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 172 public and private organizations working together to study and restore, protect and manage the precious natural ecosystems of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public. www.chicagowilderness.org

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

For a complete list of Chicago Wilderness members, please visit the Website at chicagowilderness.org
Life Without Water

I'll concede that nature doesn't usually rank at the top of most opinion polls. When asked about their concerns, people put the economy and jobs, national security, education, and crime before the environment. Unquestionably these are legitimate issues, and I share the widespread concern about them. But I think nature ranks so low because we take it for granted. Nature is so essential to our existence—literally, we are nowhere without air, we are nothing without water—that we dismiss its significance. Nature, we think, is a given.

How can we begin to treat nature as a necessity and not an amenity? Since we are utterly dependent on healthy nature for our survival, why is securing an adequate supply of fresh water and arable land—indeed, the very preservation of our web of life—not the primary focus of human security, much less national security?

To illustrate my point, let's conduct a thought experiment: Imagine a day without water. Brush your teeth in the morning with paste and saliva (No rinsing!). No shower or bath, or face-washing. No flushing the toilet. No coffee or tea. No pop, no milk, no juice, no wine (unless you dehydrate them first). No baths by the water cooler. No shampoo at the gym. No rocks and no Scotch, no dip in the pool. You get my drift? (If any of you actually try this—alone or as a family—send us your journal entries and we may share them online.)

Our dependence on water links us—happily, mysteriously—with much of the rest of creation. Look at the seeps of Lockport Prairie (see page 10), where groundwater moves through dolomite bedrock to form one of the world's rarest ecosystems. Species such as the leafy prairie clover and the Hine's emerald dragonfly utterly depend on these seeps.

True, our technological wizardry may buy us a bit more latitude than the Hine's (for instance, we can invent water filters or bring in water from somewhere else), but ultimately we are in the same predicament.

Through our intercession and care in the form of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Forest Preserve District of Will County, the Illinois Department of Corrections, the Lockport Township Park District, and other partner agencies, we humans have monitored and modified our consumption of water to ensure the survival of Lockport Prairie's inhabitants.

Efforts to remove dams along area rivers and creeks (see page 13) and to reintroduce rare butterflies to habitats that will harbor them (page 16) also demonstrate how humans are seeking a just and right relationship with nature. That's Chicago Wilderness—people and nature. Together we can change those opinion polls and learn to take nothing for granted. Together we can honor our fathers and one particular mother, Mother Earth. Let's get to work.
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Cover: Trail 9 into the Beach House Blowout, sunset,
Indiana Dunes State Park. Camping in the park's
campgrounds allowed photographer Jason Lindsey and
friend Jeff Mikulina (pictured) to spend a weekend
exploring the Dunes' varied topography (see pages 19 and

Opposite: Lush blooms, ten weeks after a spring burn
at Somme Prairie Grove: gayfeather, yellow coneflower,
mountain mint, rattlesnake master, and early goldenrod.
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CROWS ACROSS THE POND

Dear Editor,

I was delighted to find your website on Google because it explained something we saw this morning while we were walking our dog. There were three crows taking it in turns to hang upside down from a telephone cable near the park. They were using their beaks and claws to hang on, and we were mystified as to why they were doing it.

To discover from your website (“A Murder of Crows,” Winter ’04) that they were just showing off to each other is brilliant!

Sharon Sibley
Ruislip, England

Editors’ Note: Since we’ve never been able to get a crow to confide in us, we can’t say for sure that they were “showing off.” Animals may have entirely different motivations from humans for seemingly similar behaviors, but it’s also entirely reasonable to think that they share a great deal, psychologically speaking, with us.

SAVE THE WILD PULLOUT

Dear Editor,

I have enjoyed Chicago Wilderness for several years and appreciate your upgrades and new look—except for one detail. I especially liked having Into the Wild as a pullout on light card stock. I keep them in a separate portfolio to take along on visits to forest preserves. The Spring 2004 issue has included the information, maps, helpful hints, etc., but not in pullout form or on substantial paper. Perhaps enough comments will be coming in to restore the former format.

Thanks.

Irene F. Hansen
Oak Park, IL

CORRECTIONS

In our Spring ’04 issue, the credit for the photo of a Cape May warbler on page 21 should have read: Rob Curtis/The Early Bird. Also, credit for the photo of wild columbine on page 23 should go to Ed Reschke, and, for the mosquito photo on page 16, to John, not James, Kohout. The woodland garden at the top of page 8 is actually the yard of Harvey Davis, in Warrenville, IL. CW regrets the errors.
Birds on a Cool Green Roof

Can the roof of Chicago's City Hall take urban nature to a higher level?

By Katherine Millett

When my nephew first visited the top of the Sears Tower, it wasn't the altitude or the lake view that impressed him. It was the grasshoppers jumping on the glass outside the windows. He liked the spiders, too, spinning their webs in corners of the steel window frames. Deaf to tales of human engineering, he wanted to know how these creatures climbed 1,353 feet to the observation deck.

Below us spread downtown Chicago. For a bird or even a grasshopper, it seemed a desolate place to make a living. Around the chess pieces of Loop buildings flowed an unremitting stream of cars and people on pavement; only Grant Park and the wooded banks of the Chicago River suggested food and shelter. At roof level, sun beat down on expanses of asphalt, and fans whirred inside boxes of ventilating equipment.

Then we trained our binoculars northeast. Between a black tower and a gray one, we saw a patch of green — the roof of City Hall.

In 2001, at a cost of $1.5 million, the City transformed 20,300 square feet of the 38,800-square-foot roof at LaSalle and Washington Streets into a contoured garden landscape. Much publicized, the green roof was installed to combat the "urban heat-island effect" that traps heat and air pollution in congested downtown areas, to cool the building and reduce its energy costs, to soak up water during storms and release it slowly afterwards, and to grace the cityscape. (When summer temperatures reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit, City Hall's green roof holds at 90 degrees, while the black-tar roof of the adjacent Cook County building heats to nearly 170 degrees.)

Soon after, almost unnoticed amid calculations of roof temperatures and water runoff, a small team of naturalists asked whether the roof could also serve as a home for wildlife. Making regular visits there to monitor birds, plants, and insects, they became the first, and are still the only, people in all of North America collecting data about animals on a green roof, according to Steven Peck, executive director of the Toronto-based organization Green Roofs for Healthy Cities.

