer at Wolff Clements and Associates, the contractors on the project. The Chicago Park District in recent years has done considerable habitat restoration at those two sites, which, like Jardine, are lakefront migratory bird stops. "Birds can stop at Jardine to rest and feed in a sanctuary where they won't be disturbed by humans or cats and dogs," added Wolff. Jardine is a high security facility, accessible to the public only during special tours.

Phase one of the landscape enhancement project began this summer. An area of bluegrass turf was striped for what is going to be savanna habitat with trees and mixed meadow plantings. In late May, contractors dug shallow scrapes that quickly filled in with rain. Groups of common birds that hadn't been seen at Jardine before, showed up right away, including chickadees and barn swallows.

More than 400 trees, among them ironwood, shingle oak, and black cherry, will be planted in Jardine's two corner areas that make up about one acre of land. As the tree canopy takes over, sedges will be planted for the herbaceous understory. Wolff asked the Mayor's Wildlife and Nature Committee to review the project's species list and compile input from local birders, and took much of their advice to help ensure that the birds and other wildlife will find what they need at the site.

"We wanted to improve on what we already have at Jardine," said Commissioner Rice, "and these enhancements do that while reducing some of our landscaping maintenance costs. The prairie grasses we're planting will eliminate some of our mowing costs and cut down on lawnmower emissions." The city is being remarkably creative at finding areas where the needs of people and nature correspond. Happy days.

–Alison Carney Brown

7 CHICAGO WILDERNESS WELCOMES FIVE NEW MEMBERS

On July 11, the Chicago Wilderness Council approved five new members, bringing the total to 136. The mission of the **Kendall County Forest Preserve District** is to preserve and manage natural areas and open spaces, provide environmental education, and offer recreational opportunities to Kendall County residents. **Purdue University Calumet** is dedicated to the land grant tradition of which it is a part and is especially concerned with serving the people of Northwest Indiana. **CorLands** provides technical assistance and financing to local governments in the Chicago Wilderness region for their work acquiring open space. The **Eden Place Nature Center** in Chicago's Fuller Park neighborhood seeks to provide a live simulation of a nature preserve with a bio-diversified environment that explores the mechanics of a wetland, prairie, and woodland, supplemented with multimedia and live presentations to spark the imaginations of our children. Eden Place will be a doorway for the South Side residents of Chicago to the world of nature. The **Village of Orland Park** provides recreational programs to meet leisure needs of the community and seeks to maintain and enhance a high quality level of environmental life through parks, open space, special venues, and restoration.

8 HOW DO YOU COAX A CATERPILLAR INTO A CARROT?

Ten years ago, that was one of the vexing questions Doug Taron, now curator of biology at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, needed to answer to ensure the survival of one of the very few known May apple stem borer moth (*Papaipema cerina*) colonies in Illinois and Indiana. In 1991, Taron discovered the caterpillars at

Photo: Ron Panzer

a woodland in Elgin – now a housing development and an extension of Shales Parkway.

Taron, one of the stewards at Bluff Spring Fen, went with the site's management team to the unprotected Elgin site to rescue spring ephemerals. Dr. Ron Panzer, conservation biologist at Northeastern Illinois University, had told Taron about the stem borer, a moth that lives in high quality oak woodlands, and suggested that he keep an eye out for damaged May apples. "As the others were looking for plants, I began noticing brown May apples within the large clones of green plants growing there," Taron remembered. "Many contained caterpillars in the stems."

The species starts out eating bottlebrush grass and, when bigger, bores into the stem and roots primarily of May apples. Raising 74 caterpillars in Taron's home meant identifying another food source. Dr. Panzer, who advised Taron throughout the project, suggested carrots. "He was rearing the rattlesnake master stem borer, and wanted to try a more readily available food source, but one that was in the same plant family as rattlesnake master," Taron explained. "He tried carrots, then discovered that this method worked for other moths in the genus *Papaipema*. I had no carrots at home when I got my first caterpillars, so I tried asparagus. It didn't work," Taron reported, "which is just as well considering the relative costs of asparagus and carrots!"

Taron drilled holes into the carrots and coaxed the caterpillars in by pointing and nudging them in the right

direction. They pupated in late August 1991. When they emerged as adult moths, he released them, with permission from the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, at Bluff Spring Fen.

"This July, damaged plants that contained caterpillars were found at Bluff Spring Fen," said the surprised Taron. "The colony has therefore successfully reproduced in each of the intervening years."

– Alison Carney Brown

9 CURLEW SANDPIPERS, ARCTIC TERNS, AND WHIMBRELS FIND NAVAL SANCTUARY

What do these birds have in common? They have all been seen this summer at Great Lakes Naval Training Center at the newly created Protected Bird Sanctuary at the tip of the peninsula (CW, Summer 2001, p. 33). Other notable birds have included willets, stilts, many plovers and sandpipers, and a nesting colony of state-endangered common terns. Clearly, this is a significant conservation area for resting, foraging, and nesting birds.

