Bug Mosher

Coyote on the Fairway

Celebrating the Burn Queen
What is Chicago Wilderness?
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 163 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. 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.
chicagowildernessmag.org

For a complete list of Chicago Wilderness members, please visit the Web site at chicagowilderness.org.
Regular People

When I first heard that Chicago homicide detective Luis Munoz is also an avid birder, I thought it was an unusual story. I shouldn’t have. When I learned that rock musician Rick Mosher hunts for rare moths and other insects late at night after his gigs, I thought, “That’s remarkable.” But it’s not so.

In fact, it’s absolutely normal—not out of the ordinary—for people in all walks of life, of all ages, races, professions, to love nature and to find great pleasure and enjoyment in its midst.

The stories of Luis and Rick and of Robbie Hunzinger, an oboist and volunteer bird protector, are emblematic of Chicago Wilderness. Many people in our region connect in a daily way with nature. Many of these people are extraordinary, wonderful people. But their connection with nature is not the unusual part.

I shouldn’t be delighted when people, adults especially, show an affinity for nature. I should be astonished when they don’t. Kids naturally gravitate towards animals—the attraction is a fundamental part of us. It’s innate, that affinity for other creatures that share our world. The astonishing part is how many of us have lost that connection.

Chicago Wilderness is all about making this natural connection complete again, between people and wild places. (Hence our name, for starters.) Cindy Crosby finds solace for her spirit and inspiration for her craft in walks at Schulenberg Prairie (page 30). Nine-year-old Henry Gilley campaigns for turtles (page 37). All these people fit Chicago Wilderness—a new kind of magazine and a new kind of place (with less harangue and more heart). A new paradigm for urban dwellers.

Even golfers are getting into the swing (pardon the pun and see page 6) as our story on the growing trend of restoring nature on area courses demonstrates.

In April Robyn Thorson stopped in Chicago Wilderness on her way to a new home in Minnesota. She’s the new regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Chicago Wilderness is a great model,” she said. “Public support is the key to the kingdom.” Partnering is crucial to conservation. “If we don’t have public support,” she added, “then we’re just shoveling the tide.” After all, whom do you trust to deliver messages about what’s happening in our world? she asked us. “Not the government!” The government can help make things happen only when people take those things to heart.

We’ll stick with messengers this magazine is full of—like Luis and Robbie, Henry and Deb Petro. We’ll celebrate the Aphrodite fritillaries, crab spiders, bees and our human neighbors, all of whom are necessary to foster that great mystery, Chicago Wilderness.

With this issue we bid farewell to Alison Carney Brown, devoted volunteer and crackerjack news editor for these last four years. Alison plans to spend more time with her twin daughters and on longer writing projects. (Look for her byline from time to time in our pages.) She has spread good will throughout Chicago Wilderness. We wish her well.
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Which one would YOU choose? It was very difficult for us to pick the
image for this issue's cover – we had such great images to choose from.
Help us choose the cover for Fall 2003! Go to
chicagowildernessmag.org/cover to participate in our reader poll.

Cover: Dewy damselfly. Damselflies are smaller and more delicate than dragonflies.
These skilled predators eat small flying insects. Photo by Ed Reschke.
Opposite: In August, saw-toothed sunflowers rise to eight feet or more in a disturbed
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Dear Editor:

In Chicago, 225 cases of illness from West Nile virus (WNV) were reported last summer (CW, Spring '02). Many of those affected have not fully recovered, and 19 died. In some neighborhoods nearly one in 1,000 residents became ill.

People would be outraged if an artificial environmental hazard caused this much illness and death. In a way, it did. WNV was transmitted here by Culex pipiens, the northern house mosquito. These mosquitoes are urban opportunists. They breed principally in catch basins and other artificial containers in populated areas.

Elimination of containers that hold standing water is critical to limiting mosquitoes that spread WNV. Property owners, concerned citizens, and city agencies need to work together to make this a basic part of sanitation.

Catch basins, a necessary part of our urban environment, serve as ideal breeding sites for Culex mosquitoes. We currently use methoprene, an insect growth regulator, for these. Methoprene is available in a slow-release formulation that requires only one application per season to each of the 200,000-plus catch basins in the city. The bacterial products last 30 days, and would require several costly re-applications during the season. Methoprene only affects insects that develop in treated water, doesn’t contaminate groundwater, degrades quickly into inactive chemicals, and doesn’t bioaccumulate. These characteristics compare favorably with those of the bacterial larvicides.

Controlling mosquitoes in the larval stage is always preferable to spraying. However, spraying is the only way to reduce the number of infected adult mosquitoes when they threaten human health. Sumithrin (Anvil), used in Chicago, also has a favorable profile for a pesticide. It breaks down quickly in sunlight or water and does not bioaccumulate. The risk to aquatic species is low: the EPA label does not require spraying to be set back from bodies of water. With regard to other nontargeted species, an ultra low volume application would be expected to affect mosquito-sized insects that are flying at night when an area is sprayed. Bees, butterflies, and dragonflies are larger than mosquitoes and are typically not flying at night in Chicago, so effects on these species would be unexpected.

West Nile virus is a significant public health concern that can be lessened with citizen action and environmentally responsible mosquito control methods. At times, this includes judicious and careful use of pesticides.

William S. Paul, MD, MPH
Deputy Commissioner
Chicago Department of Public Health

**Letter Section**

**Responsible Mosquito Control**

Dear Editor:

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Thousands of golf enthusiasts converged on Olympia Fields Country Club this June to count bogies, eagles, and birds as top golfers competed in the U.S. Open. Just a month earlier, a team of birdwatchers gathered on the same rolling hills to count birds, exclusively, in Audubon International’s 2003 North American Birdwatching Open. All told, Olympia Fields’ team spotted 95 species, including orioles, scarlet tanagers, and 22 different species of warblers. Under the stewardship of Course Superintendent Dave Ward, these 350 acres of Chicago Wilderness offer both premier sporting for humans and an increasingly more hospitable environment for wildlife.

A Powerful Drive Toward the Green

Olympia Fields is not alone. A growing number of the more than 300 golf facilities in the metropolitan area are paying more attention to how the land is managed, according to Randy Kane, Ph.D., director of turfgrass programs for the Chicago District Golf Association. Kane estimates that virtually every golf course has begun to employ at least some environmentally sensitive management practices, while as many as 40 percent of all courses have done much more than that.

“Golf course superintendents used to do whatever was needed,” states Kane. “Now many really look at their actions in the framework of their impact on the environment. Many superintendents consider themselves stewards of the environment.”

At these progressive golf courses, there is less turfgrass, less mowing, less pesticide use, and less watering. Managers compost grass clippings and yard waste, recycle oil, and rigorously monitor water quality. Many native plants find a home on areas that are out of play, drawing more wildlife around the links.

Improve Your Game, Improve Your Habitat

Ten years ago, Dave Ward enrolled Olympia Fields in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses and began working toward full certification (see page 8). Among other steps, he invited Marianne Hahn, former president of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, to conduct weekly bird counts for one year in an initial survey.

“My suburban neighborhood, where many of my neighbors smother their yards with lawn chemicals, has nowhere near the bird diversity of Olympia Fields,” asserts Hahn, whose birdwatching team counted 82 species in the 2002 Birdwatching Open.

A similar transition took place at the Village Links in Glen Ellyn. Assistant Golf Course Superintendent Chris Pekarek admits that when he joined the course in 1969, “we mowed fence line to fence line.” Pekarek once scoured the entire course for bird nests and found not one.

But under the direction of Pekarek and Course Superintendent Tim Kelly, the Village Links became the first public
course in the nation certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Over the past decade, more than 1,200 bluebirds, tree swallows, and wood ducks combined have fledged there through the Village Links nest box program. Red-tailed hawks nest on the grounds, and native plants buffer all 20 ponds. The staff works at using pesticides and fertilizers sparingly and chooses from a small list of regulated treatments. Working with local garden clubs and elementary schools, they conduct educational and restoration projects such as installing butterfly gardens at local schools.

However, while golf courses can be maintained to provide habitat for some prairie or savanna species, they offer only limited habitat for animals and plants that require large blocks of land or can't withstand human disturbance.

Ken Klick, restoration ecologist for the Lake County Forest Preserves, notes that golf courses are inherently not high quality nature preserves. "We're doing what we can to expand the benefits of our facilities to the environment," he says. It's a compromise that has been improved because of the Audubon International program, the Lake County Forest Preserves' efforts, and our community education efforts." Like the game of golf itself, it's a mission of constant improvement.

And despite courses' tendency to favor common disturbance-tolerant species such as deer and geese, they can provide the wherewithal to protect certain rare species. Situated on highly vulnerable and environmentally sensitive shoreline, Fort Sheridan Golf Course offers a tantalizing opportunity to reclaim and rehabilitate a sizeable tract of rare land. Community and conservation organizations began efforts to preserve the golf course as well as adjacent shoreline and bluffs for public use and natural resource protection long before the U.S. Army decided to vacate Fort Sheridan and transfer the land to the Lake County Forest Preserves at no cost. Recently, Lake County voters approved funds for the Forest Preserves to protect the property's natural resources, improve public access to Lake Michigan, and restore natural storm water flows. Golf course revenue will ultimately pay for all improvements to the course itself, as well as part of the ongoing natural restoration work.

"These ravines and bluffs are so rich in natural resources," notes Openlands Project Associate Director Joyce O'Keefe, citing some of the nine endangered and threatened plants that have been identified on site: ground juniper, pale vetchling, small Solomon's seal, star flower, and Canadian buffalograss. "This will be a very expensive project," states O'Keefe, "but the bottom line is that Lake County Forest Preserves board members realized that having a golf course on this site would help pay for the environmental restoration."

There are limits to how completely nature can be restored on golf courses. Yet because they cover such a large area, their continued efforts to be more natural can help improve the ecological health of the region. As of 1995, golf courses covered 8,340 acres across the six Illinois counties immediately surrounding Chicago, or 1.4 percent of that area, according to the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission's (NIPC) most recent land-use inventory. Golf courses accounted for nearly 21 percent of total open lands, compared to nearly 17 percent for recreational parks and nearly 62 percent for natural conservation areas. And from 1990 to 1995, NIPC data suggests, golf courses represented the fastest-growing class of open space in the region.

"Golf courses serve an important function in regional land-use patterns," states Openlands' O'Keefe. "They provide recreational value, often in areas where buildings shouldn't occur."

To wit, many courses have been built along river floodplains. Harbor-side International Golf Center on Chicago's industrial South Side rests on a former solid waste landfill that could not be used for industrial, commercial, or residential development, and Willowills Golf Course perches atop a former landfill, making it the highest point in Northbrook. Though most land advocates would contest any new construction of golf courses on natural lands, some find redeeming value in the courses that exist. "The fact is, a significant amount of land in the North Branch watershed is now used as golf courses, and much of that open space would have been developed as homes," states John Quail, manager of watershed projects for Friends of the Chicago River. "Depending on how they are being managed, golf courses preserve open space that can serve ecological functions, from filtering water to providing bird habitat," concludes Quail, who works with local golf courses and stakeholders to address non-point source pollution in the North Branch watershed.

**AVOIDING HAZARDS (OF PESTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS)**

The practice of applying pesticides and fertilizers to keep turfgrass green at any cost has long contributed to the decline of health in our waterways and our wildlife populations. The Chicago District Golf Association's Kane estimates that the average golf course may be able to reduce its use of pesticides and fertilizers by as much as 30 percent by adopting more sensitive practices.

Continued on page 9
A CATALYST FOR CHANGE: AUDUBON INTERNATIONAL

Today’s fairways are getting greener, thanks in part to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, administered by Audubon International and sponsored by the United States Golf Association. Audubon International, it should be noted, is not associated with the National Audubon Society, which does not certify golf courses.

Founded in 1991, the program enrolls golf courses and encourages them to develop a comprehensive environmental plan that addresses wildlife and habitat management, public education, integrated pest management, water conservation, and water quality management.

Twenty percent of all courses in Illinois participate in the Audubon program, compared to 12 percent nationwide. Twenty-two golf courses within Chicago Wilderness have achieved Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary status. To involve more courses, Audubon International has an ambitious program to enroll at least 50 percent of all U.S. courses by 2008.

GROWING NATIVE: OLYMPIA FIELDS COUNTRY CLUB, OLYMPIA FIELDS

With four 18-hole courses, polo fields, and a mammoth clubhouse, Olympia Fields Country Club was the largest private golf facility in the world when it was built between 1916 and 1923.

Today, Olympia Fields’ remaining two 18-hole courses cover 350 acres, encompassing oak and hickory forests, savanna, prairie, creekbed, and floodplain. Course Superintendent Dave Ward has launched an all-native replanting plan to mimic the original landscape. Assisted by Connor Shaw of Possibility Place Nursery in Monee, Illinois, Ward uses only trees, shrubs, and prairie plants grown from local seed sources, many collected from the golf course itself.

To ensure that the property’s aging oaks have successors, Ward is planting six different types of native oaks and adding understory trees such as pagoda dogwood, American plum, sassafras, and ironwood.

Volunteers from the Thorn Creek Audubon Society have observed more than 100 bird species on site, including summer tanagers and black-crowned night-herons. Other resident wildlife includes deer, beavers, mink, muskrat, foxes, coyotes, snakes, frogs, and turtles.