To structure the monitoring effort, North Park Village Nature Center director Drew Hart and longtime birder Jerry Garden wrote a protocol. Garden began counting birds at the project's inception, and he continues to monitor for a half hour each week during spring and fall migration periods. He records species that land on the roof as well as those that fly closer than 20 feet above it. Naturalist Sean Shaffer uses traps to check for arthropods, such as spiders and soil insects, and Stephanie Averill and Michael Thompson monitor bees weekly.
The variation of depth, structure, and plants creates niches that support a much wider range of birds and bugs than a standard green roof.

This spring, I accompanied Garden, Hart, and Shaffer to the roof. After riding a service elevator to the 12th floor and zigzagging through pipe-lined hallways, we walked into a surprising landscape. I had seen the roof from above, a view enjoyed by hundreds of people whose high-rise offices face the building, but I was startled by its contours and contrasts: prairie up close, glass and steel behind; curvy hills opposite right-angled windows; birds chirping in a crabapple tree while engines rumbled on LaSalle Street.

Wildlife habitat was never a primary objective of the City Hall roof’s design. Yet experiments often have unintended consequences, and providing urban habitat for animals is turning out to be one of them. City Hall’s is not a typical green roof with hundreds of identical sedums set in three inches of soil. Such easy-care installations have numerous advantages, but according to Swiss scientist Stephan Brenneisen, who has studied green roofs as habitat in Europe, they don’t support much wildlife. The best way to encourage biodiversity on a roof, he says, is to vary the depth and structure of its substrate. Some animals need cover and seeds, while others need rocks and gravel.

The garden on City Hall begins with layers of waterproofing materials, designed to protect the original roof, and drainage ways to manage stormwater. Combinations of polystyrene contours, gravel, soil, and fabric lie atop these, varying from 5 to 18 inches deep to create a hilly profile.

Over several weeks in the fall of 2000 and the following spring, workers set 20,000 individual plants into the soil. The planting design, developed by Conservation Design Forum, Inc. (CDF) of Elmhurst, called for 150 different species. Some, like sedums, were known to do well on green roofs. Others represent experiments in growing native prairie species (many are typical inhabitants of dry gravel hill prairies) and long-blooming flowers within the constraints of a roof environment.

We followed a path of round paving stones through clumps of big bluestem grass, plumes of bottlebrush, and green nodes of sedum clustered under last fall’s brittle flowers. A prickly pear cactus wrinkled on a sandy hillside. Towering above the dark purple heads of a wild onion, a rattlesnake master plant rattled its seeds in the breeze. New shoots were pushing aggressively against old stalks, and tangles of papery grasses dangled on bare branches of shrubbery. The landscape had the messy candor of early spring.

While Hart and Garden combed through seed heads and flung the contents in strategic patches of soil, Shaffer crawled under the crabapple tree to check a pitfall trap. He stirred through a few cherry-sized apples and came up with a pillbug, springtails, and some coiled millipedes. On his fingertip, a nematode raised its translucent body and wriggled like a tiny, charmed cobra.

Only up to 30 percent of the soil mixture is organic soil, but the animals don’t seem to mind. Engineered to be light, the “growth medium” also contains expanded clay pellets, wood chips, and vermiculite.

I followed Hart to an unplanted section of the roof’s north end, where he stooped next to a beehive. Two box towers were built there in the spring of 2003, each stocked with 3,000 exotic honeybees. We watched dozens of bees land at the bottom of a hive, and fly inside carrying loads of yellow pollen on their back legs.

The roof’s beekeepers, Averill and Thompson, say the honeybees routinely fly to Grant Park and back, laden with pollen to produce excellent honey. Yet, other bees use the roof as well. Perhaps the most exciting development on the roof to date is its discovery by native bees. Unlike honeybees, many species native to Illinois are solitary soil dwellers. They nest in the ground and tunnel to deposit eggs individually.
“They must be nesting up there,” says Thompson, “because there are so many of them. The porous quality of the soil is perfect.” He has observed them feeding on native flowers such as white asters, goldenrod, and coreopsis.

As we talked, Garden hopped up onto one of the metal walls that enclose the structured landscape. “There we go,” he said, a smile showing beneath his binoculars. “Field sparrows, a junco, and a song sparrow. And isn’t that a peregrine?” He arched his back and twisted to follow a falcon overhead, watching as it disappeared beyond the tall spire of the First United Methodist Center.

During the first year, Garden saw a few sparrows each week and occasionally a flock of juncos. His list of visitors included a wren, a chickadee, a kinglet, a Cape May warbler, and an Empidonax flycatcher. The year 2003 brought 12 percent more birds and a greater variety: at least one of each species from the previous year, plus six types of sparrow, woodpeckers, thrushes, a robin, a thrasher, a starling, a Philadelphia vireo, and both a Cape May and a common yellowthroat warbler. But his biggest thrill came last October when Garden saw a rare olive-sided flycatcher determinedly push through the steel “Grand Canyon” of LaSalle Street and land on the roof. “It must have been compelled by its sense of direction to abandon a friendly route and take off into this inhospitable environment. The more green roofs we have,” he says, “the more birds will get to know them.”

To encourage birds to nest on the roof, Garden built eight birdhouses that the City installed on poles among the plants and on a few walls. “The house wren would make a good indicator species for the roof if it nests,” he says. “Then we would know we have a habitat that drawn and holds.”

As the experiment enters its third year, it is beginning to yield results. The monitors know that a variety of plants and soil animals can survive year-round and that birds are taking advantage of the roof. They’ve also observed that, as an isolated environment connected to other green patches only tenuously by its animal pollinators, the roof depends on human custodians to stimulate its genetic health. To add to the challenge, the soil here is unnaturally shallow and warm, as the roof receives heat from the building beneath it all winter. This will be hard on large prairie grasses long-term, says Gerould Wilhelm of CDF. These plants usually root deeply and require cold-weather dormancy for their seeds to germinate. Drought-resistant ornamentals like sedums and Eurasian carpet weeds are most likely to succeed.

“One can plant anything on a roof that one can plant on the ground,” Wilhelm says, “but one may need to replace certain individual plants every three or four years. The objectives are not the same for a green roof as for a restoration. On a roof, one might have four or five species within a quarter square-meter area, whereas an aboriginal prairie might have about 25 species in the same space.”
Beneath the plants, a significant variety of arthropods churn the soil, and, says Petra Sierwald of The Field Museum, spiders "definitely like green roofs. The more complex your habitat structure, the more species of spiders you'll get." Some, like the orb-web spiders outside the observation deck on the Sears Tower, favor vertical surfaces. They balloon upward on warm currents of air, riding strings of silk they spin for the purpose. And while the thousands of grasshoppers that besieged the green roof during its first year were likely carried up on the new plants, these and other insects also can be inadvertently transported long distances by winds, sometimes reaching mile-high altitudes.