In mid-September, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) together with naval personnel at Great Lakes organized a work day to further improve the habitat for nesting and migrant species and provide better viewing opportunities through improved sight lines for birders. Anticipate seeing migrant Le Conte's and Nelson's sharp tailed sparrows and American pipits this fall.

Kudos to IDNR, Great Lakes, and volunteer organizer Donald Dann!

10 RARE POLICIES – AND PEOPLE – BENEFIT BIRDS AND PLANTS AT ILLINOIS BEACH STATE PARK

A woodpecker and a nuthatch never seen in Illinois. A state park with a dedicated nature preserve. Birders hungering to add a new species to their lists. Park officials working to protect a rare ecosystem.

This story of conservation ethics recently unfolded at Illinois Beach State Park in Lake County, when the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the brown-headed nuthatch, a national species of conservation concern, were discovered there, far away from their homes in southeastern United States.

While the discoveries are important to the ornithological world, the way in which the discoveries were treated is equally, if not more, important.

So a decision had to be made when Al Stokie, Robert Erickson, and Paul Sweet found the red-cockaded woodpecker on August 19, 2000, and rediscovered it in a part of the park where they had permission to venture, but which was off limits to the public. Park manager Bob Grosso graciously allowed birders to search for the woodpecker provided they received the proper permits for entering the special use area, and took care not to trample the sensitive vegetation. Because of his decision, and help from Natural Resources Coordinator Bill Wengelewski and park biologist Susan Wright, hundreds of happy birders added this species to their life lists.

Last seen December 10, 2000, the woodpecker probably perished during the winter.

Just as the excitement over the woodpecker was fading, Illinois Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Biologist Brad Semel discovered another new state bird on July 11, 2001, at the park – the brown-headed nuthatch. Semel, who is studying plant life and hydrology there, said this particular nuthatch has nearly the same distribution as the red-cockaded woodpecker. The nuthatch was also seen perched in the same tree in which the red-cockaded woodpecker had roosted.

Another decision had to be made.

Semel found the nuthatch at a time when most of the state-listed endangered and threatened plants at the park were in bloom or had just set seed. "A single footprint could have obliterated a year's reproductive effort," he said. After careful consideration, park officials decided to schedule guided outings for 10 to 15 people at a time to view the bird. Wengelewski coordinated the walks – and again many happy birders added the species to their lists.

Illinois Beach State Park contains 4,160 acres and encompasses 6.5 miles of sandy shoreline, providing habitat for 650 species of plants and at least 300 species of birds (now at least 302). About one-fourth of the park is a designated Illinois State Nature Preserve.

The federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker sports a glossy black crown and nape, bright white checks, and a black-and-white barred back. The number of this species is declining.

The brown-headed nuthatch has, as one might have guessed, a brown head (as opposed to the dark blue heads of the white-breasted nuthatch, which lives in Illinois year-round, and the red-breasted nuthatch, which occasionally breeds here and also ventures here in winter).

Though non-migratory, brown-headed nuthatches and red-cockaded woodpeckers will disperse to new locations for various reasons, such as habitat destruction or low food production.

Illinois Beach State Park seems like a good location for birds like these. It's next to a large body of water and the large stand of mature pines, though not native to Illinois, offered food and respite for these weary nomads. The brown-headed nuthatch was still being seen at the park as of late August.

A cautionary word: Please do not enter the park's off-limit area. Call Bill Wengelewski for more information at (847) 662-4811. One non-compliant person can ruin policies that benefit not only birders, but also the rare vegetation at Illinois Beach State Park.

– Sheryl De Vore

11 ADOPT THE CHICAGO RIVER

A neighbor sits against a tree reading while red-winged blackbirds fly overhead and rowboat teams sluice through a stretch of the Chicago River. We humans think of the river as our own. But the river, littered and degraded, needs some quality parenting – skills Friends of the Chicago River (FCR) can nurture in their new Adopt-A-River program. "We want to give neighbors, community groups, and landowners the training and support to take good care of the river," offered Cynthia Fox, FCR stewardship coordinator.

Friends' Adopt-A-River program will help address the channeled river's problems of scarce and degraded habitat, poor water quality, and rubbish, by recruiting a network of stewardship groups that adopt sites along the Chicago River. FCR will provide the training and resources to support a variety of adoption activities including cleanup and restoration workdays, pollution prevention solutions, and stabilization and restoration of eroding streambanks.

FCR has served as guardian of the Chicago River for 22 years. The Adopt-A-River program is based on similar programs across the country and will build on the success of local neighborhood groups such as the Riverside Neighbors – residents near Berteau Avenue who have been improving conditions at their river-edge site for more than five years.

To adopt a site, each stewardship

Neatnicks despair. The average healthy person has 300,000 bacteria on their skin.

group must commit for a minimum of two years to monitor their site once every 60 days and participate in Chicago River Rescue Day. People can join an existing stewardship group or start a new group and/or support a group financially.

FCR envisions a continuous Chicago River Trail, linking the more than 50 urban neighborhoods and suburban communities along the river's ecologically healthy 156 miles. To befriend The Chicago River, contact Cynthia at (312) 939-0490, ext.13.