This gallery of wildlife had prime seating this June as Olympia Fields hosted the U.S. Open, one of many championships held at the historic course. Proving that environmental sensitivity and superb golfing can coexist, Olympia Fields is both an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and premier golf facility; its championship North Course is rated #2 in Illinois and #24 nationally by Golf Digest.

RESTORING DIVERSITY: THUNDERHAWK GOLF CLUB, BEACH PARK

At 243 acres, ThunderHawk Golf Club embraces more land than many 18-hole courses, but a remarkably low percentage consists of turfgrass. Mowed turf covers less than 90 acres, leaving 74 acres of native and replanted forest, 32 acres of preserved and created wetlands, and more than 50 acres of restored prairie. Opened in 1999, ThunderHawk was designed by noted course architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr., and became the sixth public course worldwide to achieve Audubon's premier Signature Sanctuary status, a more rigorous program available only to newly constructed courses.

During construction, the discovery of more than 2,000 small sundrops (Oenothera perennis) prompted development of a conservation plan for the state-threatened plants. The course owner, Lake County Forest Preserves, worked with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Audubon International to protect, manage, and monitor the plants.

Restored natural areas provide habitat important to migratory birds such as towhees, white-throated sparrows, and yellow-breasted chats, notes Ken Klick, restoration ecologist with the Lake County Forest Preserves.

WILDLIFE TO GOLFERS: CAN WE PLAY THROUGH?

SUNSET VALLEY GOLF COURSE, HIGHLAND PARK

“Golf course superintendents are not necessarily golf people first,” admits Brian Green, course superintendent for Sunset Valley Golf Course, managed by the Park District of Highland Park. “My first love is the out-of-doors and nature. In our area, the thing that connects the green space is the golf courses. We’re fence to fence with neighboring preserves,” Green observes. Indeed, a dozen golf courses range along the Skokie River from Wilmette Golf Club north to Deerpath Golf Club in Lake Forest.

“We take particular efforts to focus on the issues that are bigger than golf, whether it’s wildlife, biodiversity, or the watershed of the Skokie River,” continues Green. Through a stream restoration project that involved Friends of the Chicago River, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, and the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission, Green got plugged in to efforts at the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Skokie Lagoons. “There are watershed planners working on the entire reach of the stream, and we need to be involved with each other,” notes Green.

In addition to teamwork, Green advocates education. With golfers playing 50,000 rounds of golf annually at Sunset Valley, Green recognizes he has a “daily canned audience.” He reaches them with “Protected Area” signs, targeted messages on score cards, a community newsletter, and even PowerPoint presentations on the clubhouse television.
At golf courses that adhere to "integrated pest management" techniques, pesticide use is focused and less frequent. Course superintendents, who often possess college degrees in forestry, turfgrass management, or horticulture, monitor their courses to determine if a turfgrass disease has reached a predetermined threshold before initiating treatment. "For each condition or fungus, there is a certain percentage we can tolerate," states Tom Morgensen, superintendent of natural resource and maintenance operations for Lake County Forest Preserves and former superintendent for Lake County's four public golf courses. "We use scientific techniques and watch the weather closely, since many conditions are weather dependent. If the weather is going to change, we may decide to do nothing."

The amount and type of chemicals that a course uses can vary tremendously, depending on factors such as its size, budget, and level of maintenance. Despite ThunderHawk's progressive methods, the course still spends more than 21 percent of its $667,000 annual budget on pesticides and fertilizers. But the design of a course can determine how much of this enters local waterways. According to Morgensen, the ThunderHawk course was "designed to be cleaner environmentally than many other watersheds." The course directs water through its ponds, which are connected by planted wetlands that filter out sediment, chemicals, and nutrients. According to tests the course conducts to comply with its Audubon certification, the water exits the course in better condition than it entered. And tests have failed to find pesticides in pond water, wetland soil, or groundwater wells on site.

At Glenview's North Shore Country Club, which is also Audubon-certified, Course Superintendent Dan Dinelli stocks his ponds with rainbow trout as living proof of the overall course health and water quality. "Everything a man does to his environment ends up in the water," observes Dinelli. "These trout are our canary in the mine."

As they adopt pest and turf management procedures, course superintendents have a wealth of techniques to draw on. The United States Golf Association (USGA) has funded more than 225 turfgrass and environmental research programs, at a cost of more than $21 million, since 1983. Under its Wildlife Links program, the USGA also funds research, management, and education projects managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. While efforts such as these have not eliminated the use of harmful applications, they provide new tools for superintendents intent on changing "business as usual."

Avid golfer Michael Donohue of Orland Park, Illinois, appreciates the trend toward the "wildlands look" he has noticed on several courses. Though he brings binoculars with him to check out the increasingly more abundant prairie and woodland birds he sees between shots, Donohue says that most serious golfers remain more focused on their game than on the savanna just past the tee. For those closely following the excitement of this summer's major tournaments, this is easy to understand. But inspiring more golfers and course managers to revere habitats as much as handicaps may be the key to the greening of all the golf courses in Chicago Wilderness.
For the past 15 years, Rick Mosher has been the lead singer in the New Duncan Imperials, a hard-driving rock-and-roll band that he and two college friends formed after several of their more heartfelt efforts had stumbled along without much success.

“We started NDI as a joke,” says the soft-spoken, wry 41-year-old. “We were so sincere, trying so hard and getting nowhere, that we just sort of snipped off the tail with one clip and made up this band that was going to be totally goofy. And of course it took off because we weren’t trying and we didn’t care at all. We dressed in loud, silly clothes, straw hats, and within a year we were one of the bigger local bands in the city — sold out the Metro a couple of times, played with top national bands, started touring, making money.”

Yet even during the high rock-and-roll ride, Mosher held on to the spirit that he remembered lighting up as a young boy when he’d wandered into the fields around his Freeport, Illinois, home. He had a passion to collect bugs. So at around 30 years old, having given up the insect harvest for almost 20 years, he found himself drawn to the hunt again — this time on the road with the band, dressed like an idiot.

“We would be in, say, Missoula, Montana, and I’d get back from the show at about three o’clock in the morning — still dressed in my loud sport coat, green pants, golf shoes, straw hat — get my jar, and start prowling around the lights of the motel looking for moths — and maybe find a whole wall of them I’d never seen before. It was completely thrilling.”

He paused in the small study of his North Side home with its 48-drawer cabinet full of nearly 4,000 beautifully mounted and catalogued insects, remembering those after-gig expeditions. “Every moment out there I saw how silly I looked. But I enjoy that. If you’re self-conscious, you’re not going to be a good insect person.”

Mosher has bugs in his blood. His great grandfather was a pioneer in the study of wasps, and his grandfather was an insect illustrator for the Smithsonian.

“When I was seven, my grandfather sent me a collection of insects he’d been drawing,” he recalls. “They were on black pins in a cigar box, all labeled. I still remember the smell of the preservatives when I opened that box with all these perfect amazing beetles and butterflies. And from that moment I was hooked.”
He collected bees and moths and butterflies until he was about 12 — “Around the time I started to play guitar to be cool,” he says. Later, after three years at Northern Illinois University, he dropped out of school and came to Chicago to play rock-and-roll. He later returned to school in Chicago for a masters in Human Development, and married his wife, Alison.

These days, with two young boys and a teaching job at the Near North Montessori school, he makes his collecting trips when he can. One of his glass-topped drawers is from a single night not too long ago in the Shawnee National Forest. It contains nearly 50 different moths – his particular fascination. When he talks about the night he caught them, there is a relish in his voice that evokes the deep pleasure he takes from gathering this diversity of winged beauty.

“Shawnee is full of densely wooded forest with swampy, boggy areas,” he says, remembering the warm spring day he rented a generator to run a light, then drove alone to the national forest south of Carbondale. “I followed a tiny road to a spot away from light pollution, away from other campers. It was kind of Blair Witch Project scary, actually: deep woods, no light. It was silent, you could smell the forest.”

In late afternoon, Mosher strung a rope between two trees, and hung a sheet and a mercury vapor lamp from it. “The best moment, a weird moment of clarity, is when you have everything set up and you take a breath and look around as the shadows fall and the sun starts to go down,” he says. “Then you turn on the light and they start coming.” He looked at the drawer full of insects: large white moths, small ones wearing tree-bark camouflage, 15 or 20 different species meticulously arranged in frozen flight on pins, an inch above their identifying labels.

Closer to home, Mosher says he has been surprised by the rich variety of urban bugs. “I had always assumed you had to be out in the country or at least not in the city to find real diversity in the insect population, but I was wrong. Last summer I went to the North Park Village Nature Center at Pulaski and Peterson. It’s an amazing site with oaks, savanna, and a pond, surrounded by traffic, obscenely bright lights, shouting people. But somehow it’s this calm wilderness-like place where I found a really impressive diversity of moth life. It’s like another planet.”

Even deeper in the city, Mosher was surprised at the number of insects that survive amidst the tall downtown buildings. “I was allowed to sample the bugs in the garden on the City Hall roof,” he said. “I found about 100 individuals and maybe 20 species – which isn’t great diversity – but the fact that anything is up there is amazing.”

As for the suggestion that his collecting harms the insect world, he says, “Insects can handle individuals taken out of the population because they reproduce so fast. But if their resources aren’t there, they’ll die out, which is one of the reasons habitat preservation is important.” Mosher carefully observes the “many overlapping regulations” created to ensure the health of insect populations.

When I asked him which was most deeply satisfying – a full screaming house at the Metro or a solitary night in the forest being mothman, he smiled. “That’s a great question,” he said. “Both are a pinnacle of experience, a moment when you step back and say ‘this is so great.’ But if I could have only one, it would be a night in the Florida forest with my light set up and the night just starting. I’d hate to have to choose, because there’s a balance there between solitude and the crowd. But you know, when I’m in concert I feel like someone else. But when I’m alone out there waiting for moths, I feel like myself.”
"I didn’t really get into birding til I was shot on Labor Day 1992," said Luis Munoz as he stood with binoculars and a spotting scope on the shore of Montrose Harbor not far from the Magic Hedge, one of Chicago’s famed birdwatching spots.

Munoz is a solidly built 43-year-old Chicago cop whose light-hearted and personable manner somehow don’t reflect that he has spent the past 18 years first as a patrolman, then a gang crimes officer, and now a homicide detective assigned to unsolved murders out of the Harrison and Kedzie station.

"My partner and I were investigating an aggravated battery around Western and Madison," he says of the day he took a bullet. "We had a lead on a witness and we were pulling up next to the building where he was supposed to be staying. Then I was jolted backwards by a gunshot. Hit me right above the elbow, I started spurring blood, and I put pressure on it. We almost killed the car trying to get out of there," he recalls. "Then my training kicked in, and I started counting my breaths trying to calm myself. We got to the county hospital and it turned out I was very lucky. The bullet missed the nerves, so all I had was a broken arm. Anyway," he says, as if he had been lucky to avoid more than nerve damage, "I took it as a warning that I wasn’t taking advantage of my life. So I went to Yellowstone, began videotaping birds, and it just blew me away. From then on, I started to get passionate about it."

Munoz and I met around dawn on his day off in a wind-whipped freezing rain, while he used his binoculars now and then to look at the few gulls who were soaring and diving through the dismal gray over the harbor. It was here, early in his birding passion, that he fell in with the family of birders who meet each other at favorite spots to share what they know.

"I started hanging out with John Purcell at Montrose. He’s a really good birder and he became like my birding father," Munoz recalls. "Then, I was out looking at gulls, and I met Bob Hughes, one of the best birders I’ve ever seen, an ace. He pointed out a Mew gull, a really rare West Coast gull, and we’ve been great buddies since then."

Munoz was just back from vacation in Puerto Rico where
his father raises mourning doves, ring turtle doves, and a few canaries. He birds while he's there and goes scuba diving and whitewater rafting when he gets the chance.

"It takes me a few days to come back from being out in nature when I get home," he says. "It's the way I leave the job behind. I quit drinking – which a lot of cops do to relax – when I got shot because I knew it would kill me. It's a really tough job, which is why I'm not married and don't have pets. Sometimes you spend 36 hours at a stretch working a case, so you just don't have time for family."

Not surprisingly, Munoz' passion for birds sometimes rides in the squad car with him and his partner. "Last January, we were leaving Cook County Jail," he says, beginning to laugh in the middle of the comic setup, "and I see two adult geese with three chicks. I go 'What!' and my partner slams on the brakes because he thinks something's going on, and I say 'baby geese.' And he looks at me like 'What?' And I say, 'I know you don't realize this, but you're not supposed to have baby geese in January. Make sure you see what I'm seeing because they're not going to believe me.' And last summer, near the police gas station," Munoz continues, in a state of focus, "we saw two red-tailed hawks. And since I was going to Arizona for ten days, I asked my partner to check to see if they were breeding. He did, and, lo and behold, he saw chicks. So he's getting into it a bit, although he mostly likes raptores."

In the spring, Munoz haunts southern Cook County near Palos Hills. "There are two ospreys who've been down there for about five years," he says, "and they just laid two eggs. And you get a wonderful bunch of birds down there – warblers, kingfishers, sparrows, tanagers, thrushes, and thrashers."

By that time my hands were numb and it was clear that only a few very hungry gulls and a couple of ducks were to show this morning. We decided to give up the harbor for someplace warmer and drier. I think Munoz could have stayed longer.