The presence of these animals, especially those that require quality habitat, bodes well for the roof's future diversity. "It's a very good sign," says Wilhelm, "when conservative species volunteer in an engineered environment."

One of the primary goals for City Hall's green roof has been to inspire more green building. Indeed, the idea is catching on. Within Chicago's city limits there are now 70 green roofs, either complete or in the works, and 51 of them are private. Many were at least partially funded by $100 million the City recovered from Commonwealth Edison after a series of power outages during 1999, but many more are in the works with other sources of funding. When all these roofs are finished, says Kevin Labarge of the City's Department of Environment, they will cover one million square feet. No one yet knows exactly what the cumulative effect of significant areas of green roofs here will be, but the flat roofs of our dense urban centers provide ample opportunity to find out. "In most cities, the roof area is between 15 to 30 percent of the total land area," says Steven Peck. "So if we can design green roofs that generate stormwater quality and quantity improvements, reduce the urban heat-island effect, clean the air, provide green space, and support butterflies, migratory birds, and invertebrates, why not? Why not give back to nature the footprint of the buildings that rest upon her?"

After my tour of the City Hall roof, I took the elevator down and walked out to Washington Street. Arranged in a stone planter near the door was a row of purple crocuses. A bee emerged from a blossom, its legs yellow with pollen, and flew up to the roof.

GREEN ROOFS ON THE RISE

Roofs are going green all over the Chicago region—on public buildings, businesses, even private residences.

PEGGY NOTBAERT NATURE MUSEUM—CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

In addition to the demonstration roof (with a wetland, low-maintenance plantings, and a tree), the museum has planted its large, angled main roofs with varied sedums. Water not absorbed by the plants trickles down a wall of local limestone planted with native ravine-dwelling plants. What's more, equipment monitors rooftop conditions, and visitors can watch what's going on via four "roof cams."

CONDOMINIUMS—EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Several new condo high-rises use a portion of each resident's assessment to maintain a rooftop common area full of trees, flowers, and grass—often adjoining an exercise room, party room, or swimming pool.

DICK YOUNG RESIDENCE—OSWEGO, ILLINOIS

Shortly after World War II, botanist and builder Dick Young built a stone home and gave it a green roof. He mixed trees and broad-leaved plants with Kentucky bluegrass—50 plant species in all. Even back then, he knew the green roof would cool his family's home.

TARGET CORPORATION—CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The vast flat-roof acreage and ubiquitous nature of the "big-box stores" make them perfect—and critical—candidates for green roofs. In summer 2003, Target installed a sedum roof on a store in Chicago.

COFFEE CREEK CENTER—CHESTERTON, INDIANA

The public restrooms at Coffee Creek Center resemble a stone hut with a sod roof (photo above). Yet the greenery is a modern design, installed on a pitched surface to hold sedums, sand coreopsis, even hens and chicks.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY ROOFS

- Center for Green Technology (Chicago)
- Conservation Design Forum (Elmhurst)
- Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital (Chicago)
- Oak Park Public Library (Oak Park)

NOT A DO-IT-YOURSELFER

Building a green roof requires a lot of professional help, from making sure your roof can support more weight to providing engineered soil and plant designs. A few places to start.

- U.S. Green Building Council (Chicago Chapter), (312) 453-7879, usgbc.org
- Green Roofs for Healthy Cities, (416) 971-4494, greenroofs.org
- Greenroofs.com, (678) 580-1965, greenroofs.com

Argiope orb-web spiders can live on green roofs only if they have tall prairie grasses on which to build webs.
Groundswell for Groundwater

Protecting land around Stateville Prison may save the critical seeps of Lockport Prairie.

By Jill Riddell

Some earthly elements are common: iron, for example, and silicate. Some are so rare as to be considered precious: think rubies, perhaps, or platinum. The same can be said for Illinois landscapes; some were abundant to begin with, and among what little remains of natural land, they are well-represented and reasonably common.

But in Will County, there is the ecosystem equivalent of a ruby, an example of something that was rare in the past, rare today, and will likely be forever rare: the wet dolomite prairie. Produced by specific and unlikely sets of circumstance, this natural community can’t be reproduced on a whim. If you were to decide to devote your life to trying to manufacture a wet dolomite prairie, the first thing you would need is a location where 425 million-year-old limestone bedrock lies under the surface. Next you must arrange for a glacier to visit and, in the process of its arrival and departure, to scour out a wide valley, leaving a river in the middle and bluffs along the side. In between the river and the bluffs, there must be a flat river plain. On the plain you can have some soil to support marshes and prairies, but scattered here and there, you must have some spots where the glacier scraped things right down to the limestone bedrock. Otherwise you won’t get your dolomite prairie, because that’s where it’s going to form: on the frighteningly inhospitable, almost-bare dolomite rock.
In the Chicago Wilderness region, the only place where these precise conditions occurred is along the Des Plaines River, from Willow Springs to Joliet. (There are also dolomite prairies slightly farther west, in Byron County near Rockford.) It’s impossible to know how much dolomite prairie may have existed in the lower Des Plaines Valley prior to 1972, but when the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory was completed that year, the document stated that there were only 36 acres statewide. Much of this acreage was destroyed by mining at nearby sites. But there is protected dolomite prairie remaining in the 250-acre Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve, a site west of the town of Lockport.

Lockport Prairie is home to certain plants that show decided preference for the spartan conditions of dolomite prairie: tufted hair grass, slender sandwort, and prairie satintail grass are a few examples. But the dolomite prairie isn’t the only natural community that is of interest at this site. The nature preserve is a complex mix of dry and wet prairies, marshes, graminoid fen, and sedge meadows, some of these fed by groundwater and by seeps in the bluffs on the western edge of the river valley. It is this diversity that creates habitat for a wide variety of invertebrates, amphibians, birds, plants, and other wildlife, many quite rare. The federally endangered leafy prairie clover and Hine’s emerald dragonfly, for example, wouldn’t exist here if not for the preserve’s calcareous seeps.