⓬ NEW NATURE SANCTUARY FOR CHICAGO'S SOUTH SHORE

Volunteers have long dreamed of a nature center on the peninsula at the South Shore Cultural Center (SSCC) at

71st Street and South Shore Drive in Chicago, where sand has collected into a dune and a rare plant, the sea rocket, has found a footing. In January 2000, when a junior golf center was proposed instead, the dream galvanized people into action.

At a Chicago Park District meeting, the SSCC Advisory Council and birders rallied for a nature center and sanctuary and the district agreed. With grants from the state, work began this past June. The approximately $500,000 project will transform the peninsula, long used for a dump and overgrown with weeds and weed trees, into a dream come true.

By mid-summer, Chicago Park District (CPD) contractors had cleared out the central portion of the more than four-acre peninsula to create a prairie meadow for butterflies. "The site is healthier than we thought," remarked Barry Burton, director, CPD Department of Natural Resources, "but willows and cottonwood were starting to take over, so the project's timing was good."

A boardwalk will traverse a portion of the west sand dune habitat and cross a wetland into the prairie area. A trail system loops around the sanctuary. Some cottonwoods and willows – good food sources for caterpillars – have been left standing. Oaks have been planted, as well as understory native hawthorn and American plum. The shrub layer includes native roses and sumac to attract birds. Button bush, cardinal flowers, and wild blue iris were planted by the wetland for the butterflies. "We looked at this project in the big picture, enhancing the native areas for the insects that birds and butterflies depend on," said Mary Van Haaften, natural areas manager for the park district. "The Chicago Park District is really stretching out to improve habitat all along the lakefront."

A Jens Jensen-style council ring will be built at the edge of the peninsula's point. With views of the sanctuary, the lake, and the Chicago skyline, the ring of limestone will invite visitors and students to gather and study, encircled by wilderness and culture. Nature Center construction will be scheduled when funds become available.

The park district plans to open the sanctuary at the end of September in time to celebrate the fall bird migration. "The sanctuary is a part of the migratory flyway so we're looking forward to creating a greater interest in birding in the area," said Polly Silberman, SSCC Advisory Council vice president and Landscaping Committee member. The district is also working on a stewardship program for the sanctuary. For more information call CPD volunteer coordinator Vera Onate at (312) 742-4775.

– Alison Carney Brown

⓭ DUPAGE MISSILE SITE RETURNS TO NATURE

Plows, pavement, and rockets. A small preserve in DuPage County has contended with a lot over the years. And in helping it to return to its beginnings, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County has become the proud owner of a missile site. It is one of two parcels totaling 13.53 acres that expand the marsh and prairie ecosystems of Fullerton Park Forest Preserve, on the corner of Fullerton Avenue and Grace Street, in Addison.

Fullerton Park's story is one of endurance. Born of an ancient outwash left by a dying glacier, for thousands of years it was a mosaic of prairie and marsh. In 1842 surveyors slogged through, and in their wake, farmers in the 1850s. The prairie fires stopped. For more than a century these same families plowed and harvested to feed a growing nation.

In 1954, the relative peace of the old prairie was shattered when the federal government moved in, digging into the rich soil to install three NIKE missiles, which stayed underground for 30 years. Urbanization raced forward in the 1960s, hemming in plants and animals, and by the mid 1970s, the wetlands had been partially drained and were ringed by commercial and industrial development. In 1974 and again in 1978, the forest preserve district stepped in and purchased a total of 154 acres.

Fragmented and oddly shaped, Fullerton Park is sliced in two by Fullerton Avenue. It is neighbor to a string of high-tension wires and a water pumping station. A railroad shears off the southwestern-most corner and a large wedge of municipally owned land bites into the main prairie. In places, the northern property line clings to the very edge of a slough, just a few feet from parking lots. Its marshes and creek take in more water than they should. And until finally stopped, motorcycle riders tore up the hill of glacial gravel known as a kame.

Restoration on the marshes and prairie began in the 1990s with a mitigation project. In 1991, volunteer steward Chris Oszak tossed a handful of seeds from the adjoining railroad right away, destined for another site, into the preserve's fallow field. The next year she saw a little colony of prairie dock pushing up through the timothy and hay. It may take five or 10 years to see conservative plants like shooting star or prairie dropseed to mature from scattered seed. But the preserve has time and special care.

After a decade of hard work, Fullerton Park now harbors 311 species of native plants, 65 percent of which are typical of high quality prairie and marsh. Twenty-seven bird species breed on the preserve. An additional 100 species migrate through. Thirty other animal species also call it home.

The new purchase provides "more open space in a very urbanized, industrialized section of the county where such habitats are at a premium," says District Plant Ecologist Scott Kobal. "It also adds to the existing acreage of the preserve, providing more connectivity for

plants and animals. Management is facilitated when the communities are larger and contiguous. It gives us more control over the local watershed, which can help us improve water quality." From shooting missiles to shooting stars, Fullerton Park is moving ahead on its way back.