"This is where I relax, big time," he said, folding his tripod. "Out here, I've never seen anything bad happen. Nobody lies to you, nobody sticks you up, nobody shoots at you, nobody gets murdered. I love it."
I met Robbie Hunsinger for lunch in a North Side restaurant just before she was to take up her volunteer rounds looking for dead and injured birds in the Loop. Because she is an accomplished classical oboist, I asked her if I was remembering correctly that the oboe was the voice of the duck in *Peter and the Wolf*. She laughed — it’s a musical laugh and she laughs it often, as if she can’t help making music even when she’s not playing an instrument. “Yes, it’s the duck,” she said, “although we oboe players try to live that down.”

Hunsinger’s introduction to the oboe came at eight years old in her Atlanta grammar school. “Atlanta was a great place full of wonderful oboe players and teachers, many of whom went on to work with major symphony orchestras,” she says. “I had a great teacher who actually played the oboe, which was rare, and he gave us very advanced pieces when we were very young. As a teacher myself now, I’m not sure how he dared.”

Hunsinger, whose curly brown hair and open face complement a sunny personality, eventually went on to the Manhattan School of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Music, then to Chicago, where she played with the Civic Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony. “That was very exciting,” she says of her symphony dates. “There were four or five years when they were short on oboe player, and they asked me now and then to substitute. I was never a member, but I loved it every time I got to sit in. My biggest concert was the Bach Christmas Oratorio — just thrilling.”

The duck voice in *Peter and the Wolf* wasn’t Hunsinger’s first bird connection. “My mother,” she says, “was and still is an avid birder in Atlanta, so I always had an interest.” About five or six years ago, as Hunsinger began exploring experimental music, she says she started hearing the birds in a way she hadn’t before. “I became really fascinated by the calls: goose calls, yellow-headed blackbirds, thrushes — I love the whole gamut. And when I started birding again, it really opened up my music.”

A smaller group in which she plays oboe has a CD collection of improvisational pieces that runs a wide range from peaceful meditation to wonderful musical bickering. Some of them contain varied birdlike notes and rhythms, and even a couple of moments that sound like moody duck talk.

Hunsinger also plays stand-up bass with her partner Kelly Kessler’s band, The Wichita Shut-ins, an authentic country-western hootenanny with words, music, and voice up out of some piney woods somewhere. When we talked, they were just back from Austin, Texas, where they’d played the well-known “South by Southwest” festival.

About a year ago, Hunsinger met Ken Wysocki, founder of the Chicago Bird Collision Monitor and Rescue Project, a volunteer group thatprods the early morning Loop during the spring and fall migrations, looking for and counting birds that have become disoriented and fallen victim to the hazards of the downtown canyons.
"I really liked the program, and I wanted to help the birds," she says. "But I'm kind of squeamish, and I'm not a morning person, so I was hoping I could become involved in some indirect way. I called Ken and asked him how many people were involved in the project. He said 'one,' meaning himself, so I said 'OK, here's my number,' and it turned out to be amazing."

On the three to five days a week they go out during heaviest migration, the group meets at five a.m. to check several of the plazas near skyscrapers in the Loop where they count dead and fallen birds. "There was a problem at the Art Institute of Chicago, for instance, until the school drained the fountain. The birds would fly into the huge glass wall there and fall into the water," Hunsinger says. The Art Institute has since collaborated by draining the fountain during migration season. "The birding community has had the same kind of cooperation with most of the downtown high-rise companies who turn their lights off in the late evening, early morning hours."

"We don't know exactly what happens in this maze of tall buildings, but the birds - a lot of thrushes, warblers, ovenbirds - get pulled down into these canyons then fly into lit windows and reflective glass, or else just become exhausted from circling and settle at street level," she says. "Which is one of the reasons it's crucial to get there early because there's a huge predator problem: gulls, crows, some rats. I've seen a gull pick up a stunned bird right in front of me before I could get to it."

On their most hectic morning out, the group counted about 60 birds, 10 or 15 of which were alive. Help for the injured can mean long trips to a licensed bird rehabilitator. Only stunned or injured birds are handled, and Hunsinger has a federal permit to do so. Hunsinger remembers one morning when she drove an hour and a half to Wisconsin with an injured thrush on the seat next to her. She found Brahms on the radio to comfort the hurt bird. "I felt it was the best we could do," she said, as if the highest of the classical repertoire was probably not quite up to birdsong.

When I asked her where she thought birds fit in the musical world, she said, "I think they're the inspiration, all of them. I was with a group in the Sierras a while ago recording bird calls, and found that I liked the rougher sounds better than the pretty musical sounds. I feel like my ears have really opened, as if the birds have taught me that the traditional music I love has room for duck calls."

Craig Vetter is a freelance writer in Chicago and teaches magazine writing at Northwestern University. Freelance photographer Eric Fogleman is a carpenter on the side.
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Into the Wild
OUR GUIDE TO THE WILD SIDE

1. BIG ROCK FOREST PRESERVE — Kane County
2. CHURCHILL WOODS FOREST PRESERVE — DuPage County
3. GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL — Northern Illinois
4. ROCK RUN PRESERVE — Will County
5. THEODORE STONE PRESERVE — Cook County

CHICAGO WILDERNESS: GET INTO IT
At chicagowildernessmag.org, you'll find the Web versions of all the preserve profiles in this issue as well as every profile since the 1997 premier issue. Arranged by county to help you plan the perfect weekend destination.
Big Rock Forest Preserve is on Jericho Rd in the southwest corner of Big Rock Township. Follow I-88 west to Sugar Grove and exit at Rte 47. Follow Rte 47 south 2.5 miles to Jericho Rd. At the intersection of Rte 47 and Jericho Rd, turn right/west. Continue on Jericho Rd roughly five miles. Big Rock Forest Preserve is the first entrance on the right/north after the bridge over Big Rock Creek.

In early summer, as slivers of light sneak through the white oaks to the east, a noisy kingfisher — seeking a meal of fish — skims above the 32-acre quarry lake at Big Rock Forest Preserve.

Since its initial acquisition in 1991 of land in the southwest corner of Big Rock Township, the Forest Preserve District of Kane County (FPDKC) has purchased additional parcels. Today, with roughly 468 acres, Big Rock is among the district’s largest properties.

When Big Rock Creek broke its banks during heavy rains in 1996, it burst through to the abandoned limestone quarry beside it, filling the 65-foot-deep pit and creating habitat for fish, including bluegill, black crappie, largemouth bass, and sunfish. After building an access road, parking lot, and pedestrian bridge, the district opened the site to the public in the spring of 2001.

We stroll northeast on an unpaved road that is sandwiched between Big Rock Creek and the quarry lake. Below us, a ledge of dolomite bedrock parallels the water’s edge. Where the trail turns north, slabs of limestone — skeletal remains from the property’s previous quarry life — are stacked cairn-like next to the path. Pointed stumps of silver maple and box elder, now weathered silver-gray, hint that beaver once foraged here.

“Big Rock is at the edge of two major divisions in Illinois that are defined by plant communities, gla- ciation, and topography,” says Valerie DePrez, FPDKC nature programs supervisor. “Where the rock shelf is exposed, you can see scratches where the glacier left its mark 10,000 years ago. Fossils in the limestone include creatures from the Ordovician period, such as trilobites and brachiopods.”

Farther on, we turn west. Hearing our footsteps, a pheasant hen bursts from her hiding place. Goldfinches bob overhead and add their sweet notes to the summer symphony. Visitors have seen other birds at Big Rock, including osprey, brown creeper, Acadian flycatcher, scarlet tanager, barred owl, tufted titmouse, and wild turkey.

We climb the man-made berm that rises 90 feet above the water’s edge. “That’s downtown Aurora,” says DePrez as she points southeast across the lake.

“And just behind us is the district’s Deer Valley Golf Course.”

Although there’s no formal trail, hikers can reach the eastern portion of the preserve by leaving the lakeside road and heading east toward the oak grove along the ridge. Beyond that, the oxbows of Big Rock Creek snake through a verdant valley lined by high, sandy bluffs. Along the creek, massive sycamores tower over ironwood. Trees found in the 80-acre oak-hickory woodland include red, white, and chinquapin oak; bitternut hickory; American and slippery elm; and purple mulberry.

“Other habitats at this diverse site include a high-quality fen and a perched pond [a pond that rests on a shelf, usually clay, above the water table],” notes Drew Ullberg, FPDKC director of planning and development.

Several years ago, the district seeded roughly 20 acres with prairie grasses and forbs. Other native plants at Big Rock include wingstem, swamp thistle, cup plant, spotted Joe Pye weed, sedges, cardinal flower, and Canada wild rye.

Activities at Big Rock include hiking, catch-and-release fishing, and picnicking. Leashed pets are welcome. Swimming is not allowed. A pit toilet is available near the parking lot.

The district has scheduled a nature walk for families from 10 to 11:30 a.m., Saturday, July 12, at the preserve. (No walk if it’s raining.) Register at (847) 741-8350, ext. 10.

— Ann W. Davis
In 1860, farmer Winslow Churchill complained about the nighttime clacking of horse-drawn traffic along the plank-covered St. Charles Road that crossed his property. Today this same property, now known as Churchill Woods Forest Preserve in Glen Ellyn, offers 271 acres of open space. Its 2.5 miles of trails pass many scenic stretches of river and wind through savanna and prairie, including a 60-acre Illinois Nature Preserve.

From the easternmost parking lot on St. Charles Road, an unnamed trail leads south through a mature forest to the main picnic area along the East Branch of the DuPage River. Here, anglers can take advantage of flagstone terraces, and picnickers can spread out along the river’s edge or on an inviting island connected by a bridge. A wide turf path follows the river west and meets one end of the Bur Oak Trail. Farther along, splashes of bluegill and largemouth bass punctuate this quieter stretch of the East Branch.

Bur Oak Trail winds north along the riverbank, eventually crosses St. Charles Road, and picks up again off Swift Road. There, it intersects the Sundrop Trail amid a stand of black walnut, hawthorn, and bur oak.

Head north along Sundrop Trail to see ruby-saturated patches of cardinal flowers, doll’s eyes, and blue cohosh. There, hikers can catch their first glance of Churchill Prairie, an Illinois State Nature Preserve.

Restoration efforts at the prairie began more than ten years ago on the hill at its northwestern corner. Today, Indian grass and big bluestem mix with prairie dropseed, little bluestem, side oats grama, and prairie dock. Coneflower, compass plant, bottle gentian, black-eyed Susan, wild indigo, and golden Alexander add a touch of color.

“In order to be considered an Illinois Nature Preserve, the land has to have a significant amount of unusual and rare plants, and the plant list here is very impressive,” explains the preserve’s volunteer steward Chris Schwarz.

From north to south, the prairie slopes past an old hedgerow of sumac into a wet area left untouched during the agricultural boom. There, a strong stand of cord grass holds its own against the invasive reed canary grass.

“Once you get out in the open, if you want to see a place where the grass is over your head, come out here in late August or September,” says Schwarz. “Because it’s so grass-heavy, everything towers over you, even if you’re walking this big, wide trail,” she adds. When dry, that thick canopy creates fuel for the controlled burn season, when some flames reach upwards of 30 feet.

Back toward the north side of St. Charles Road, Bur Oak Trail continues east and cuts into Babcock Grove, a savanna of bur oak, black maple, and scattered 150-year-old white oaks. The western leg of the trail provides a dramatic view of the work of Forest Preserve District of DuPage County staff and volunteers to remove menacing invasive trees and return native woodland plants to the forest floor. Bur Oak Trail ends at the district’s East Sector office where visitors can continue under St. Charles Road to return to the starting parking lot.

A landing at Crescent Boulevard offers free access to the East Branch for state-registered canoes and kayaks. For picnic grove, picnic shelter, or youth group campground permits, parties should call the district’s visitor services office at (630) 933-7248. For more information, visit dupageforest.com.

— Jayne Bohner
When we first got started," said George Bellovics, landscape architect and Grand Illinois Trail coordinator for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, "the Grand Illinois Trail really was about doing a big project, about having a bold vision which linked Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River. And as it turned out, the idea was so good that we just kept extending it."

As it stands, the Grand Illinois Trail (GIT) runs for about 525 miles in a big loop through northern Illinois. Started in 1995, the Grand Illinois Trail is a broad system designed to link together new and existing trails. These include the Hennepin Canal, the Illinois Prairie Path, the Illinois & Michigan Canal, the Old Plank Road Trail, the Great River Trail, and a long list of others. When these local paths are linked, they create an overarching route that sweeps across the multiple ecosystems of Chicago Wilderness and beyond.

These links have important conservation benefits. Trails are linear corridors useful to migrating animals, and the open lands alongside trails provide habitat and food for wildlife. Trails also get people outdoors and help them become more familiar with their natural environment.

The GIT offers something for all enthusiasts: long-distance and race cyclists, serious hikers and casual walkers, birders and other naturalists. The traveler along this trail system can pedal through quiet prairie or wheel through city streets. "You see the cultural history of emigrating people who came from all over the world to settle at various points along the Grand Illinois Trail," said Bellovics. "You see Native American history, industrial history, and transportation history."