In the 1990s, biologist Dr. Daniel Soluk from the Illinois Natural History Survey was studying the Hine’s emerald dragonfly at Lockport Prairie when he observed that the periods of time when there was water in the seeps were decreasing. There always had been intervals when these rivulets flowed into the prairie and others when they were parched, but the possibility that the seeps and the moisture in the nature preserve were changing significantly soon became a source of concern for Soluk, as well as the staff of the Forest Preserve District of Will County. (The district manages the site in a lease arrangement with the landowner, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.)

Though the district felt the pressing need for more hydrological information, such studies are costly and no one knew where the money would come from.

The tragic destruction of another dolomite prairie nearby resulted in the payment of a $7.5 million settlement by the site owner, Material Services Corporation, and the establishment of a fund to help restore nearby areas, especially dolomite prairie. In 2000, the Forest Preserve District of Will County applied for money from the settlement fund, which is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the non-profit group CorLands. The district received $1.4 million to conduct a hydrological study and to take appropriate management action at Lockport Prairie.

“We had to be honest, though,” says Marcy DeMauro, deputy director for the district, as she recalls the application for the grant. “We had to admit outright that we might come out at the end of the study and find out that we couldn’t manipulate the hydrology of the system without affecting something else. We might not be able to fix whatever the problem turned out to be.”

After two years of study by Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates, a consulting firm out of Milwaukee, we now know where the prairie’s water comes from and where the problems originate. Beginning in 2001, the consultants installed well nests at different depths, both on and off the property, to collect data about groundwater flow. “Groundwater recharge areas are very hard to understand because their boundaries don’t follow the surface topography,” says Jean Sellars, an ecologist from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “But,” Sellars says, “our natural areas are almost all dependent on groundwater, and we have to learn to understand it.”

The consultants found that in addition to rainfall, water enters the nature preserve two other ways: from the seeps in the bluffs to the west, and from fissures in the bedrock that allow water from the aquifer to come to the surface. Rainwater recharges the aquifer that supplies groundwater to the nature preserve.

“No environmental area is an island,” says Mike Pasteris, the Forest Preserve District of Will County’s executive director. “It always exists as part of the earth, as part of a much larger system.”

This became acutely apparent at Lockport Prairie, since none of its problems originate within its borders. Lockport Township, for instance, operates a golf course west...
of Lockport Prairie, on the other side of Route 53. "The golf course had pumps at
two wells that it used to fill its irrigation
ponds," DeMauro explains. "One was
shallow, and the other one deep. When
they drew on the shallow well, it showed
up as an immediate impact on the water
feeding Lockport Prairie. The well nests
showed there was a six-inch drop in the
total aquifer after each pumping event."

When this was brought to the attention of
Lockport Township, the golf course staff
stopped using the shallow well. "They were
extremely cooperative once they — and we — knew what was going on," says
DeMauro.

The consultants identified other potential problems from
the increasing development of lands near the natural area. First,
the town of Crest Hill has new municipal wells going on line,
and these may pump at rates in excess of the aquifer's ability to
recharge itself. Second, during development, whenever land is
paved or planted with dense turf grass, rainwater is no longer
absorbed by the earth and the aquifer in the quantities it was
before. Instead the rain runs off into sewers, where it is treated
and discharged into the Des Plaines River. Third, the chemistry
of the water that does enter the natural area may change
because it spends less time in the aquifer, and floodwater from
the river may enter the natural area more frequently.

Lockport Prairie turned out to be lucky not only because
the symptoms of its problems became evident at a time when
money was available to pay for a diagnosis — it was also lucky
with its neighbors, namely Stateville Prison. Located on the
west side of Route 53, Stateville has a 700-acre buffer area
maintained mostly in agricultural leases. The absence of
development on that open space has allowed absorption of rainfall
and recharge of the groundwater through the years.

"I was out golfing one day [on the Lockport Township golf
course] when I started thinking about how this would be a
great piece to keep as open space," says Brent Hassert, state
representative for the 85th district, speak-
ing of the prison buffer. Subsequently,
Hassert contacted the Forest Preserve
District's Mike Pasteris. Pasteris and the
district staff put together a proposal to
have the Illinois Department of
Corrections (DOC) turn over the 700
acres to the district and to Lockport
Township. (Hassert had previously helped
Lockport Township obtain its existing golf
course from DOC.)

Armed with the information provided
by the hydrological study, the district
made a compelling case for protection of
this parcel as part of the prairie's recharge
zone. Though there's no way to keep
development off all the land that composes the recharge zone,
this parcel is the one directly adjacent to the property, a signifi-
cant contributor to the preserve's groundwater.

The district has pledged to restore its portion of the recharge
zone — approximately 470 acres that will be called the Prairie
Bluff Preserve — to prairie, the ideal groundcover for ensuring
as much water as possible is absorbed in the aquifer.

"Within a fifteen-minute drive of the Prairie Bluff Preserve,
there are well over 150,000 people," says Hassert. "With the
rate of development we're experiencing in northern Will
County, we'll never have an opportunity like this again."

Hassert has flown over the Prairie Bluff Preserve with the
governor's staff, and has initiated legislative action to have the
DOC property declared surplus land. These are first steps
toward what he and others hope will be the eventual sale of
the property for conservation. The proposal will be considered
by the legislature either in the fall veto session or in the spring
2005 session.

While by no means final, the Lockport Prairie story does
offer encouragement to other natural area managers facing
hydrological issues. "So many natural area professionals are
terrified by hydrology, and think there's nothing you can do
about it," says Sellat. "Lockport Prairie shows us otherwise."

Rain soaks into the land
west of Lockport Prairie,
then seeps out of the western
bluffs (in blue), sustaining rare
pockets of wet dolomite prairie.
Protecting neighboring prison
land from development
also protects some of the
groundwater recharge zone.

3D Map: Geographic Information System
Imagery adapted from: Corlands, Forest
Preserve District of Will County, and
Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates.
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Do not share my name.
Stroll along Batavia's Riverwalk on the Fox River in southeastern Kane County, and you hear an endless roar of water rushing over the North Batavia Dam. A 10-foot-tall, 357-foot-wide concrete strip, the dam was built a century ago to power the machinery of a windmill factory. The factory is now occupied by businesses serviced by conventional electricity sources. But its stone façade bears a banner that reads “Keep the Batavia Dam.”