– Elizabeth Riotto

⓮ THE VALUE OF SOUTHERN LAKE MICHIGAN, APPROXIMATELY

The general public values healthy birds and fish along the southern coast of Lake Michigan at between $3 and $5 billion, according to the first study to evaluate the monetary value of the lake to the people who live near it.

"The Natural Capital of the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Zone: First Steps Towards an Economic Valuation" was recently released by the Lake Michigan Federation and the University of Illinois at Chicago. "A clean, healthy Lake Michigan is key to the quality of life in this region and strongly influences Chicagoan's decisions about where to live and where to locate a business," said Cameron Davis, executive director of Lake Michigan Federation. "For years we've heard about how protecting Lake Michigan costs money and threatens jobs," he says. "The study shows the opposite, that there's an enormous economic benefit to protecting the lake ecosystem."

The study calculated how much each household in northeast Illinois and northwest Indiana would be willing to pay each year – through taxes, volunteer programs, or annual donations to a conservation group – to maintain or preserve 13 species of birds and six species of fish.

The study estimates a total willingness to pay, per household, for these fish and birds at approximately between $117 and $197 per year. These figures translate to a total valuation of between $3.19 and $5.37 billion for the southern Lake Michigan area.

"The study does not put a price tag on Lake Michigan, because it is priceless," said Joel Brammeier, Lake Michigan Federation staff scientist. "But the study does demonstrate that citizens place a high value on the lake and would be willing to pay a significant amount to keep the birds and fish healthy and a part of their lives."

The results of this study are based on previous studies that have used the contingent valuation method (CVM). The CVM technique surveys people to find out what they are willing to pay to maintain or preserve an environmental resource. The average value individuals are willing to pay for each resource is then calculated and multiplied by the number of households in the designated area. The CVM method is considered a valid technique, as it was also used to determine the value of natural resources harmed in the Exxon-Valdez oil spill.

Researchers took many safeguards to avoid overestimating the values of wildlife in the Lake Michigan study, making the final economic estimate conservative. "The study is simply meant to open the door to a broader economic benefits discussion," Davis explained. "It only covers a fraction of what the lake is really worth. For example, the lake has spiritual value that is priceless to a lot of us who live, work, and play around Lake Michigan."

You can read or download the study at the Lake Michigan Federation Web site at http://www.lakemichigan.org/habitat/slmcz_report.pdf.

Healthy soil may have approximately 250,000 mites per square yard. Mites look like tiny insects but they're more closely related to spiders.

15 WETLAND RECLAIMS BALL FIELDS

The water rose, the ball fields sank, and cattails marched in where children once ran the bases at Veterans Park in

Photo: Courtesy Streamwood Park District

Streamwood. The 18-acre multipurpose park, converted in 1972 from an undevelopable wet lowland, once included three ball fields and a retention pond built on clay-capped landfill. Over time, the landfill shifted and the lowland gathered water. Kids got muddy; games were cancelled. On a couple of occasions park district lawn mowers had to be yanked out of the fields with heavy equipment from 30 yards away.

This past spring, representatives from the US Army Corp of Engineers, North Cook County Soil and Water Conservation District, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Village of Streamwood, and Streamwood Park District met at Veterans Park to discuss its future. Two of the ball fields had already been decommissioned and some neighbors expressed dismay about the weeds. The ad-hoc group agreed that repairing or rebuilding the fields would probably prove too costly. The idea of restoring a wetland for flood control – a project that might simultaneously increase property values surrounding the park and provide community educational opportunities – seemed a sound solution and was championed by the Poplar Creek Watershed Committee.

At the request of the Streamwood Park District (SPD) Board, Applied Ecological Services did a study and offered plans for a wetland restoration with boardwalk paths over the wetland and limestone or mowed paths through the drier areas. The SPD submitted an Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) matching grant proposal this summer. "The Village Board really sees this project as a way to get our community together and do something that we can be really proud of, " says Paula Lambertz, board president. "When someone sees a wildflower they planted bloom, it will really connect them to their park."

Plans also include a prescribed burn, allowing dormant natural species to regenerate themselves, and planting a lot of native wetland and dry mesic species. The plan assumes that enough of the clay has sunk to allow the wetland plants to become established. The last remaining ball field will be converted into mesic prairie with some mounds built in the infield to add topography. The ball field will be relocated at a middle school across town. "Veteran's Park loses about five feet of field a year from cattails," says Rick Pyle, executive director of the park district. "With funding and volunteers, we hope to turn these weed fields into a beautiful site."

The project has already captured the imagination of local teachers. A teacher from Streamwood Elementary School adjacent to Veterans Park called Deb Perryman, a biology teacher at Elgin High, and asked how her students might work with the ball field wetland. After a visit to Veterans Park, the enthused Perryman began brainstorming a soil study, seed germination, plug planting curriculum for her Mighty Acorns program that would include mentoring the younger children at Streamwood Elementary. "I hope we can develop a school and park partnership," said Perryman, who also co-chairs the Poplar Creek Watershed Committee. "Maybe we can form a Friends of Veterans Park and build a local volunteer base," she added. It seems the long-lost wetland has resurfaced to find itself much appreciated.