The Grand Illinois Trail runs west from Chicago to the Quad Cities mostly along the Illinois & Michigan and Hennepin Canal trails. (The southern portion is also part of the continent-spanning American Discovery Trail, a 6,300-mile trail system stretching from Delaware to California.) The GIT then traces the Great River Trail north along the Mississippi River, passing through the unique environments of the Thomson-Fulton Sand Prairie and Mississippi Palisades State Park on the way to Galena. This section of the GIT is also a major biding area. From Galena, the GIT northern route runs along trails and local roads, heading east through Rockford. Passing through three impressive state parks, this northern section offers a varied cross-section of Illinois geography. Along this leg, the traveler crosses from the hilly Jo Daviess County to the morainal uplands of northeastern Illinois.

At Richmond, the GIT turns south along the Prairie Trail, re-entering Chicago Wilderness near Glacial Park. The 2,806-acre Glacial Park, crown jewel of the McHenry County Conservation District, is a rambling woodland where hikers can easily spot woodpeckers and American kestrels. The park encompasses prairie, marshes, savannas, and a bog.

The GIT route through Kane County continues on the Fox River Trail and runs from Algonquin to Elgin. This sect-
tion trips through historical Trout Park and easily accesses nearby Voyageur Landing Forest Preserve and Tyler Creek Forest Preserve. Here in the Fox River Valley, a north-south flyway, the traveler can observe several kinds of warblers during migration.

From Elgin, the G17 route follows the Illinois Prairie Path past several forest preserves. The trail takes Augusta Boulevard into downtown Chicago, passing just a block north of the picturesque Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District in Oak Park. The G17 route then runs along the Lakefront Trail from Navy Pier to the South Shore Cultural Center, and from there follows local streets to Calumet Park and the new Burnham Greenway.

In itself, the Burnham Greenway is a modern-day miracle. Chicago’s South Side has long been densely packed with industrial areas around Calumet Harbor. But here the trail reclaim an abandoned railway corridor, forming a valuable link between several Cook County forest preserves in the area: the Burnham Prairie, Eggers Woods, William Powers Conservation Area, the Wentworth Prairie, and Sand Ridge Nature Preserve. The Burnham Greenway joins the Thorn Creek Trail in Lansing. Low-volume roads take the G17 further on to the Old Plank Road Trail, which leads from Chicago Heights to Joliet.

Countless governmental agencies and nonprofitorganizations have swung behind the G17 program, contributing millions of dollars to trail improvements and thousands of hours to negotiating a continuous path around the state. The trail serves as a broad invitation to explore the great Prairie State and a fine chance to venture past one’s local neighborhood to see the varied wonders of Illinois.

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**Day Tripping**

The Grand Illinois Trail lends itself well to short trips as well as long ones. Many bikers enjoy exploring the trail a section at a time. A special G17 Trail Blazer program recognizes those who have trekked the entire route within one calendar year and have kept a travel diary. (Contact the IDNR at (815) 625-2968 for details.) Two samples of local day trips follow, but adventurous types can easily invent their own “preserve-hopping” trips.

**The Illinois Prairie Path**

Start at Founders Park in downtown Wheaton, where parking is available. Head east on the main path to Maywood and back for a distance of 30 miles. This route passes through the western suburbs, where the Illinois Prairie Path Association has installed trailside prairie plantings that include purple coneflower, compass plant, cup plant, black-eyed Susan, and yellow aster. For those seeking a closer stopping point, downtown Elmhurst offers good picknicking.

Or head west from Wheaton on the Elgin Branch. Elgin and back is a distance of 30 miles, but casual bikers may prefer shorter stretches to North Avenue (12-mile roundtrip) or Timber Ridge Forest Preserve (6-mile roundtrip). The route passes first through Lincoln Marsh, a good place to explore wetlands, tallgrass prairie, and a bur oak savanna. Pratt’s Wayne Woods, past North Avenue, is one of the largest forest preserves in DuPage County, with a fine oak savanna and wetlands that often attract a host of waterfowl. Be sure to notice the quaint old structures of the former Chicago, Aurora & Elgin interurban train line along the Elgin Branch.

Just across from the former Ovaltine Factory in Villa Park, the former Villa Avenue train station houses the Villa Park Historical Society Museum, (630) 941-0223, 220 S. Villa Avenue. A time capsule into the development of the western suburbs, this small museum has a knowledgeable staff and makes for a memorable watering stop along the path.

Hungry bikers and bikers passing through Wheaton can try Egg’lctic Café on 145 N. Hale Street, (630) 690-9001, and Suzanne’s Creperie, (630) 462-0898, at 211 W. Front Street. Jack Straw’s is a classic hot dog stand at 221 W. Naperville Road (about two blocks south of the Prairie Path). Tate’s Premium Homemade Ice Cream is at 109 S. Front Street. Also downtown, the DuPage Art League Gallery, (630) 653-7090, at 218 W. Front Street, and the DuPage County Illinois Historical Museum, (630) 682-7343, at 102 E. Wesley Street, offer a break from exercise. Adams Park, across from the museum, is a great place to picnic.

**The 1 & M Canal Trail**

This former towpath for barges parallels the Illinois & Michigan Canal, uncovering the region’s natural and cultural heritage as it goes. An attractive crushed limestone path runs past state parks and preserves along the way, as well as preserved historic buildings and handsome Civilian Conservation Corps shelters. Visitors will see a variety of waterfowl, including wood ducks, great blue herons, white egrets, and green ducks. Violets, phlox, bluebells, trout lilies, and white trilliums also adorn the trailside. The woodlands along the river include cottonwoods, scyamoars, and maples.

One pleasant section of the 1 & M Canal Trail begins in Channahon State Park, right off Route 6 in Channahon, Illinois (take exit 248 from I-55). The park’s amenities, including parking, restrooms, picnic areas, campsgrounds, and water, make it a good point of departure. The 15-mile path from Channahon to Morris follows the canal past the bluffs and ravines of McKinley Woods (about 3 miles) and the restful Gebhard Woods (about 6 miles). Keep a lookout along the trail for the historic locktender’s houses, Nettle Creek Aqueduct, and other restored structures. Downtown Morris offers interesting shops and restaurants and retains much of its historic character.

Visitors can find convenient food options within five blocks of the trail in Channahon. Pizza for “U”, (815) 467-6344, located at 23536 W. Eames, serves subs, pizza, and sandwiches that are easy to pick up on the way to or from the trail, and Dari Castle, (815) 467-6350, at the intersection of Route 6 and Canal Street, offers ice cream and food that is perfect for weary summer bikers.

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**Resources**

The Complete Grand Illinois Trail Guidebook (FirstServePress, 2003) by Todd Volker explores the possibilities and resources the trail offers travelers. To order guides, contact FirstServePress at (800) 433-8868. Price per copy is $19.95 plus $1.75 shipping and $1.60 sales tax.

The League of Illinois Bicyclists’ extensive Web site (bikelib.org) offers profiles of each section of the Grand Illinois Trail, as well as other trails in Illinois. The site also provides turn-by-turn “cue sheets” for established routes.

For a printed copy of the Grand Illinois Trail map, contact the IDNR at (815) 625-2968.

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**Events**

This June, a 175-member group will take to the trail in the first-ever Grand Illinois Trail and Parks Ride (“GITAP”) to travel the entire route. Organized by the League of Illinois Bicyclists, this weeklong event is already sold out, but serious cyclists can schedule the trip for next year by visiting the League’s Web site at bike-lib.org or by calling (630) 978-0583.

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Please see the Web version of this profile at <chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/summer2003/weekendexplorer.html>, for links to all the natural and cultural destinations mentioned here.
For training one's eyes to appreciate the subtle roll of prairie landscape, there are few better vistas than Rock Run Preserve, a 178-acre wetland and prairie just west of Joliet. Seen from the preserve's northern footbridge, Rock Run Creek etches the lightest of lines in a southwesterly curve of cat-tail marsh and sedge meadow, backed by a low ridge that would hardly be called contour in a rougher landscape. Nothing breaks the soft, nearly mile-long progression from grasses to reeds and back to grasses.

From this vantage point, a hiker can place Rock Run Preserve in context -- one pearl bulging on the thin necklace of the Forest Preserve District of Will County's Rock Run Greenway. The greenway sits at the western edge of an immense upland between the DuPage and Des Plaines Rivers. Prairie once blanketed this expanse, divided by woods only on a few streambanks. Most of the grassland was plowed over, but landowners held the lowlands of the Rock Run Preserve as hunting land and kept its higher fields in pasture, creating sanctuaries for native vegetation.

In the border marsh along the stream, cattails rule an empire of touch-me-nots, tall meadow rue, and blue vervain, a pretty summer flower. A colony of wild rice, unusual in the area, rustles in one of the creek's pools. Muskrat prints line the mud banks, where the grass-like needle spike rush grows. This plant profits from the cycle of floods and low water that drowns or dries out competitors. Beavers, lacking solid timber, have woven a dam of cattail reeds and a few strands of willow beneath a short footbridge, creating a fishpond around which red-winged blackbirds sing conk-a-ree and marsh wrens perch in the reeds.

Restoration is in its infancy at Rock Run Preserve, much of which the district assembled after voters approved more than $50 million for land purchases in a 1999 bond referendum. "The thing about Rock Run Preserve is not only the wetland, but the fact that there's so much prairie around it," says district ecologist Floyd Catchpole. "One of our restoration goals was to back the trees away from the stream and open up the landscape," he explains. "If perching birds don't have a high place to sit and 'hawk' from, it helps butterflies like the wetland skippers and prairie insects that fly in straight lines." Now that the few outlying trees and shrubs have been removed, the Rock Run visitor can experience an unimpeded view from stream and marsh to higher elevations. First, cattail gives way to a meadow band of tussock sedge and unusual glade mallow. A strip of wet prairie takes over next, where great blue lobelia and the white flowers of turtlehead blossom in midsummer amid cord grass. The prairie merges into a drier belt where taller big bluestem grass grows above golden Alexander. Each plant community draws a subtle stripe across the contours of the land. Buckthorn once crowded out the highest, driest strip -- the upland prairie -- but brush-cutting workdays and a recent burn have replenished the grasses and given a patch of rare slender scurvy pea space to spread.

Early each summer, Blanding's turtles amble out of the marsh to scrape out nests in the upland gravel. Hatchlings of this endangered species have been found near the edge of a shallow pond -- a former quarry -- so the restoration aims to protect habitat for each phase of the turtle's life cycle.

The improved upland habitat should also provide nesting spots for eastern meadowlarks, seeds for song sparrows and goldfinches, and glide paths for northern harriers flying in low arcs to flush out voles, according to Catchpole. He's crossing his fingers that bobolinks might establish residence by moving over from nearby Midewin grasslands.

The preserve offers picnic shelters by permit, restrooms, and three miles of trails with links to the seven-mile Rock Run Greenway bike trail. For additional information and maps of Rock Run Preserve and the bike trail, call (815) 727-8700.

—Ryan Chew
Let's meet at Ted's" is the rallying cry for volunteer stewards Barbara and George Birmingham and a devoted crew of 30 regular volunteers. Eight short years ago, much of the 140-acre Theodore Stone Preserve in southwest Cook County was a mess of invasive buckthorn, with little else managing to eke out a living beneath it. But scattered high-quality prairie and savanna remnants survived throughout the preserve, and volunteers have begun to restore the degraded areas. The results have been much like the patient cleaning of a rare art masterpiece.

Theodore Stone Preserve, purchased in 1917 and managed by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, features a variety of ecosystems. From a morainal beach ridge, a hickory-oak savanna gently slopes down to Sundrop Prairie and Milkweed Prairie, both with scattered marsh areas. In 1994, the district added an adjoining 60-acre property to the east that harbored a rare dolomite prairie. Invasive brush now separates the three prairies, but at one time they formed a single sweeping expanse. The preserve’s landforms reach back 14,000 years, when the ridge was a beach along the shores of Lake Chicago and both prairies were part of the lake’s bottom.

Although Ted Stone Preserve lacks formal paths, visitors can navigate the property along the two paths trod by volunteers traveling between work sites. Just north of the picnic area by the parking lot, a bridge crosses some wetlands. Leave the bridge before it turns right and head up the ridge. A short distance northwest, the savanna opens up to overlook a creek. According to Barbara Birmingham, “You get this wonderful sweep of wide-open savanna with these wonderful ancient trees” that evokes pre-settlement times.

In the northeast section of the preserve, exposed rock signals the beginning of dolomite prairie. “You get the sense that it’s special,” says Barbara. “Everything that grows there is growing there by great might of will.” These plants send long roots through cracks in the rock to find the moisture they need. In the summer, false pennyroyal and a mysterious, stunted, downy grass create the impression of a “green shag carpet” there. Hikers here may even stumble upon a remnant patch of auto-racetrack built on the property around the 1940s.

Thanks to the group’s efforts, visitors can now see into the woods, where buckthorn had formerly obscured the view. Restoration can be hard work, but volunteers find inspiration in toiling alongside some of the 187 native plant species—including purple milkweed, sky-blue aster, downy wood mint, and rough blazing star—they are working to protect. Restoration activities vary greatly, both because the area contains a variety of habitats and because certain tasks are more appropriate for certain seasons. If clearing buckthorn under the shade of a bitternut hickory holds no appeal, then perhaps pulling garlic mustard to save the marsh marigold will. The whole picture of Theodore Stone Preserve’s original ecology has yet to be revealed, but the sculptured limbs of elderly oaks—that less than 200 years ago sheltered vibrant carpets of flowers—hint at both its past and potential.