Last February, the Batavia City Council voted to support the Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ (IDNR) $8.6 million plan to tear down the dam and reconfigure this stretch of the Fox. This project—the first large dam removal in Illinois—could begin by 2006. Located in the heart of downtown Batavia, the dam has become a focal point in the debate about what’s best for the rivers of Chicago Wilderness and the people who live along them.

Communities regionwide are facing decisions. Five years ago, in Kendall County, the Oswego Park District removed its damaged Stonegate Dam on Waubonsie Creek. Kane County removed the YWCA Dam on Brewster Creek this year, while the Kane County Forest Preserve District is finalizing plans to remove Batavia’s breached South Dam. In Wisconsin, which leads the nation in dam removals, a coalition is working to remove a critical dam on the Pike River in Kenosha County. All of this signals a growing awareness about the importance of healthy river ecosystems. Yet, as the City of Batavia discovered, people grow attached to their dams. Dam removal advocates have much work to do in building popular support for an asset, and an issue, that people usually see only on its surface.

Evolution in Understanding
The aging of America’s dam infrastructure, combined with a mounting interest in ecologically oriented policies, explains why 114 dams have been torn down nationwide since 1999, according to the organization American Rivers.

“We’ve known for a long time that dams have a negative effect on rivers’ health, but the real shift has come since passage of the federal Clean Water Act in the 1970s,” IDNR streams biologist Steve Pescitelli explains. “Rivers are a lot cleaner now and capable of supporting a lot more fish. But fish need to have access. In northeastern Illinois, where there are so many dams, removal is the most effective way to complete the return on investment for river restoration.”

Several years ago, IDNR launched a survey to evaluate the effects of dam removal and modification in Illinois. Its benchmark is a Fox River fish passage study by the Dundee-based Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation. The study was co-authored...
Longnose gar, and the big-mouth, black, and small-mouth buffalo — were restricted to the lowest reaches of the river.

The fish have vanished, Santucci contends, in part because dams impede their movement. (One joke circulating in Batavia goes, “Q: What did the fish say when it got to Batavia? A: Dam!”) Dams prevent fish from migrating into breeding areas, from leaving unsuitable living conditions, and from replenishing depleted local populations.

But there's also the question of water quality. “Dams create a lake-like environment where water stagnates,” says Santucci, “and sediment, which is normally moved downstream by current, collects on the river bottom.” River advocates point out that dams often concentrate the effects of other problems such as polluted runoff and erosion. “Nutrient pollutants feed the growth of algae” causing drastic fluctuations of dissolved oxygen, says Santucci. “This is not a habitat that river fish like.”

The river redhorse (CW, Spring '04) is one such fish. Redhorse have disappeared from many heavily dammed sections of the Fox where sediment has clogged gravel beds. “These suckers reproduce somewhere in the Fox or its tributaries,” Santucci says. “They run up creeks or they breed on gravel bars in the river where quickly flowing water keeps their eggs oxygenated.” He adds that dam removal will also help expand habitat for many invertebrate species, including mayflies and water-cleaning filter feeders such as mussels, which have suffered drastic reductions over the last century.

David Horn, president of the group Friends of the Fox River, says that other animals also could return to the river. While it would be “hard to quantify in terms of ‘x-number more’ Acadian flycatchers along the banks of the Fox,” he says, “there’s no reason to expect anything other than that the removal of the dam will improve habitat for flora and fauna and the organisms that depend on them.” He adds that dam removal also could improve community drinking-water quality and lower filtration costs.

The Community Perspective

Many Batavians like the North Dam because the current configuration is pleasant to the eyes and ears, as well as a good resource for boaters and fishermen. In fact, a citizen group called Save the Dam won a non-binding referendum drive to keep the dam. One of the group’s organizers, 50-year Batavia resident Ruth Johnson, wishes city officials had followed the example of downstream Yorkville. There, a citizen petition drive led elected officials to back a $6.2 million IDNR plan to modify its Glen Palmer dam. Ten percent of the river’s water will flow through a 1,000-foot-long channel designed to allow the passage of fish as well as canoeists and kayakers.

Batavia City Manager Bill McGrath claims the referendum was misleading. Politically, he says, “It would have been a lot easier for us to go the Yorkville way.” Yet he contends that the Yorkville project’s cost exceeds the benefits. “The jury’s out on whether these fish ladders work. And what’s the point of spending all these millions if you’re not going to deal with all the sedimentation upstream?”

Openlands Project’s Des Anderson says the key to support for healthy rivers is to start educating people early on about the streams in their own neighborhoods. Without public awareness,
he says, "the value judgment from the citizenry and their
deeply held beliefs about nature and the aesthetic view that
they would rather not change. Understanding the dynamics of
the river and what it needs to be healthy is not something that
takes hold in the 12 to 18 months of debate when the issue for-
mares arises."

David Horn says that people will care more when they expe-
rience a wild river system for themselves. "Whether it's a canoe
trip, a walk along the Fox River Path, or wading into a local
stream and turning over rocks, you're going to see a great diversity of plant and animal life
that lives around or within the river."

Public education efforts are being under-
taken by such groups as the Fox River
Ecosystem Partnership, Friends of the Fox
River, Batavians for a Healthy River, Prairie
Rivers, Illinois Sierra Club, Friends of the
Chicago River, The Conservation Foundation, many forest
preserve districts, and, of course, the IDNR. With more than
120 mainstream and tributary dams in the Chicago region, the
river-reconnection crowd will be paying close attention to the
example Batavia sets.

Batavia's Post-Dam Look
State-contracted engineers are finalizing designs for the river's
new configuration. The waterline just above the dam, they esti-
mate, will drop about seven feet after removal. The water itself
will be about a foot shallower, and engineers will redistribute
up to six feet of accumulated sediment, some to build islands
and stream banks. McGrath anticipates that once the dam is
gone, the river could be about one-third of its current width for
a half-mile upstream of the dam site. Floodplain vegetation will
be planted on dewatered portions, creating a natural buffer
zone that will filter runoff and provide some streamside wetland
habitat.

Strollers on the Riverwalk won't hear a local version of
Niagara Falls anymore, but they will be able to see the bottom
of the river. Meanwhile, boulders will amplify the sound of
rushing water. "We're going to lose the water skiing, and the
current may be a bit too fast for families who like canoeing on
the impoundment," McGrath says. "But there's going to be a lot
more sport fishing." And once the North and South Batavia
dams are gone, canoeists will be able to cruise continuously for
six miles from Geneva to North Aurora.