– Alison Carney Brown

16 DEAM AND SWINK: A BOTANICAL CORRESPONDENCE

The Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund recently published *A Congenial*

Fellowship: A Botanical Correspondence between Charles C. Deam and Floyd A. Swink, 1946-1951, edited by Peg Mohar. The letters are filled with references to collecting spots in the dunes region, plants Deam and Swink found, discussions on ecology, questions about plant variations, opinions of other botanists, and more. Armchair and active botanists alike will enjoy these exchanges.

The letters also tell the story of how the lives of these two preeminent, self-taught 20th-century botanists intersected and the relationship that develops between the mentor who encourages the young enthusiast. When the letters begin, Mohas notes "Deam is a grand old man of 81, a distinguished member of learned societies, recipient of an honorary doctorate of laws from Indiana University and author of the still highly regarded *Flora of Indiana*. Swink has yet to experience his first professional position, his success as taxonomist at the Morton Arboretum, and his publications, most notably *Plants of the Chicago Region* (with Gerould S. Wilhelm 4th edition), and the honorary doctorate from Western Illinois University. Swink, in fact, is a weekend botanist, fresh out of the navy after World War II, and supporting his family by taking whatever jobs he can."

Swink gave the collection of letters to the Heinze Fund to publish and helped with the editing and footnoting of the book up to a few days before his untimely death on August 2, 2000. For the Heinze Fund, the book is a final tribute to a man who played a large role in the botanical lives of several of its trustees and was a great influence on the land preservation movement in Northwest Indiana.

A Congenial Fellowship is available from the Shirley Heinze Environmental Fund for $18 plus shipping and handling. Call (219) 879-4725 or visit their Web site at www.heinzefund.org.

⓱ BLOOMINGDALE COMPANY'S EMPLOYEES HELP DUPAGE FOREST PRESERVE

The employees of NOW Natural Foods in Bloomingdale realized they couldn't take the East Branch Forest Preserve that borders their corporate and manufacturing facility for granted when they saw an overflow of cars parked on it during a golf tournament in 1999. So, Louis Richard, engineering manager and director of the company, approached the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County and asked what they could do improve the preserve.

Photo: Courtesy FPD DuPage Co.

Several litter removal projects were organized over the next couple of years with more than 25 employees and their families participating. This year, on June 9, more than 40 NOW volunteers planted seeds and plants at Rush Lake in the preserve. Half the group raked in 55 pounds of native seeds with the youngsters stomping it in. Others helped plant 300 wetland plugs on the lake's shoreline to help stabilize the soil, improve water quality, and provide fish and wildlife habitat. They also put snow fencing around the planted area so the Canada geese would not pull out those tantalizing morsels – like blue flag, dark green rush, great bulrush, and prairie cord grass – before they could take root.

"After the restoration work day, employees came up to me and said, 'My kids don't want to clean up at home, but they can't wait to get out to the forest preserve and pick up litter and plant plants,'" says Dan Scoles, NOW safety manager and volunteer organizer. "Employees are donating their Saturdays to do this. They use the forest preserves and this gives them a sense of giving back to the community and contributing to the health of the preserve for their kids and their kids' kids."

NOW Foods plans to schedule ongoing restoration workdays and has invited neighboring businesses to participate. Contact Maureen Spradlin at mspradlin@dupageforest.com or (630) 462-8706.

⓲ WISCONSIN GOVERNOR CREATES TASK FORCE ON INVASIVE SPECIES

On May 23, Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum announced the creation of the Governor's Task Force on Invasive Species. The task force, co-chaired by Lieutenant Governor Margaret Farrow and Representative Dan Vrakas, will evaluate the severity and spread of invasive species in Wisconsin, develop a statewide control plan, and seek funding.

"I think the Governor's Task Force has the potential to really rally some resources around this issue," said Nancy Braker, task force member and director of science and stewardship at The Nature Conservancy Wisconsin Chapter. "It's brought together some people who are clearly very concerned about invasive species."

Gov. McCallum said that invasive species disrupt the natural ecosystem of Wisconsin's lakes, rivers, and forests. It's estimated that in the United States last year, economic losses due to invasive species and control measures cost more than $138 billion. "It is crucial for Wisconsin to be proactive when it comes to invasive species," Gov. McCallum said. "Wisconsin is very proud of its forests and waterways. This task force presents a great opportunity for scientists, sports enthusiasts and environmentalists to work together to protect our precious natural resources."

Examples of invasive species currently found in inland Wisconsin waters include purple loosestrife, carp, Eurasian water milfoil, and rusty crayfish. Invasive species currently found in the Great Lakes include spiny water flea, ruffe, zebra mussels, round goby, and white perch.

"I hope the task force will look at the broad issues concerning aquatic and terrestrial invasive species," added Braker. Broad action could include recommending enactment of revisions to the Noxious Weed Law. Spearheaded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Weed Law Technical Advisory Committee drafted the revision and submitted it to the state legislature as part of the state budget process. A draft is posted on the Web at www.dnr.state.wi.us /org/land/er/news/wltc1.htm.