However, much work remains to be done. “There are days when everything is right in front of me, and I’m in the middle of it all,” says Birmingham, “and then I stand on the ridge and realize how big 140 acres is.” While the restoration process can seem slow when measured in human time, volunteers can experience tangible results of their work. Visitors to Theodore Stone may notice a restored glen burstling with summer wildflowers or a coyote chasing down prey in one of the prairies. Someday they may witness the return of prairie birds. Says Birmingham, “The place seems to reveal more of itself with every workday.”

To volunteer at Theodore Stone Preserve and many other important sites, visit the Des Plaines River Valley Restoration Project Web site at restoringnature.org or call the Conservation Volunteer Hotline at (708) 771-1334.

— Heather Cosja
Natural Events

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

Early Summer

Learning to Fly
The falcon fledglings that live on the fire escape of a certain grand old music theater in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago are just starting their lives as urban flyers. For now, they awkwardly grip the railing with their talons, stretching their wings, working to improve their balance and coordination. Soon enough, they'll be among the premier aerial predators in the world. The rock doves in Lincoln Park had better keep an eye out.

Their historic urban home has served the peregrine parents well. The five-year-old female, Zoom, has raised families here since 2001. Her mate this year is from Porter County, Indiana. It's a nice neighborhood; the place is quiet now that the music has stopped. This theater always did attract wildlife, myself included. I attended the final show in 1981, which featured the appropriately named rock-and-roll animal Peter Wolf.

The Caterpillar Hunter
Fiery searchers are large, metallic green, highly predatory ground beetles. All summer they will relentlessly pursue their prey — all kinds of moth and butterfly caterpillars — over the ground and through the trees. The stunningly beautiful adults hunt during the day; the soft larvae hunt by night. They use their sickle shaped jaws to grab any caterpillar they come across.

The summer of 2002 seemed to be a banner year for fiery searchers, with many gardeners noticing them under rocks and logs. Don't touch them, though — they'll release a bad smell.

Middle Summer

Alternative Life Cycle
Red-backed salamanders are not your typical amphibians — they are terrestrial. Mom will lay eggs in damp rotting logs, rather than standing water, and then she'll brood her eggs for up to eight weeks. Moreover, when the young hatch in August, there is no "tadpole" stage or metamorphosis. A newly hatched red-back is a miniature replica of an adult.

Adult red-backs are the smallest local salamander. They're as skinny as a golf pencil and rarely reach more than two inches from tip to snout. They belong to a group of lungless salamanders that respire through their skin and cloacal opening. Uncommon even in a suitable habitat, quite a few of these tiny salamanders make their home in the forested parts of the Indiana Dunes. They are rarely seen in the open, tending to stay under the moist leaf litter.

Still Life on Water
I read somewhere that the American lotus "makes the soul forget the woes of the Earth." Damn straight. Their picturesque yellow flowers and flat green leaves on a still pond have inspired artists, poets, and spiritualists for centuries.

American lotus grows in the slow moving backwaters of our rivers and shallow lakes. The plant forms dense colonies, spreading through seed propagation, rhizomes, and tubers. The showy blossoms, which appear in July and August, are cross-pollinated by a host of flying insects.

Drops of Sun
The prairie sundrop sounds like a slick executive at a downtown marketing agency could have named it. But they are pretty prairie plants with bright yellow flowers and slightly hairy leaves, belonging to the primrose family. Unlike most of their family members, sundrops are diurnal. Their flowers open during the day, closing at night. Among rare colonies of prairie sundrop seem to be doing well at prairie restorations. A plant was discovered growing at the Fermilab prairie in 2000. One colony grows near the Burlington railroad tracks as they pass through Aurora.

Late Summer

Foxy Snake
Fox snakes hatch hungry. In late summer, baby fox snakes will emerge from a slit in their eggs. These mini-constrictors will shed once and begin slithering about hunting for pink newborn rodents. Next summer they will be eating furry creatures. Starting life less than a foot long, they grow big and fast. In suitable habitat, we have many individuals over four feet in length.

Historically, fox snakes adapted well when our lands were converted from savanna and prairie to agriculture. Today, fox snakes are still found down on the farm and in those few special areas where the people don't live. I've heard they get their name from their vile defensive tactics of secreting a substance that smells like fox pee. Ewwww!

Catching Flies
A few Septembers back, I went to my friends' lovely wedding at a park along the DuPage River. During most of the ceremony, I watched an eastern kingbird sally forth from a sandbar willow to snatch a meal of flying insects. He did this over and over, always returning to the same limb. I figured he was fueling up for his long migration to Amazonia. Late during the reception, he took off to chase a Cooper's hawk that cruised over the happy couple. Highly entertaining.

Kingbirds are one of the easiest of the flycatchers to identify, with their dark head and white band across the end of the tail. They perch on a prominent post, aggressively pursuing their prey and interlopers.

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- Whether they bloom in May or August, the seeds of all our native orchids ripen in September. A single orchid can make 100,000 seeds.
- More populations of endangered species survive in three counties of northeastern Illinois than in all the rest of the state combined.
- Once extirpated from the region—deer, coyotes, and sandhill cranes are now increasingly common. What brings back the rare?

THINK ABOUT IT!

And it's all IN OUR BACK YARD. Don't miss any of it—subscribe to Chicago WILDERNESS and GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS.

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Aphrodite Fritillary: goddess of butterflies

Even for a creature as lovely as a butterfly, bearing the name of an ancient goddess of beauty is a lot to live up to. No single feature or behavior connects the Aphrodite fritillary (Speyeria aphrodite) with the Greek deity Aphrodite, but as one of the showiest butterflies in Chicago Wilderness, this species is a celestial beauty in its own right.

About the size of a monarch butterfly, the Aphrodite is tawny orange with black spotting on the tops of its wings. The undersides of its wings, ranging from tan to brown, feature beautiful silvery spots. These silver markings appear metallic, but they are actually made of specialized scales. The shiny, reflective color results from light scattering off these scales—a phenomenon known as structural color—rather than being partially absorbed by pigment.

The Aphrodite fritillary closely resembles the great spangled fritillary (Speyeria cybele), a much more common species. A simple trick readily distinguishes the two butterflies: the area between the silver spots on the underside of the Aphrodite is a rich reddish brown. In contrast, a broad pale band runs around the entire edge of the underside of the hind wing of the great spangled fritillary. The band (or lack thereof) is readily visible when the butterflies pause to sip nectar. With practice, butterfly watchers can even see this gled fritillaries typically spend more time flying, making them comparatively difficult to approach.

A single generation of Aphrodites emerges each year. Adults begin flying in late June and early July, males generally appearing before females. Although Aphrodites mate in midsummer, females do not lay their fertilized eggs until the end of summer, typically in the second half of August.

The eggs hatch a week or so after the female lays them. Newborn larvae consume their eggshells (a common diet for caterpillars) and immediately crawl under available cover to hibernate for the winter. They will not feed again until violets appear the following spring. As spring progresses, the active caterpillars develop rapidly, transforming into chrysalides in June. Aphrodites complete the cycle by emerging as adult butterflies right around the summer solstice.

The distribution of the Aphrodite’s host plants, the violets, plays a role in where Aphrodites exist, but the picture is complex in ways researchers don’t fully understand. In the laboratory, Aphrodite caterpillars can be reared on nearly any species of violet, but in the field, the butterfly remains much rarer than these species. In Illinois, Aphrodites inhabit only larger prairies such as Gensburg-Markham Prairie, Goose Lake Prairie, and Illinois Beach State Park.

At those locations, caterpillars appear to feed mostly on prairie and bird’s foot violets.

The populations of Aphrodite fritillaries and great spangled fritillaries at Illinois Beach State Park in Zion reveal an important aspect of the ecology of both of these species. Great spangled fritillaries can live in more types of habitat than Aphrodites. Therefore, people often see them fluttering throughout most of the park, particularly in the black oak savannas. In contrast, Aphrodites dwell only in the open, wet prairies that occur in the troughs, or swales, between the park’s dune ridges. As a consequence, visitors wandering the nature trails are far more likely to encounter great spangled fritillaries than Aphrodites.

The strong dependence of Aphrodites on prairie habitats suggests that these butterflies are one of the species most likely to benefit from prairie restoration. So far, however, this does not seem to have happened. Although the species seems to be thriving under current management on sites where it already flies, Aphrodites are not colonizing new sites that have been restored to prairie. One reason for this might be that the prairie violet species are difficult to restore. The process of gathering seeds from violets requires much time and effort.

Consequently, many sites that have otherwise been restored to vibrant communities lack violets. If land managers can improve techniques for the widespread planting of prairie and bird’s foot violets, we may restore these spectacular insects to many additional places in Chicago Wilderness.

—Doug Taron
Native Bees: what's the buzz?

A walk through Lake County’s Ryerson Woods on an early spring day will reveal carpets of spring beauty, Claytonia virginica, blooming under expansive budding oaks. The hum of insects darting through this floral show includes a breathtaking 58 species of native bees.

Bees are nature’s most important pollinators, but their vital role in the sustained health of our ecosystems is often overlooked. Bees use specialized hairs on their legs or abdomen to collect pollen for food—mixed with nectar, it becomes a nutritious paste. By grand design, this self-interested act moves pollen from flower to flower. Without bees and other pollinators, many trees and flowers would go unfertilized or be unable to cross-pollinate. Lack of pollination means less fruit or seed production, and, over time, a decline in the hardiness and reproduction of the plants, including possible extinction. This, in turn, affects birds, mammals, and other species that depend on these plants.

Nearly 300 species of native bees inhabit Chicago Wilderness. Bumblebees usually steal attention from the wide range of shapes, sizes, and colors of many native bees. Though groups of bees have common names like the digger, leafcutter, carpenter, and mason bees, individual bee species are known mostly by their Latin names. Anthidium manicatum, a black bee with prominent yellow abdominal markings, probes flowers with a long tongue. Osmia cornuta sports a dramatic and hairy metallic blue-green body. The small Ceratina metallica measures only five millimeters and has the same metallic blue-green coloring as Osmia cornuta, but with less body hair. And towering above that tiny creature at 13 millimeters, Cersohyla bicolor is a black body with brown hair on its abdomen.

Most native bees are solitary, not social hive dwellers, and nest in the ground, tree holes, or other hollow plant material. Most are so unassuming that if disturbed, they will choose flight over pursuit and will rarely sting.

While relatively unseen and unknown at home, native Illinois bees are renowned on the international stage. Thanks to Charles Robertson, a passionate naturalist, many today view Illinois as the bee capital of the world. Between 1884 and 1916, Robertson assembled one of the most extensive collections of native bees and their flora. His study concentrated around the southern Illinois town of Carlinville, where he discovered 296 bee species. Today his collection remains a significant reference for bee specialists.

In 1932, Jay Frederick Wesley Pearson, a doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago, based his dissertation on Robertson’s findings. Pearson’s research, conducted primarily in Chicago Wilderness, found that Chicago’s flora and bee fauna were similar to Robertson’s impressive findings in Carlinville.

“There are probably more bee species in the Chicago region than in Carlinville because the habitats are more diverse here,” explains entomologist John Marlin of Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ Waste Management and Research Center. Marlin observed Carlinville bees in the early 1970s and found that, despite habitat changes, native bee diversity had changed little since Robertson’s time. He believes that the same is true today in the wilder parts of the Chicago region.

Native bees live simply and have two basic needs: a suitable nesting habitat free from insecticides and, since they don’t fly long distances, a locally abundant food source. Unfortunately, their basic needs are threatened by loss of native plants, habitat fragmentation, roadside herbicide spraying, and especially the massive sprays of broad-spectrum insecticides used in some mosquito abatement programs.

Today, the best bee sanctuaries in the Chicago area are places that are relatively undisturbed, are rarely sprayed, and support a wealth of native plants. Vacant lots and abandoned cemeteries or railways are sometimes good spots to see native bees. More important though are the native prairie and woodland preserves that represent the past and future of local bee populations. By protecting the full range of native wildflowers that bloom throughout the growing season, natural lands provide more consistent food sources for bees, and the native plants benefit in turn from a broader range of pollinators. With continued attention to habitat preservation and reduced spraying, we can ensure that Chicago Wilderness remains a vital part of the world’s bee capital.

—Mari Coyne
Deb Petro: celebrating the burn queen

Deb, or just plain "Petro" as she preferred to be called, was an extraordinary - perhaps legendary - character. On her 46th birthday, she joked that each of her legs was 23. Those of us who had the privilege of working with Deb can twist her gag into a simple truth: In Deb's 50 years of life, she gave at least 100 years of help to the natural places she loved.

In 1990, Deb helped founded the Palos Restoration Project. As volunteer steward of Cap Sauers Holdings, a forest preserve in southwest Cook County, Deb directed restoration work on 1,500 acres with co-steward Rich Hyerczyk. As the regional steward in the Palos/Sag Valley, Deb played a major role in the work at more than a dozen sites, supervising restoration projects, buying supplies, organizing interns and volunteers, and providing expert advice. Stewards throughout the county recognized her pickup truck.