Victor Santucci's findings have made him an advocate for
dam removal. He has presented his study in dozens of forums
with hopes of "getting the science out there. A lot of people say
they don't care about the fish," he says, "but almost everybody
cares about clean water."

Downtown Batavia will have a different look. But Bill
McGrath expects positive reactions from anyone visiting the
Riverwalk for the first time. "They won't know what was here
before. What they come and see will be the Fox River."
Restoring the Butterfly Tapestry

Many rare butterflies could thrive again in restored habitats—they just need help finding them

By Doug Taron

On a beautiful summer afternoon in July of 2002, I was driving back to Chicago after visiting a couple of beautiful fen remnants in east-central Wisconsin with a colleague.

The fruits of our labor—six egg-filled female swamp metalmark butterflies—now rested in a beer cooler sitting beside me, on their way, we hoped, to become the nucleus of a restored population at Bluff Spring Fen near Elgin, Illinois.
The swamp metalmark hadn’t been recorded at Bluff Spring Fen since 1939, and the species disappeared from Illinois entirely in the mid-1980s. As I crossed the state line into Illinois, I suddenly had the sobering and exhilarating realization that the state’s entire population was sitting on my passenger seat.

That summer and the next, our team of scientists from the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum collected fertile eggs from the female metalmarks, raised them, and transferred more than 100 larvae to Bluff Spring Fen. It’s a little like sending your kids off to college for the first time.

Such assisted reintroductions, or translocations, are an important part of butterfly conservation. Studies by researchers such as Ron Panzer at Northwestern University show that some butterflies, termed remnant-reliant species, require intact habitats like prairies and wetlands. But data from the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network suggest that remnant-reliant species do not spontaneously reappear, even after careful management improves a site’s conditions to the point that it again becomes suitable habitat.

While it seems that rare butterflies won’t automatically flock to a restored site as though to a dinner bell, translocations, closely integrated with a well-executed land management plan, physically place them in the few places they can still survive. As ecological restoration brings back more of these places in Chicago Wilderness, butterfly restoration can be expected to thrive as well. In northwest Indiana, Paul Labus of The Nature Conservancy has been reestablishing populations of the Karner blue at the Ivanhoe Dune and Swale Preserve near Hammond. This tiny blue butterfly, which is on the federal endangered species list, requires open oak woodlands with sandy soil where wild lupine grows, the only plant its caterpillars can eat.

In 1996, the butterfly disappeared from the site as a result of two separate wildfires. In both 2001 and 2002, wild-caught females from the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore were induced to lay eggs in the laboratory. Over 1,000 adults have been released on the site. The butterfly appears to be thriving and even spreading, possibly benefiting from reduced shade and healthier host plant populations that follow a fire. Some have even turned up on a second site a half-mile away.

The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum’s butterfly restoration program began in 2001, when we received a BP Leader Award of $100,000 to support the project. Since then, we have bred three species for restoration purposes. In addition to the metalmark, the Nature Museum placed about 50 silver-bordered fritillary caterpillars on violets at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in late summer 2002. Though they do not appear to have survived the unfavorable winter that followed, we gained valuable experience in rearing this species in the laboratory, producing over 500 chrysalids in three successive generations. In October 2003, we placed 75 Aphrodite fritillary larvae at Glacial Park in McHenry County. By July of 2004, we should know if they have established the beginnings of a population.

As for the swamp metalmarks, in July of 2003, we spotted the first adults. Numbers remain precariously small — we have seen but two adults to date. But we remain hopeful that they represent the beginnings of a long-term presence of this butterfly at the fen. Already in early spring of 2004, I am finding larvae in the rosettes of the swamp thistle that they feed on. It’s a small sign that this ornate butterfly could again sail over fens across Chicago Wilderness.

Doug Taron is curator of biology at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago and one of the founders of the Butterfly Monitoring Network in northeastern Illinois. He is a steward at Bluff Spring Fen Nature Preserve in Elgin.
Dune grass, prairie coneflower, and cottonwood slowly transform a sand dune at Indiana Dunes National Park.
You didn’t think it was possible to camp in Chicago Wilderness? It is. While it won’t rival some remote backcountry for seclusion, a night at one of the sites listed here can ease first-timers into camping, extend a day-hike into a weekend getaway, and provide some perspective on life.

Compiled by Alison Carney Brown

Into the Wild: Camping in Chicago Wilderness

Illinois & Michigan Canal, Will, Grundy, and LaSalle Counties
The 60-mile gravel I&M Canal Trail has both primitive and car camping sites spaced at regular intervals. Stage a multi-day biking, hiking, or canoe trip from these lightly used sites, or take a short drive to Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, or Des Plaines State Fish and Wildlife Area.

Consider the four hike-in tent sites at McKinley Woods in Channahon, a short path from the I&M Trail. The 473-acre preserve includes bluffs and deep ravines formed by glaciers, with 400 native plant species. Reservations must be made two weeks in advance, (815) 727-8700. Call the National Heritage Corridor Commission at (815) 586-6040 for the full list of I&M Trail sites.

Illinois Beach State Park, Zion, Illinois
Linger at dusk along the sandy ridges of Lake Michigan. Wake up to birdsong from the marsh.

Surrounded by the park’s ecologically rich 4,160 acres, the 244-site campground is a very popular car-camping destination. Call (847) 662-4811 for reservations.

Glacial Park, Ringwood, Illinois
North Shelter campground, at the 3,000-acre Glacial Park, is accessible only by canoe. Paddle the remodeled portion of the Nippersink Creek to the site. From there, paddle to three other Glacial Park landings or hike through broad grasslands. Call (815) 338-6223 for reservations.

Blackwell Forest Preserve, Warrenville, Illinois
Situated in a chain of forest preserves along the DuPage River, the 1,312-acre Blackwell Forest Preserve has 60 campsites. While enjoying the preserve’s seven miles of trails (connecting to the Illinois Prairie Path), try some birding at McKee Marsh. You can also rent a canoe at the 65-acre Silver Lake. For reservations, call (630) 933-7248.

Bliss Woods Forest Preserve, Sugar Grove, Illinois
Bliss Woods features 40 car-camping sites. Hike or bike the shady 12-mile Virgil L. Gilman Nature Trail that runs through the 330-acre preserve. Or check out the Kaneville Esker, with its rich oak-hickory woodland remnants—a good place to spend some time alone with your journal or sketchpad. Camping on weekends only; first come, first served. Call (630) 466-4182.