The Nature Conservancy's Weeds on the Web page tncweeds.ucdavis.edu /common.html defines what weeds are and answers commonly asked questions in a user-friendly format. For the restorationist, follow the steward's link to "weed control methods" to download the April 4 revision of *Weed Control Methods Handbook: Tools and Techniques for Use in Natural Areas*.

⓳ FIELD TRIP GUIDE TO LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES

Teachers and youth group leaders can get a copy of the *Lake County Forest Preserve District 2001-02 Field Trip Guide* that details the more than 55 programs offered at the preserves, the Greenbelt Cultural Center, Independence Grove and the Lake County Discovery Museum. Programs help meet Illinois Learning Benchmarks or cover Scout badge requirements. Call (847) 968-3321 or e-mail ryerson-woods@co.lake.il.us to request a copy.

Nematodes are the commonest animals that are visible (at least the larger ones) with a magnifying glass. They look like worms. A square yard of soil may have 10-to-20 million nematodes.

EVENTS

THE LANDSCAPE WE MAKE

The Landscape We Make, an exhibit at the Evanston Art Center (EAC), is guest curated by Victor M. Cassidy, a Chicago-based writer and curator, and includes the work of six artists who present different ways that people treat and shape the land. Looking out the EAC's large gallery windows, visitors see grounds designed by Jens Jensen, a man-made beach with planted prairie grasses, and a breakwater slicing out into Lake Michigan. This is not the pre-settlement appearance of the site, but the landscape that people have shaped over the years. *The Landscape We Make* includes work by Terry Evans, David Plowden, Linda Horn, Paul Clark, Joe Llewellyn Davis, and James Iska. Terry Evan's subject is the prairie, America's huge grassland, which the settlers plowed up to create a great agricultural industry.

September 9 – October 23
Gallery hours: Monday – Thursday
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
and 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.
Friday and Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Sunday 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Evanston Art Center, Evanston, Free
Information: (847) 475-5300
www.evanstonartcenter.org

TOUR MIDEWIN THIS FALL

As cooler fall weather makes outdoor activities more enjoyable, consider taking a tour at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Throughout September and October, tours of Midewin will be offered every weekend. Although the wildflower tours have ended as the native plants' flowers fade and seeds ripen, the bird tours will increase during grassland birds' migration south for the winter. The geology and history tours will continue, and a Sunday hike or bike ride at Midewin would make a great family outing.

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie was established in 1996 and is the first national tallgrass prairie in the country. It is administered by the USDA Forest Service, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and with the support of hundreds of volunteers and partner agencies, businesses, and organizations. As the largest portion of the peacetime conversion of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, Midewin remains largely closed to the public while the Army completes the cleanup of contamination remaining from decades of TNT manufacturing and packaging.

Although public access is restricted, activities at Midewin are gradually increasing to include interim hiking trails, escorted tours, volunteer work projects, and deer hunting in some areas.

Birds of the Prairie:
East Side: October 6, 13, 20 and 27, 7:30 a.m.
Prairie Creek Geology:
October 20, 9:30 a.m.
Midewin History Tour:
October 13, 9:30 a.m.
Introduction to Midewin (van tour):
East Side: October 6 and 27, 9:30 a.m.
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Joliet
Fee: $2.00 per person per tour
Advance reservations (required): (815) 423-6370

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

Tryon Farm Institute's fourth annual Day in the Country will feature Keith Schneider of the Michigan Land Use Institute in a workshop on "The Politics of Smart Growth". The day is co-sponsored by Chicago's Campaign for Sensible Growth and J.F. New Associates, environmental planners.

The program includes a panel response to Schneider's challenge, box lunch in the old Tryon Farm dairy barn, presentation of the Living Green awards, and architectural and environmental tours of the new conservation community one hour from Chicago.

October 5, 10:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Tryon Farm, Michigan City, Indiana
Fee: $30 advance registration, $40 at the door; includes box lunch
Information: (800) 799-6433 or www.tryonfarm.com

For more events, see– chicagowildernessmag.org/calendar/.

Guest essay

The Nature of Chicago Wilderness

by John Rogner

In recent years, we in the Chicago region have been using the word "wilderness" in a highly unconventional context.

We have coined the term "Chicago Wilderness" to refer to the rich biodiversity that resides in this huge sprawling metropolitan area – an area most people think of as anything but "untrammeled by man, where man is a visitor who does not remain," to use the words of The Wilderness Act of 1964.

This is an area that is associated with, and defined by, humans and our cultural footprint. The biodiversity is concentrated in the fragments of land, slivers of land by conventional wilderness standards, that are scattered throughout the region – 200,000 protected acres in all. It is found in dozens of 100- to 1,000-acre units separated from each other by houses, offices, roads, factories, railroads, cornfields, concrete. Some fragments are larger, some smaller, but most are small isolated islands by wilderness standards.