Deb worked at Amoco's audiovisual department for years before taking a buyout package in 1995. She spent her last years doing what she loved, working as a restoration technician in The Nature Conservancy's Markham Prairies.

A country girl from Indiana, Deb chose to live in Chicago. Deb always retained her childhood love for squiggly critters and for kids. Through her eight years of field-based teaching as a docent with the Forest Preserve District's Mighty Acorns program (she volunteered with the program since its creation), she exposed many urban kids to nature. I remember her telling me with great glee after one Mighty Acorns outing how the Hispanic kids called her "loco." Deb was crazy with a love of life and nature.

Deb Petro's knowledge of Chicago Wilderness seemed nearly encyclopedic. Whatever plant someone mentioned, she knew where a population grew and how to determine if its seeds were ripe. Such knowledge helped her discover the on the President's Community Advisory Council on Land Management in Cook County by Commissioner Jerry Butler, bringing her expertise and passion for habitat restoration - and a heroic ability to speak her mind - to a different form of public service. In gratitude, Cook County Board President John Stroger recently designated an annual Deb Petro Workday in her memory.

But perhaps Deb's most notable expertise was natural-area fire management. She became the undisputed authority on controlled burns in the Palos region, taking countless classes at her own expense and gaining experience at burns across Chicago Wilderness. She rightly dubbed herself a "burn queen." Deb had a heart for the wholeness of nature and never limited her love to just an individual deer or tree. She understood the role death plays in life.

"Things die," she said with a shrug after she got sick, "that's okay."

So many memories... Deb nibbling poison ivy early in spring. She said eating it helped her build an immunity... Deb's mother's amazing tale of how at age 13 months Deb scaled a fence and made her way to a neighbor's turkey house to shake a stick at the birds... The rainbow animal decals Deb tattooed onto her bare scalp after the cancer came. Deb Petro: 1952 - 2003. You don't ever replace a person like Deb; you just thank God you had her in your life.

—Joe Neumann
NEIGHBORS SAVE AN ANCIENT PRAIRIE

by Anna Sachdeva and Dennis Nyberg

The Woodworth Prairie may appear to many as an ordinary plot of vacant land penned behind a chain-link fence. Most drivers might catch a glimpse of tall grasses and flowers near the '70s-style visitors center as they rush along busy Milwaukee Avenue through Glenview, Illinois. But these few acres are virgin land, land that was never plowed or heavily grazed, land that still contains original prairie plants and animals. Whittled down over a century and a half to an area roughly the size of five football fields, the Woodworth Prairie is one of the last true remnants of the vast prairie that once covered 85 percent of Cook County. This is the story of one of the first successful efforts to preserve a prairie.

Though the Peacock and Long farming families, who owned this land from 1843 to 1953, were among the settlers who converted Illinois’ vast grasslands to farms and residences, they kept a ten-acre patch of their land in its natural state. The black-soil tallgrass prairie must have been important to at least a few members of both families to have escaped the plow. The ten-acre plot did slim slightly during that period, however, when the construction of Greenwood Avenue in 1933 took a strip from the prairie’s eastern border.

The prairie was appreciated by more than just the Peacocks and Longs. Northwestern University Professor Ruth Paintin published a list of plants in the 1929 Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Sciences. She recorded 149 species, 15 of which were nonnative. Ecologists still consult this important list as they work to understand changes in the plants of the prairie. In 1949, another Northwestern professor, Orlando Park, studied beetles there. But scientists weren’t the only ones who appreciated the prairie. Neighboring youths and adults did as well, and that proved important in eventually saving it.

After World War II, appreciating real estate values led to the transfer of ownership from the Peacock family to real estate developer Arthur T. McIntosh & Co. in 1953. The prairie’s prime location on Milwaukee Avenue seemed ideal for commercial development, but the prairie lost its first four northerly acres to a housing development in 1957. At about that time, commercial interests developed the southwest corner, where the current Interpretation Center sits, first as a golf cart track and later as a miniature golf course. Seeing these developments energized citizens who loved the dwindling prairie to try to save it.

Bernice Popelka, Marion Cole, and Ev Tyner stepped forward to lead a collection of concerned citizens who formed the Peacock Prairie Preservation Project in 1965. The committee tried to raise community awareness of the prairie’s biological value by distributing flyers, publishing articles in the suburban and city newspapers, and holding fundraisers. They also attempted to enlist the support of government agencies and nongovernmental charitable organizations.

The primary problem the group had to overcome was the economic value of the property. When the group asked McIntosh to donate the property, he replied in a Chicago Tribune article, “I can’t afford to be a philanthropist. I must be realistic.” The group then focused on what it saw as the only solution to preserve the prairie: raising money — approximately $200,000 for the remaining 5.14 acres — to purchase the land.

The committee sought assistance from many sources. First, they contacted the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. The general superintendent, Charles “Cap” Sauers, felt that the plot was doomed by its location and small size. Sauers’ membership on the state conservation advisory committee also influenced the State of Illinois to withhold help. The committee then approached the Glenview Park District, from which they received only qualified support. Meanwhile, Dr. Robert Bets and Marion Cole published a new flora inventory. They found that most prairie plant species had persisted since Paintin’s list.

While seeking financial support, the committee helped restore the biological integrity of the prairie. In the spring of
In May the tallgrass prairie is six inches to one foot tall.
Dr. Dennis Nyberg is on all fours.

Big bluestem and golden arches in August.

In 1966, they organized Glenview citizens around a cleanup campaign. A large group cleared four truckloads of trash with the help of young volunteers and a donated truck. The removal of the trash helped the prairie vegetation recover and helped to solidify community support for the effort, but other challenges loomed.

In the summer of 1966, McIntosh leased the land to an outdoor amusement concession. The lessee cleared parts of the precious prairie for an archery range and a batting cage. After pleading successfully with the mowers to stop, an impassioned Bernice Popelka and Ev Tyner immediately contacted Jeffrey Short, president of the Openlands Project. With six other conservationists, Short appealed to McIntosh to discontinue further destruction of the prairie. A tour of the site and a discussion of its history, led by botanists and community members, impressed the real estate developer. He immediately halted further disturbance of the property, despite the fact that the change of lease cost him money. Although this was a great victory for the Peacock Prairie Project, they still needed money to purchase the land.

Among other fundraising activities, the group sold prairie plants at the Chicago Flower and Garden Show. But at the end of 1966, the committee had only $168 in the bank. Though local community organizations, citizens, and even influential public figures supported the prairie's preservation, none provided the large donation that was needed. After months of tireless campaigning, Jeffrey Short and Gunnar Peterson of the Openlands Project finally secured a pledge from the Chicago Community Trust for the entire private share in 1967. The Glenview Park District did not come through with funding, so Short met with Norman Parker, chancellor of the new University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Circle, and persuaded UIC to apply for federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Act (LAWCON).

UIC Professor Al Rouffa, who later became the first director of the prairie, applied for and received the LAWCON grant for the university's half of the purchase price of $210,000. On May 28, 1968, UIC obtained title to the land as a research center and a place for the public to enjoy and learn about the prairie. UIC built an interpretive center and parking lot on the already disturbed portion of the prairie with funds donated by the family of John W. Leslie, who was the great-grandson of James Woodworth, an early mayor of Chicago and U. S. representative from Illinois. Opened to the public in 1972, the prairie was renamed the James Woodworth Prairie Preserve to honor the Leslie family's contribution.

Because of decisions made over the course of 100 years and the impassioned preservation efforts of the sixties, residents of the suburbs north of Chicago have easy access to a piece of Class A original Illinois prairie, complete with prairie crayfish and prairie cicadas. But maintaining the habitat in a state suitable for prairie plants and animals requires continuing struggle. Invasive species must be detected and removed, and the prairie must be burned periodically. Managers have burned various parts of the property in 24 of the 35 years UIC has owned it. Without fire, the prairie would slowly turn into a thicket of shrubs and trees. Fortunately, the neighbors of the prairie have cooperated in this effort. They, too, appreciate the preservation of natural heritage in their backyard.

Anna Sachdeva is an undergraduate English major at UIC and is pursuing a career in journalism. She studied the movement to preserve the Woodworth Prairie for her honors project. Dennis Nyberg is a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at UIC and director of the Woodworth Prairie.
In the three years since Cindy Crosby began her daily walks at the Schulenberg Prairie at the Morton Arboretum, she's learned much about the life cycles of the flowers and grasses that flourish there. But perhaps nothing has astounded her as much as her own growth.

Her epiphany came about two years ago during a spiritual and professional drought, when the lifelong Christian and longtime freelance writer found herself at a loss for words — unable to pray and wrestling with writer's block.

Seeking renewal, she trod the prairie's worn paths. She witnessed the death-into-life drama of a prairie burn and joined a group of restoration volunteers. Crosby recorded her experiences in a journal and made an unexpected revelation. There, tucked in the pages of her daily diary, she found not only her prayer voice, but also something else — the seeds of a tender new book.

In a slim volume of collected essays entitled By Willoway Brook: Exploring the Landscape of Prayer (Paraclete Press, $17.95), Crosby chronicles how she discovered sacredness in a landscape and reveals how her spiritual restoration mirrored the restoration of Schulenberg Prairie.

Crosby, 41, who lives in Glen Ellyn with her husband, Jeff, their two teenagers, and the family collie, says she didn't set out to write a book on prayer; it evolved as she connected with the land. It's a connection that Crosby believes can be made regardless of religious orientation.

"There is a spiritual aspect to the landscape if we only would open ourselves up to it," she says. "If we don't look at the spiritual dimension of the landscape, we miss a whole component of it."

Crosby named the book after the windings stream that cleaves Schulenberg Prairie in half, and she still visits it almost daily, perched beside the water with pen in hand or binoculars sweeping the vista.

When Crosby looks at the prairie, she sees a congregation of plants and animals akin to the members of a church community. She is struck by the similarity between the recurring liturgy of the church, she said, and the recurring annual cycle of the seasons. She notes that just as a congregation is moved and restored by the prayers and rituals that have been repeated for generations, the prairie community similarly finds seasonal renewal.

Crosby especially loves the dramatic changes after a prairie burn and finds it an apt metaphor for personal growth. From seemingly barren ground comes new life, an image, she says, "that you can learn from all your life."

That theme of generational continuance marks Crosby's newest potential project. After a few months of creative fallowness, a time that Crosby says was needed to allow her to "fill up again," she recently began work on a novel. She plans to reflect the lives of her great-grandparents, whose former Indiana farm is being incorporated into a wildlife refuge. She plans to take her time, though, and let the prairie continue to nurture her.

"What I've learned from the prairie," she says, "is to be present and to let that be enough."
From “Pulling Weeds”

The prairie itself is an interconnected network of grasses and flowers, soil and water, fire and weather, birds and mammals, insects and people. It is at its best when everything is working together. When one piece of the whole is out of kilter, it triggers a domino effect. Let the wild lupine, Lupinus perennis, disappear from some prairie remnants, and the Karner blue butterfly, whose larvae prefer this particular plant, loses one of its primary sources of life. Sweet clover creeps in on the Schulenberg Prairie, and soon the richness of native plant life has vanished. The annual barn changes the voles and mouse populations. Willowy Brook runs low, and the dragonflies and damselflies swarm to lay their eggs in the shallows. It’s a community of change. Each action influences another; each member of the community builds upon the efforts of the whole.

Charm in the singular, beauty in the aggregate. Significance in the single cardinal song that pours out into the landscape, and glory in the flock of cedar waxwing’s soft music as they congregate in the evenings by Willowy Brook. Without the individual, the opportunity for landscape is lost. Without the landscape, context for the individual vanishes.

A dependency that I once resisted forms in my life. Now it becomes strangely alluring. Community prayer is powerful. The prayers of many form a woven net to catch us, to hold us, and to encourage us when we falter.

From “Field Guides”

Writing is a way I figure out where I’m struggling. When I journal through a difficult circumstance, or write through a troubled time in my life or about something that I know needs to change, the act of naming it and writing it brings me closer to resolution.

Yet no field guides or writing about my observations replace the act of prayer. For a while, I was content to write in my journal and read about prayer rather than to actually pray. Empathy for this situation came, unsurprisingly, through yet another book. I found consolation reading Thomas Merton’s sheepish words in his journal, The Sign of Jonas, “As usual I have to check my appetite for books and work and keep close to God in prayer.”

If I sat in my living room and read about the Baltimore orioles on the prairie, I would have the factual information. But it’s not until I make the practical connection — that I stand in mud under a tree looking through the leaves for the oriole, hear its song day after day from the limestone ledge, spend hours tramping through the prairie’s fringes and margins looking for its distinctive hanging nest, figure out its habits (what it likes to eat, what tree it prefers) and sketch it into my journal — that I make the transition from learning about the Baltimore oriole to knowing the Baltimore oriole.

Prairie Heights

In the summer of 2002, I set out to measure a feature of prairie structure not often considered by plant ecologists—its height. Land managers and naturalists in the field have reported that vegetation at prairie reconstructions (prairies planted on plowed ground) is taller than vegetation at remnants of original prairies, but few formal studies have been done. I wanted to test the truth of these observations.

Why does prairie height matter? For one, many area naturalists are finding that grassland birds are not using prairie reconstructions as much as expected. If reconstructions are truly much taller than original prairie remnants, the differences in vegetation height could help explain why grassland birds are not returning to reconstructed sites in the numbers that these prairies should be able to support.