Indiana Dunes, Lake and Porter Counties, Indiana
Camp near dramatic Lake Michigan landscapes, fun dune hikes, and incredible plant diversity (see p. 22). A quick walk to the park’s general store and you’re enjoying the morning paper and a cup of coffee on the beach.

The National Lakeshore’s Dunewood Campground has 54 drive-in and 25 hike-in campsites, available April 1 through October 31. The Indiana Dunes State Park Campground in Chesterton, however, is closed this summer for renovations. Reservations not accepted. Call (219) 926-7561, ext. 225 for more information.

Camp for the Nature!
Camping can be a great way to experience the things that day-hikers miss. Take an evening stroll beyond the campsite to catch the sweet, minty scent of a wetland. Listen for night calls of animals you’ve never heard before. Or see an entire prairie jeweled with dewdrops in the early morning sun.

Roughing it Close to Home
A few things to consider when you’re camping within 30 minutes of eight million people:

- Make reservations. Popular spots such as the Dunes and Illinois Beach fill up fast.
- Aim for off-peak times to avoid crowds. (Spring and fall are beautiful, quiet times. Weekdays will be even better.)
- To get further from the fray, look for preserves with the smaller “hike-in” or “primitive” sites.

Camp Lightly on the Land
You’re unwinding in the company of some rich plant and animal communities. To minimize your impact:

- Use existing trails, campsites, and latrines.
- Leave plants and animals where you find them.
- Pack out everything you came with.
- For more Leave No Trace principles, visit www.LNT.org.

More Camping
For a longer list of campsites, visit chicagowildernessmag.org/camping.
ALONG THE DES PLAINES RIVER

in southeastern Wisconsin, the aptly named village of Pleasant Prairie borders a favorite rest stop for more than 220 species of birds. Dubbed “the most important wildlife preserve between Milwaukee and Interstate 94” by neighbor and Pleasant Prairie Parks Commissioner Glenn Christiansen, Des Plaines River Floodplain offers unique landforms and wild surprises around every bend.

Pleasant Prairie owns a patchwork of about 1,400 natural acres along the river. Some of the most interesting and diverse pockets surround the manicured Prairie Springs Park. Curious mounds known as hammocks can be found in several places northwest of the park, some laden with mature bur oaks, some with cherry trees. The largest hammock is approximately eight acres, while two others, separated from this dramatic landform by a swale, are closer to one acre in size.

Just west of the hammock area, beyond a dirt and gravel trail loop, lies an oxbow dating back to the 1890s, when the river carved a shortcut across alongside one of its meanders. Lady, wood, sensitive, and even a few royal ferns adorn the fertile crescent left when the river abandoned this bend. According to Steven Apfelbaum, senior research ecologist with Applied Ecological Services, “We found several hundred native plant species, some of the most magnificent sedge meadow and wet prairie, and small mesic prairie remnants.”

Northwest of the village park, visitors who follow River Road to its end will find a planted prairie as well as wetlands containing pockets of river bulrush for yellow-headed blackbirds, protective vegetation for young sandhill cranes, and acres of wild iris, water hemlock, angelica, marsh bellflower, bottle gentian, and Joe Pye weed. “I’ve run into everything from loggerhead shrikes to red-shouldered hawks, great egrets, and trumpeter and whistling swans,” says Christiansen. Some birders, he says, even weave their canoes through the trees during spring floods to catch the “beehive” of colorful birds in their binoculars. “Oddly enough, a person can run into a lot of bluebirds late in the summer when they start gathering to move after breeding, with as many as 60 to 70 in one tree.” In addition to the birds, 36 species of mammals, 13 species of amphibians, 5 species of turtles (including threatened Blanding’s turtles), and numerous fish have been documented in the floodplain. Eastern Butler garter snakes, western plains garters, and unusual snakes with markings of both are just a few of the 11 species of snakes recorded.

Visitors can hike, canoe, and fish the preserve from dawn to dusk. In most seasons, hikers should wear waterproof boots. Bicycling is limited to paved or gravel trails. Pets must be leashed. To volunteer, call John Steinbrink, Jr., (262) 694-1403.

—April Anderson
Into the Wild: Cook County

Hidden Pond Woods and Prairie

WHEN WE BOUGHT OUR HOME IN HICKORY HILLS, Illinois, 41 years ago, a prime attraction was its location half a block from Hidden Pond Woods, part of the enormous mosaic of Palos Preserves in southwestern Cook County. As our four children and their friends grew up, they found it to be a great place to play. Now, years later, it is a place where we often play, even though, as the volunteer stewards of this site, we call it "going to workdays."

The southern half of the roughly 160-acre Hidden Pond Woods and Prairie Forest Preserve is comprised of oak woodland encircled by small wetlands. These woods, south of the parking lot, are a joy in the spring, when ephemeral wildflowers cover the ground in many areas.

In the northern half, fragmented mesic and wet prairie fights for its life against invasive plant species. The prairie is divided into segments by dogwood, hawthorn, buckthorn, and green ash. Removing them over the 12 years since restoration began here has been like working on a giant jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes after a workday, we just stand and enjoy the new view of the prairie created by joining the pieces back together. This past spring, a Forest Preserve District crew, joined by volunteers, burned the central prairies for the first time in nine years. With any luck, the prairie this summer will be a burst of flowers, including rough blazing star, stiff goldenrod, Turk's cap lily, and gray-headed coneflower. Visit in late August through early September for the best displays.

Visitors can find the preserve's namesake "hidden pond," a small glacial kettle naturally filling in with vegetation, tucked into the woods not far from the parking lot. A summer walk north along the east side of the pond is a good way to enjoy ducks and dragonflies, including the eastern amberwing and ruby meadowhawk. Continue north to join the footpath that leads into another grove of cool woods, where summer visitors might see bottlebrush grass, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and green dragon. Emerging into the warmer and more humid prairie, look for the occasional Baptisia duskywing butterfly on its host plant, wild white indigo, and notice the roll of the ground off in the distance. Rattlesnake master, ironweed, and spiderwort grow here along the trail. Occasional brushpiles and newly cleared ground indicate areas where we're encouraging this prairie community to reestablish itself. Visitors not wanting to cross a periodically wet ditch can return by the same path.

At Hidden Pond, we monitor plants, birds, butterflies, and dragonflies to see if our work is increasing species and numbers from year to year. Students from local elementary schools, high school ecology clubs, and college earth science classes study and help out on the site. We also produce our own newsletter, called The Other Side of Kean, for residents on the east side of Kean Avenue. For more information, call us at (708) 598-2234, or send e-mail to palosrestor@comcast.net.