Within these fragments of protected land can be found some of the best remaining examples in the world of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna and woodland, fen, dolomite prairie, and other natural communities. Also found within this complex of preserves is an abundance of degraded, biologically depauperate land, in need of restoration. Much of this degraded land was used and abused for 150 years before coming under formal protection. Aldo Leopold – noted conservationist, founder of the Wilderness Society and author of *A Sand County Almanac* – pointed out that the land has an innate capacity for self-renewal. But because our islands of degraded land sit in an urban matrix of lawns and homes, far from propagules of native species, the land without help has little chance of restoring itself to ecological health. People will, of necessity, become the vehicle for restoring nature.

Chicago Wilderness is also the name we have given the collaboration of over 130 organizations in the Chicago region. These diverse groups have banded together to better protect, restore, celebrate, promote, and publicize our rich biodiversity, and reconnect a landless urban people to nature. Our goal is to reconnect people, in Leopold's words, to the "raw material out of which we have hammered that artifact called civilization."

Photo: Greg Neise

The term "Chicago Wilderness" has been called an oxymoron. The name was probably intended to some extent to be provocative, to draw attention to the rich nature in and around a city that few people associate with nature. It was probably not a deliberate attempt to redefine wilderness. But it does raise the question, is this an inappropriate application of the concept of wilderness? Does it dilute it, or might broadening the idea ultimately be of benefit both to our nation's network of formal wilderness preserves, and to the fragments of real nature in and around the places where we live? Might it be a way to reconcile the two?

Various writers have pointed out that wilderness is a mental construct that proves to be conceptually slippery when you try to define its boundaries. And its connotations have changed drastically over time. "Wilderness" has gone from being a dark unknown place to be feared, to an equally unknown place to be held in religious reverence and awe, to the birthplace of American rugged individualism and democratic ideals, to Leopold's early thoughts of wilderness as primarily a place for primitive recreation. Some have pointed out that all of these concepts maintain a separation between humans and wilderness, made explicit by Wilderness Act language, which says that man himself is a visitor who does not remain. This thinking also holds that the American ideal of wilderness has tended to shape our dominant view of nature itself as a place that can only be corrupted by human influence.

I think this historical analysis has merit. Yet I think that maintaining this separation, mentally and physically, will not serve our national conservation interests indefinitely. We in Chicago Wilderness have reversed the relationship. Our wilderness will not thrive without human influence. If we do not adequately enlist people to help manage and restore these lands, they will not become or remain healthy. And so our strategy is to take

Starting in 1991, the Illinois Native Plant Society held a series of "Thismia Hunts" in the Calumet area to look for the apparently extinct plant, American thismia. No thismia was found, but many other endangered plant species were uncovered.

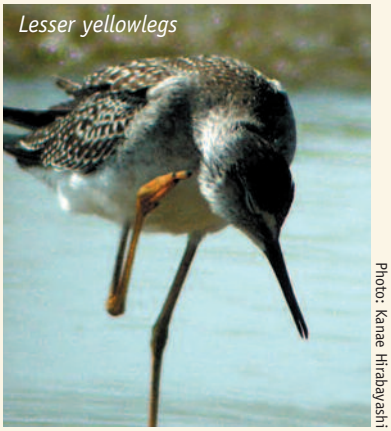
our campaign to the people and ask that they exert a direct but creative influence on our wilderness.

I realize, of course, that there are two very opposite types of human actions. One type the Wilderness Act tries to prevent. The other we encourage. One is destruction. The other is conservation. Because we did not know how to use land without abusing it, The Wilderness Act – and its attempt to isolate nature from human influence – was perhaps the appropriate remedy at the time. The post-war economic expansion threatened to completely eliminate the last remnants of our wildlands.

But by institutionalizing that separation, we create in some people the false comfort that nature is something that is adequately cared for in remote places, and not something that exists and needs to be cared for by everyone in their backyard. It deflects responsibility. In Chicago Wilderness, we are trying to get people to assume responsibility. It also creates the illusion that big wildernesses themselves are self-contained and self-sufficient, or that they are not still subject to human abuse through formal designation, which they certainly are.

Of this I am sure: we need to promote in the public a sense of connectedness. This becomes more urgent with every person who leaves the farm and enters the suburbs. And I mean not only connectedness of people with nature, but an appreciation of the connectedness between remote wilderness and so-called urban wastelands.

I spent three weeks several summers ago on a remote Canadian Arctic river, as unpeopled and untrammeled a place as you can reasonably find. Pure, glorious, unadulterated wilderness. I took special delight in seeing the abundance of bird life typically associated with wilderness areas: merlins, peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, and others. But the birds that remain with me now are the lesser yellowlegs, which rose from every gravel bar as we floated by. The memory of seeing this rather unremarkable shorebird crystallized only three weeks later when I stood on the artificial shoreline of Lake Calumet, set in the post-industrial wasteland of southeast Chicago. Steel slag waste and fill covered the uplands, forming the lake borders. In the thin strand of beach material between the slag and the water's edge, lesser yellowlegs were refueling on their way south. Where I had seen them three weeks previous was clearly wilderness, this place clearly not. Or is it clear? Did the yellowlegs know the difference?