I sampled six original prairies, six seeded reconstructions, and two planted reconstructions (seedings planted one by one) in Cook, Lake, DuPage, and Kane Counties in Illinois, and Newton County in Indiana. To quantify vegetation height structure, I measured stem density (the number and thickness of stems in a given space) at different heights and locations and counted the tallest individuals in selected spots. Among other techniques, I used a Robe pole (picted). Observing the pole from a set height and distance away, I recorded the lowest point on the pole completely obscured by vegetation. This "visual obstruction" height is the best single measure of vegetation height.

I found that reconstructed prairies dominated by classic prairie grasses had an average visual obstruction height of 30 inches, significantly taller than the 18 inches of original prairies. However, planted reconstructions were significantly shorter than seeded reconstructions. There were significantly more native species contributing to visual obstruction at original prairies and planted reconstructions than at seeded prairies, suggesting that shorter prairies tend to have greater species diversity.

My findings indicated that vegetation height structure in seeded prairie reconstructions is not mimicking that of original prairies. Reconstructions tend to be taller and have fewer species, the majority of which are taller grasses like big bluestem, switch grass, and Indian grass. Some planted reconstructions such as Schulenberg Prairie have vegetation height structure and species richness closer to that of original prairies.

Some recent prairie reconstructions in McHenry and Cook Counties and at the Nature Conservancy's Kankakee Sands project have already tried to create shorter prairies by introducing the seeds of shorter species. However, my study found that some normally short species grow taller than normal in seeded areas, suggesting that there is more to vegetation height than species composition.

I hope that my research will help people realize that vast expanses of grasses nine feet tall are probably not what original prairies looked like. Instead, most original prairies likely had shorter vegetation—rich in flowers and rich in variety.

Annan will present this study, her masters thesis, at the University of Illinois at Chicago this summer. For more details, contact the author at ramann1@uic.edu.

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**Burn Report: Triumphs and Regrets**

Each summer Chicago Wilderness summarizes the triumphs and regrets of the previous burn season – October through April. The burns will have a major impact on the health and beauty of natural areas this summer. This year’s dry spring made for great controlled burns.

But major wildfires raised concerns, mostly in areas where controlled burns were long overdue. Some wildfires slowed traffic on nearby expressways, and many were covered extensively on the evening news. Despite the alarmed tone of some of the broadcasts, the wildfires caused little problem to nature or the public – aside from inconvenience to motorists.

The wildfires underlined the importance of conducting controlled burns. Even in this spring’s dry weather, land managers consistently conducted safe and effective controlled burns. Their efforts helped reduce the risk and severity of wildfires by clearing out dead plant material that could fuel an uncontrolled blaze.

**County Reports**

Last winter Brad Woodson of the McHenry County Conservation District quietly told this magazine that the district had done no fall burns – but planned to burn 1,500 acres this spring. As shown in the table below, they safely burned 1,460 acres.

Ken Klick, a restoration ecologist for the Lake County Forest Preserves, was also pleased. “Our spring 2003 burn season provided an unprecedented number of good burn days – a total of 25 days and 1,286 acres burned. Dry conditions throughout the season allowed us to burn sites that have long been on our priority list,” he said.

Cook County didn’t fare so well, but the recent creation of the district’s first three “Resource Management Crews” should help change that in the future. The staff burned only eight acres this spring (and 32 acres last fall), according to Resource Manager John Raudenberg. A much larger acreage was burned by contractors working with the Corporation for Open Lands and other partner agencies that are helping out the district. No statistics were available on these burns. There were about four to five hundred acres of wildfires, Raudenberg said.

Fire benefits most native plants and animals of the Chicago region. Drew Ullberg conducts controlled burns for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County. He said that by early May he was already seeing grassland birds making themselves at home in prairie habitat that was burned a few weeks earlier.

**Press Coverage Mixed**

Unfortunately, some reporters still refer to fire as “destroying” rather than restoring the preserves. On April 16, radio station WBEZ reported that dry weather was creating a high risk of wildfires that threatened the region’s natural areas. The report went on to say, “Fire experts say that means cigarettes tossed out of car windows... could set off serious wildfires and destroy hundreds of acres.”

Wildfires can be a threat to people and property, but the oak woods, prairies, and wetlands benefited – whether the fire was controlled or wild.

Most of the region’s media coverage was well-informed. On April 29 a Chicago Tribune picture caption pointed out, “A wildfire that swept through 700 acres in Illinois Beach State Park Sunday was seen as an ecological blessing for regrowth.” On April 29, Frank Aberholden, a staff writer for the Waukegan News Sun quoted Park Superintendent Bob Grosso, saying, “This is quite beneficial to the environment down there. The fire eradicates invasive (plant) species and lets native species propagate.”

On April 24, Pioneer Press reported on brush fires in Lake County. The story noted that, while the wildfires are a safety concern due to dry weather, the forest preserves’ controlled burn program was continuing as planned, and the work was going smoothly. The story quotes two Lake County staffers. Jim Anderson said, “We have a very good relationship with local fire departments. And they trust us.” Andrew Kimmel said, “These forests are adapted to periodic fires, and they return nutrients to the soil while helping kill off invasive species.”

**Where to See Habitats Rejuvenated by Fire**

After a controlled burn, native plants grow with renewed vigor. Visitors to preserves will notice more wildflowers and a greater diversity of native plants in areas recently burned. The reinvigorated natural areas are not only attractive to people, they also appeal to wildlife. That makes them great places to spot animals such as birds and butterflies. Here are a few of the places where curious nature lovers can see the benefits of controlled burns for themselves. For more sites, information and directions, visit the Chicago WILDERNESS website – chicagowildernessmag.org.

**Indiana Dunes National Lake Shore**

Check out the Long Lake Trail at Inland Marsh. The fire burned off the leaf litter in the oak savanna on the northern side of the trail without harming the oak trees.

**Will County: Goodnow Grove**

Notice that burned areas contain more abundant native plants and flowers such as trillium and Jack-in-the-pulpit.

**Kane County: Nelson Lake Marsh**

The burned area provides optimal nesting habitat for many grassland birds and is host to a tremendous variety of waterfowl and shorebirds. A great place to see sandhill cranes.

**Lake County: Grant Woods Forest Preserve**

Burned areas will have fewer invasive shrubs such as buckthorn. Birds such as eastern pewees, bluebirds, red-headed woodpeckers, and screech owls will enjoy better foraging habitat in burned areas.

**McHenry County: Prairie View Education Center**

The restoration work is benefiting sandhill cranes and prairie birds such as meadowlarks and bobolinks. The trails near the wetland offer a good view of healthy habitat that has been rejuvenated by fire.

**Chicago Park District**

July and August will be ideal times to visit the fire-maintained natural areas in Douglas Park, Gompers Park, Humboldt Park, Indian Boundary Park, Lincoln Park, Marquette Park and McKinley Park.

By Stephanie Folk and Alison Carney Brown

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**THE NUMBERS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest Preserve &amp; Conservation Districts</th>
<th>Acres burned</th>
<th>% of natural acres</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cook County</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DuPage County</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kane County</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>McHenry County</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County</td>
<td>1,453</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Successful burns were also conducted by the Chicago Botanic Garden (10 acres), Chicago Park District (61 acres), Fermilab (609 acres), Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Nature Preserves (109 acres in Chicago Wilderness), the Village of Lincolnshire (43 acres), and others.
Brunsvold Named Director of Illinois Department of Natural Resources

In April, the Illinois General Assembly confirmed Joel Brunsvold, a longtime state representative from Rock Island, as the new director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources overseeing one of the most important land management, research, and conservation education agencies in the Chicago Wilderness consortium. Brunsvold, 61, had represented the 72nd District of Illinois for 20 years. He is an avid hunter and fisherman, a founder and chair of the Sportsmen’s Caucus in the legislature, and a former mayor of Milan, Illinois. He also served as co-chair of Governor Blagojevich’s Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Transition Policy Committee.

Brunsvold assumes leadership of an agency that has lost one-fifth of its staff through early retirements and that faces additional budget cuts. “We had two state parks where everybody retired,” he noted in early April. Brunsvold acknowledged that the state budget crisis has compelled his department to reassess every program and evaluate what is working and what is not. Next year’s budget allots $103.5 million from the general revenue fund, a $31.7 million reduction in program and operating costs from the current fiscal year. Brunsvold admitted that some license and permit fee increases are likely but he has resisted imposing entrance fees for state parks.

Though funds for the Conservation 2000 grants program have remained in the current budget (as this issue went to press) — these have supported a range of management, education and planning projects for many groups and ecosystem partnerships in Chicago Wilderness — key funds for land acquisition in the Open Land Trust program were cut from $36 million to $5 million in FY04, significantly hampering acquisition efforts.

“We have to grab what we can grab to save it for our children,” Brunsvold said. “But we have to find a revenue source to drive some dollars toward acquisition and conservation.”

Longtime legislative colleague and fishing buddy Senator Denny Jacobs (D–Moline) said, “Joel is a really a conservationist. He fully understands that if you don’t have good open spaces, you really have nothing.”

These editorials have a wise and lovely voice.” (Read them online at http://chicago wildernessmag.org/issues/backissues.html.) The Headline Club also nominated writer David Weisman as a finalist for best feature story in a general circulation magazine, for his portrayal of activist and teacher Jim Phillips (“Parcells to the Fox,” CW, Spring ’02). Of that article, the judges said, “With concern for environmental issues at a peak, this story is as relevant today as it was in the subject's heyday — and it has reader interest for the local community as well as a more global readership. It was inspiring (where are more activists like this guy!) and well written.”

The Chicago Headline Club established the Lisagor Awards in 1977 to honor the lifetime achievements of influential journalist Peter Lisagor. According to the club, the awards competition attracts entries from 600 individual journalists and publications each year and has “grown to become Chicago’s premier journalism contest.”

Congratulations, Debra and David.

Daley’s Midnight Run on Meigs Field Increases Security — and Habitat

It was perhaps the first attempt by a top government official to save open space — not destroy it — under cover of darkness.

Shortly after midnight on March 31, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley dispatched heavy equipment to slash large Xs through the runways at Meigs Field, effectively closing the small airport.

Daley explained the next morning that the airport’s lakefront location had allowed planes too close to downtown skyscrapers. This, he said, contributed to an apprehensive public mindset and compromised security against terrorist attacks. This precautionary step against terrorism was consistent with the mayor’s widely praised proposal to build a park and restore habitat on the 91-acre landfill site, called Northerly Island.

The hopes of parks supporters had been dashed when Governor Ryan had insisted on keeping Meigs open in exchange for supporting Daley’s expansion plans at O’Hare airport. But when the governor failed to uphold his side of the bargain, Daley was able to revive the plan for a new gem in the lakefront parks. City officials haven’t released any new plans for Northerly Island, but they have been working with several groups since the mid-1990s on plans for the site, according to Cameron Davis, executive director of the Lake Michigan Federation. “The city is going to need to progress on a step-by-step
basis on Northerly Island," said Davis, citing current lack of funds as the largest barrier to construction. "It's going to take some time. The first phase will be for the city to evaluate all of the plans, then put together a strategy."

The Lake Michigan Federation released its plan for Northerly Island in February 2001, exactly one year before Meigs Field was originally scheduled to close. The Federation based its design upon an earlier plan by the city to return the site to the parkland use for which it was originally built. "It was developed with enormous input from volunteers and members throughout the community," said Davis. "It really represents the wishes of average citizens."

"Sanctuary Point" would integrate original elements of Chicago's lakefront, such as shoreline prairie, woods, dune ridges, and wetlands, with a focus on creating habitat for wildlife, most notably fish and migratory birds. Winding paths would connect with Burnham Park, 12th Street Beach, the Adler Planetarium, and an interpretive center occupying existing buildings.

4 Return of the Bobcat

During a deer survey one winter night in the woods, a high-pitched scream startled Animal Ecologist Dan Thompson of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. It was the call of a lovesick Lynx rufus, the elusive bobcat. Once on the Illinois threatened species list, counts done in the 1990s showed a steady increase in bobcat numbers throughout the state, and the species was subsequently removed from the list. But in the Chicago metro area?

For years, the district staff heard rumors of bobcat sightings, usually in Waterfall Glen, a 2,474-acre heavily wooded preserve surrounding Argonne National Laboratory. District staff hoped the rumors were true, but they had no proof until 2002, when confirming tracks were finally spotted, first in Waterfall Glen, then in the 1,425-acre Greene Valley Preserve. Scientists believe that bobcats need about five square miles to roam. Although neither preserve is that large, Waterfall Glen is adjacent to Cook County's Palos preserves, which total about five square miles. The bobcats detected in Greene Valley may be using the DuPage River to access other preserves and rural land. Both Greene Valley and Waterfall Glen have remote wooded areas far away from highways and hiking trails.

Perhaps more important to the bobcats' success in DuPage County are the over-large populations of white-tailed deer. Bobcats prey on young deer and, like coyotes, prey upon deer incapacitated by
collisions with automobiles. Bobcats also eat rabbits, birds, and many other species. Using scent stations, district staff have begun a monitoring program to find out how widespread these animals are in the two preserves. At each station, a swab, dipped in the bottled scent of a female bobcat in heat, is placed on cardboard in remote locations and surrounded with powder to make tracks visible. The scent is a sure draw for roaming males in search of a mate.

By the end of the program this summer, the district hopes to determine bobcat numbers, location, and preferred range, so staff can take any needed steps to protect this important animal.

“The bobcat is a predator that serves a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance and health of a preserve,” said Thompson. “Even if they are only surviving in the larger preserves with more secluded areas, it shows we are on the right track. To be able to sustain such a elusive and conservative animal as the bobcat amongst all the development is amazing.” But don’t expect to ever see one. That hair-raising scream is the closest the bobcats ever come.

— Elizabeth Riotta

Yellow-headed Blackbirds’ Nesting and Leaving Hegewisch Marsh

Each year 10 to 17 yellow-headed blackbirds are born at Hegewisch Marsh, a natural marsh surrounded by an automobile factory, railroad tracks, and a garbage dump, just south of 130th and Torrence in Chicago. A recent $1.9 million Open Land Trust Grant awarded to the city for the acquisition of the ten-acre site will offer these endangered birds protection, as well as the least bitterns, pied-billed grebes, common moorhens, ruddy ducks, and willow flycatchers that also nest there.

Insect surveys have found numerous dragonflies and damselflies — the primary food of nesting yellow-heads — emerging from the wetland.

Mike Ward, a graduate student who has studied the site’s yellow-headed blackbird population for five years, has found that while Hegewisch Marsh produces many young yellow-headed blackbirds, they don’t return to the site once they leave. Not do blackbirds born elsewhere choose to nest here. “The reason appears to be because the habitat is so isolated,” Ward explains. “Calumet used to be part of continuous range through northern Illinois and Iowa. Now it’s corn and soybean fields and steel mills... We’re looking for new techniques to help the species locate the remaining high-quality habitat.”

Without jeopardizing the site’s nesting habitat, the city plans to build a nature center where neighborhood children will be able to learn about the Calumet area’s original landscape and efforts to restore it. The Hegewisch Marsh acquisition is a part of the Calumet Open Space Reserve plan, a city and state partnership to develop a 4,000-acre natural area complex within the Calumet Industrial Corridor.

— Alison Carney Brown

Birders Active to Protect Illinois Osprey

Birders, ornithologists, and community
activists have persuaded the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) to consider purchasing the 54-acre St. Coletta property in Palos Park. This former school property is adjacent to Bergman Slough, which is not only one of the few remaining high-quality prairie sloughs in Illinois but is also home to the state's first pair of nesting osprey in more than 100 years.

The osprey is an Illinois-endangered species that has made a slow recovery from the ravages of DDT use in the 1960s. Many see the osprey's return to Illinois as a symbol of recovering ecosystems in Chicago's wilderness.

"Purchasing the property will protect the osprey that nest near St. Coletta as well as the high-quality forest preserves that surround it on three sides," explained Emil and Gail Biedron, spokespersons for The Friends of Bergman Slough. The Biedrons and many other activists have been contacting local, county, state, and federal officials, conservation groups, and scientists in an effort to protect the St. Coletta property. FPDCC staff have recommended that the district continue to seek funding sources to purchase the site. The district has requested financial assistance from Congresswoman Judy Biggert, of Illinois' 13th District, who expressed interest in this project.

The osprey — or Pandion haliaetus, meaning "sea eagle" — earned its name by feeding almost exclusively on fish. Also known as a fish eagle or sea hawk, it differs from all other daytime birds of prey and is in a family by itself, closely related to the hawk and falcon families. Ospreys can grow to 23 inches long with a wingspan of more than five feet.

— Jennifer Tang

7 Young Activist Aids Marsh and Turtles

On May 3 at Exner Marsh, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) awarded Henry Cilley a Certificate of Appreciation, and the Illinois Audubon Society named him Youth Conservationist of the Year, making him one of the youngest to win the society's honor. Henry Cilley, after all, is ten years old.

The honors recognize Cilley's advocacy on behalf of Exner Marsh in Lake in the Hills. Last year, Cilley's third-grade teacher Dorothy Miller read a newspaper article to her Glacier Ridge Elementary students about a commercial development that would encroach on the nesting habitat of Blanding's turtles.

Par Development was slated to build a new Walgreens store on a site adjacent to the 117-acre Exner Marsh Nature Preserve...
and less than a minute’s drive from Henry Cilley’s house. The marsh is owned and managed by the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD). As a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve, the marsh receives the highest level of legal protection state law can provide. “Henry started to bug the living daylights out of me about what was going to happen to the turtles,” his mother Katherine recalled. Henry’s classmates wrote letters to the village president that went unanswered, so he started a petition drive to encourage all involved agencies to work together to protect the turtles. Cilley gathered signatures at school open houses, outside grocery stores, at a pancake breakfast, and after speaking to a Boy Scout gathering of 250 people. Other scouts joined the effort and circulated “Friends of Henry” petitions. Wearing a suit, the then nine-year-old Henry presented a 700-signature petition to the village board last May.

When the board disallowed the petition on grounds that it included signatures from outside Lake in the Hills, Katherine Cilley contacted the INPC. “Exner Marsh is a shallow glacial lake bed and important habitat for avian species as well as the state-threatened Blanding’s turtle,” noted John Nelson, northeastern Illinois threats coordinator for INPC. “One-hundred eighty years ago, this marsh was surrounded by open prairies. Ten years ago, when the INPC dedicated the preserve, agricultural fields surrounded it,” Nelson observed. “Now, urban development encircles the marsh and, with this development project, the marsh will be completely surrounded by an artificial landscape. Species living in Exner Marsh have to deal with a whole new set of circumstances.”

To protect the preserve and its wildlife, the INPC and other agencies consulted and negotiated with Par Development to assure that the proposed 30-acre project was carefully planned. The company recognized the likelihood of turtles wandering into the parking lot in search of nesting habitat. In response, Par Development collaborated with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the MCCD, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the INPC to develop a mitigation plan. “Hopefully, female turtles will stay close to home if surrounded by nests,” Nelson explained. In what may be the largest construction of this kind in the eastern United States — and the first in Illinois — the groups created six artificial nesting sites around Exner Marsh and on Par property. The MCCD will study the success rate of these artificial nests. If effective, the strategy may be used at other sites where the Blanding’s turtle is threatened.

Par is also installing a barrier curb to prevent turtles from getting into parking areas, as well as fencing to prevent debris from getting into the marsh. Signs throughout the development will inform shoppers whom to call if they find a turtle. Fines for taking a Blanding’s turtle or egg begin at $2,500. A series of mechanical filters, natural wetland filters, and holding ponds will purify runoff water from the development before discharging it into Exner Marsh.

Par Development is currently arranging to deed approximately ten acres of open space adjacent to the marsh to the MCCD. "Henry’s efforts to raise public awareness about the plight of the Blanding’s turtle were definitely helpful," Nelson said. "It’s so unusual for a nine-year-old to step up in this way." He did.

“My favorite part was that I met someone very nice,” Cilley quietly stated. “Al Wilson,” his mother elaborated. “Al and his wife are stewards at Lake in the Hills Fen. They have become great friends, and Henry is going to monitor frogs with Al.”

“He let me borrow his GPS [global positioning system],” Cilley commented. “It tells us how fast the wind is, how hot it is out, and stuff I need to know to monitor.”

— Alison Carney Brown

**New Nature Preserves Dedicated and Additions Made**

In April, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission announced the dedication of a new nature preserve in Chicago Wilderness and additions to two existing preserves. Burnham Prairie Nature Preserve is a 78.5 acre site recently acquired by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and recognized for its rare dry-mesic prairie, wet-mesic prairie, wet prairie, and savanna communities.

The Nature Conservancy added a new 1.5-acre buffer to Paintbrush Prairie Nature Preserve in Markham, one of four prairies located in Cook County that are collectively referred to as the Indian Boundary Prairies. Paintbrush Prairie Nature Preserve supports more than 300 plant species, including the state-threatened eared false foxglove. The site’s features include 10 acres of high-quality mesic prairie. The addition increases the size of the preserve to approximately 81.6 acres. Another 2.09 acres were added to nearby Sundrop Prairie, which supports more than 230 native plant species including the state-threatened early fen sedge. Illinois now has 315 nature preserves statewide totaling 42,700 acres.

For a listing of summer events, visit chicagowildernessmag.org/calendar.
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Busy flowers

The crab spider is an ambush hunter. It often waits on flowers to catch visiting bees, flies, butterflies, and other insects. Often the crab spider’s color uncannily matches the host flower. But this spider has chosen a “mix and match” option. Perhaps its brilliant yellow may appear to a hungry insect as a great mass of pollen at the flower’s center.

And what of the insects the crab spiders catch? Some of them arrive to drink nectar, eat pollen, and, in the process, pollinate the flower for the next roll-of-the-dice of reproduction and evolution. Some of those insects arrive to prey on other insects, or to eat (and destroy) flower parts, or to lay eggs of maggots or caterpillars or grubs that will devour seeds. In a healthy prairie, a lot of the participants eat each other.

The flower shown here is rough blazing star – sometimes found growing by the thousands in moderately dry prairies. Notice that the top of its stem was bitten off (by a deer?), and yet what’s left glows with health. A little challenge, like some moderate deer browsing, isn’t going to deter a blazing star from thriving as a spectacular stage for the richness of prairie life.

Dennis Manning took this photo at about six in the morning, just before sun-up. That’s a treasured time for photographers, because the light tends to be so rich, and because animals large and small are ending their nights or beginning their mornings, and often doing something interesting.

In this case, Dennis was photographing the metallic green native bees in Belmont Prairie. The bees were flying back and forth from the blazing stars to a wooden stump – where they’d disappear into the neat holes they had drilled as chambers for their eggs and babies (larvae, technically). They provision those holes with big delicious balls of nectar and pollen – for the kids. As the light brightened and the day warmed, the crab spider suddenly appeared on top of the flower – out of nowhere. Dennis thinks it must have been hiding behind and underneath the flower. Now was the time for the spider to go to work, hunting bugs to feed its own young. This is not a peaceable kingdom, but it’s an inspiring model of richness, beauty, and balance.

Photo by Dennis Manning. Words by Stephen Packard. Belmont Prairie, an Illinois Nature Preserve in Downers Grove, was protected thanks to the efforts of volunteers Al and Margo Dupree, The Nature Conservancy, and the Downers Grove Park District, which owns and manages it today and for the future.

Our region’s five species of blazing stars are reliably distinguished by the green bracts under the flowers. In the rough blazing star (above), the bracts are puckered and “crisped” – reminding some of iceberg lettuce.
Explore Nature in Chicago Parks!

1. Bessemer Park
   8930 S. Muskegon Ave.

2. Burnham Prairie Path
   47th St. just west of Lake Shore Dr.

3. Clark Park
   3400 N. Rockwell St.

4. Columbus Park
   500 S. Central Ave.

5. Douglas Park
   1401 S. Sacramento Ave.

6. Eugene Field Park
   5100 N. Ridgeway Ave.

7. Garfield Park
   100 N. Central Park Ave.

8. Gompers Park
   4222 W. Foster Ave.

9. Horner Park
   2741 W. Montrose Ave.

10. Humboldt Park
    1400 N. Sacramento Ave.

11. Hurley Park Savanna
    Southeast corner of W. 100th St. & S. Winchester Ave.

12. Indian Boundary Park
    2500 W. Lunt Ave.

13. Jackson Park Lagoon
    57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.

14. Bobolink Meadow
    57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.

15. Jackson Golf Prairie
    E. Marquette Dr. and S. Richards Dr.

16. Paul H. Douglas Nature Sanctuary (Wooded Island)
    57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.

17. Kiwanis Park
    3315 W. Carmen Ave.

18. Legion Park
    W. Foster Ave. just south of Devon Ave.

19. Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool
    Corner of Fullerton Ave. & Cannon Dr.

20. Bill Jarvis Migratory Bird Sanctuary
    Between Lake Michigan & Recreation Dr. at Waveland Ave.

21. Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary
    Montrose Ave. & the Lake

22. North Pond Nature Sanctuary
    North of Fullerton Ave. between Cannon Dr. & Stockton Dr.

23. Marquette Park
    6734 S. Kedzie Ave.

24. Mary Berkmeyer Quinn Park of Trees
    Intersection of McClellan Ave. & Mandell Ave.

25. McKinley Park
    2210 W. Pershing Rd.

26. Nichols Park
    1300 E. 55th St.

27. Ogden Park
    6500 S. Racine Ave.

28. Portage Park
    4100 N. Long Ave.

29. Prospect Gardens Park
    10940-11000 S. Prospect Ave.

30. Rainbow Beach Park
    2873 E. 79th St.

31. Ridge Park Wetland
    North Wood St. between 95th St. & 96th St.

32. Riis Park
    6100 W. Fullerton Ave.

33. Ronan Park
    Between Lawrence Ave. & Argyle Ave. on the North Branch of the Chicago River

34. Rutherford Sayer Park
    North of intersection at Shakespeare Ave. & New England Ave.

35. Sherman Park
    1301 W. 52nd St.

36. South Shore Nature Sanctuary
    7059 South Shore Dr.

37. Washington Park
    5531 S. King Dr.

38. West Pullman Savanna
    401 W. 123rd St.

39. Winnemac Park
    Northwest corner of Damen Ave. & W. Argyle St.

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