Lesser yellowlegs

Photo: Kanae Hirabayashi

I personally hold the national wilderness preservation system in the highest regard. I have spent much time in these areas, and think Leopold and others created what has become a flagship of American conservation. But the idea is in need of tinkering in light of changing American attitudes and changing conservation needs.

Wilderness is an idea in need of a greatly expanded American constituency. It may be time to broaden the concept of wilderness to emphasize connections between wilderness and people. It may be time to recognize that humans always have influenced landscapes, for better or worse, and that humans can be a positive creative force in nature. And it may be that by using the word "wilderness" for a 200-acre patch of ancient prairie in a sea of suburbia, we can promote a correct sense of unity between the places where we live and remote places most will never see except as pictures on calendars.

In contrast, the "leave it alone, don't touch" attitude toward wilderness actually threatens the preservation of nature in Chicago. In a few localities, there has been sincere and strong opposition to land managers' efforts to introduce natural ecological processes, like fire, into our preserves. Anti-restorationists are not anti-nature – they merely subscribe to the idea that human interference is, by definition, corrupting, and nature will thrive only if we leave it alone. Although methods will probably remain a subject of debate, I am as certain of the need for constructive human interference in the form of ecological restoration and management in Chicago Wilderness as I am for the need for it in large designated wildernesses. Neither is outside the reach of human influence, both constructive and destructive. Humans are part and parcel of both systems. To the extent that the "designated wilderness" approach to conservation has promoted dualistic thinking and separation from nature, it is a counterproductive concept in the Chicago region.

Yet the lands comprising Chicago Wilderness have important values traditionally associated with wilderness. They are nature playgrounds for millions of city dwellers. They are a repository of great biological diversity, much of which cannot be found in any other "Wilderness" area, anywhere. Thus these lands are base datums of ecological health against which to measure land sickness. (This became the highest value that Leopold placed on wilderness.)

So, back to Chicago Wilderness. It may offer some hope of changing people's relationship to nature and insert people back into wilderness in ways that make both kinds of wilderness relevant. What better way to reintegrate people into the nature of which they are a part than to call all of these scraps of nature in their own backyard wilderness, and then redefine it to include – indeed require – humans to maintain it in a healthy condition?

Restoration and stewardship will be the antidote to dualistic thinking. And will this familiarity with wilderness not then carry over into public support for the large tract wilderness areas on the other end of the wilderness spectrum? Both types of wilderness benefit when they are seen as part of a single system that includes people.

John Rogner is Field Supervisor, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and chair of Chicago Wilderness

Teaching Our Eyes to See Trees

White oak. The Illinois state tree, it's the commonest large old tree in most of this region's finest woodlands.

White oak (note the pale, flaky bark) can have three rather different shapes. It can be a wide, roundish tree, with broad spreading limbs, as in one that grew up in a pasture or a lawn (though white oaks tend not to do so well in lawns, in the long run). It can be a tall tree, with just a few branches at the very top, in situations where it is densely surrounded by other trees. But white oak doesn't continue to reproduce once a woods becomes this dense, because oak seedlings die within a year or three of germinating in heavy shade.

Or a white oak can look like the specimen shown here. This healthy individual grew up in its sustainable natural habitat, an open woodland.

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but there is something like a Platonic ideal of beauty in a healthy ecosystem. To truly appreciate the beauty of trees and their plant and animal associates, we have to be able to distinguish sickness from health.

Notice how smallish horizontal limbs occur well down below the middle of the trunk. This is a tree that has – for a great long time – gotten enough light to retain its lower limbs. Of course there's more to this picture. Sadly, we can also see densely packed invasives closing in around the oak. Those skinny, pale, opposite-branching twigs on the upper left belong to a maple or ash. And those dark green leaves below likely belong to alien buckthorn, a tree that stays green later than the natives. Invading sugar maple, green ash, and European buckthorn are major threats to survival of the oak woods. In the absence of fire management, these denser, more heavily-leafed species shade out the lower limbs, wildflowers, birds, butterflies, and most other oak woods species.

At Bluff Spring Fen in Elgin, stewards Leon Halloran and Doug Taron recognized that the woods needed thinning and fire. Working with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, they not only brought back the health of the trees, but Taron midwifed the return of a beautiful moth, which requires large quantities of bottlebrush grass, one of the components of the classic sunny understory.

Today at Bluff Spring, visitors see the birds, wildflowers, dragonflies, even darting rare fish where the trail crosses a crystal clear stream. These multitudes are central to nature at its most beautiful.

To date, restoration is restoring only a very small proportion of our oak ecosystems. But in those forests, beauty is on the increase, as land managers restore the natural health that underlies true beauty.

Photo by Mike MacDonald. Words by Stephen Packard. More about oaks on pages 6 and 28 and about Doug Taron's beautiful moth on page 35.

***OPPOSITE:** Photograph by Willard Clay.*

Common understory trees in our fire-dependent oak forests are hazelnut, sumac, American plum, viburnum, hawthorn, and Iowa crab apple.

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Sierra Club members walk the straight and narrow at Waterfall Glen in DuPage County. Photo by Hank Erdmann.

Chicago WILDERNESS

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