—Roger and Cara Keller

At a Glance

THE SCENE Oak woodland dotted with wetland to the south. Mesic and wet prairie to the north

HIGHLIGHTS Recently burned central prairie expected to be at height of bloom in late August, secluded pond

SIZE: 160 acres, 2.5-mile loop trail (including multi-use trails on three sides and sidewalk along Kean Ave)

BEHIND THE SCENES Thriving volunteer group with newsletter, Monitoring, workdays. Workdays are held on third Saturday of every month at 9 a.m.

GETTING THERE From I-55, exit on Rte 45 (Larkin Rd) south. Turn left/east on 95th St, continue 0.25 miles to Kean Ave, turn left/north to 94th St. The entrance to Hidden Pond is on the west side of Kean.
Into the Wild: Weekend Explorer
The Indiana Dunes  by Ron Trigg

"It sure doesn't seem like Indiana," said the lone hiker as I approached him on a high dune ridge. Indeed it did not. Before us shimmered the blue waters of a great freshwater sea; behind us towered a deep green forest. Not a single Hoosier cornfield in sight.

Great views are just one of the attractions awaiting those who visit the Indiana Dunes. Its sandy beaches have drawn Chicagoans for decades, but this is far more than just a playground for city dwellers. The 15,000 acres of natural and recreational land comprising Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and Indiana Dunes State Park offer an astonishing diversity of landscapes and natural communities.

Plant ecologist Noel Pavlovic, who has been studying the Dunes for 20 years, says it is one of the richest places for plant diversity in the Midwest. "Indiana Dunes ranks seventh of all National Parks in native plant species richness," he says. "About 1135 native plants have been identified, including 26 percent of all plants considered rare in Indiana." And with almost 45 miles of hiking trails, all this is within easy reach of most visitors. Where else can a short stroll take one past cactus, birch trees, and prairie grasses, all in their natural settings?

Miller Woods in Gary is the western gateway to the National Lakeshore. It may be the purest bit of duneland topography in the park, featuring rolling oak savanna with interspersed ponds. Waterfowl, herons, and egrets regularly visit the ponds, and visitors may see signs of beaver and muskrat activity. The prickly pear cacti bloom in June, and prairie wildflowers—blazing star, goldenrod, aster, ironweed—take over in late summer. The most enchanting time to visit, however, may be September, when the gentians and ladies' tresses orchids put on their annual show.

Visitors can find some of the National Lakeshore's best trails at Cowles Bog, located near the town of Dune Acres. The main loop includes plenty of ups and downs as it leads past wetlands, through heavy forest of maple, birch, and pine trees, and over high dunes to a secluded beach. Turk's cap lily, wild bergamot, and butterfly weed are among the summer beauties to be found here, and the woods are filled with a great variety of colorful mushrooms—puffball, sulphur shelf, death angel. Visitors may also happen across a hog nose snake, a fascinating nonvenomous serpent that hoods blowouts, deep woods, and wetlands.

The dune ridge on Trail 9 offers the best lake views. Look for bank swallows nesting in holes on the steep sides of blowouts, and six-lined racerunner lizards skittering across the sand. Pilated woodpeckers—generally accepted as North America's largest woodpecker—also famously inhabit these woods.

Roaming

Why not take a refreshing dip in Lake Michigan while in the area? The Dunes parks offer swimming at eight public beaches. West Beach and Dunes State Park are the most popular, but both charge access fees. The six lesser-known beaches have limited facilities, but, with free parking, they offer a better deal.

Perhaps the best summer wildflower display in the area is at Chesterton's Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve, a privately owned 167-acre natural area that is open to the public. Its three-mile loop trail meanders through a shady woodland, along the banks of a swift-flowing creek, and through a restored prairie where visitors might count more than 30 species in bloom in midsummer.

Pinhook Bog, located several miles southeast of the rest of the National Lakeshores, features quaking earth (dense mats of vegetation floating on water) and rare carnivorous plants like sundew and pitcher plant. Visits to this fragile environment are limited to guided tours, scheduled throughout the summer at 9 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays and 9:30 a.m. on Sundays. Call (219) 926-7561 for reservations.

Many bicycling opportunities exist in the area. The nine-mile Calumet Trail parallels the southern boundary of the Dunes parks from Cowles Bog to Mount Baldy. A little farther south is the DuneLand Prairie Trail, 11 paved miles from Chesterton westward to
Foraging
After a day of exploration, head to historic downtown Chesterton for alfresco dining. Lucrezia Café at 428 S. Calumet Road, (219) 926-5829, offers authentic Italian cuisine, and Popolano's Restaurant at 225 S. Calumet Road, (219) 926-5552, has good family fare.

If you come on a Saturday morning, stop at the outdoor European Market on Broadway for gourmet treats and fresh produce.

The Miller section of Gary features fine dining at Miller Bakery Café at 555 Lake Street, (219) 938-2229. Another nearby option is Café 444 at 444 Lake Street, (219) 939-0444; its eclectic menu, with French, Asian, and Mexican influences, is offered in a casual setting.

Bedding Down
Comfortable lodging options include Indian Oak Resort & Spa, at 558 Indian Boundary Road in Chesterton, (800) 552-4232, $70–$120 per night, and Spring House Inn, 303 Mineral Springs Road in Porter, (219) 929-4600, $79–$109 per night. For the local bed-and-breakfast experience, try Dunes Shore Inn in Beverly Shores, (219) 879-9029, $42–$75 per night, or Gray Goose Inn in Chesterton, (800) 521-5127, $90–$185 per night.

With the State Park campground closed for renovation all summer, camping opportunities will be limited in the Dunes this year, but Dunewood Campground at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore has 79 sites. Call (219) 926-7561, ext. 225, for reservations.

At a Glance
THE SCENE A national park surrounding a state park, featuring beach, high dunes, woodlands, wetlands, prairie, and savanna
HIGHLIGHTS Incredible plant diversity, great lake views, a rare quaking bog, birding and wildlife-viewing opportunities
STATE Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore: about 13,000 acres. Indiana Dunes State Park: 2,782 acres.
GETTING THERE From I-94, exit at State Rd 49 north, which ends at Indiana Dunes State Park. For the National Lakeshore Visitor Center, turn right/east on U.S. 12 before reaching the State Park. All Dunes destinations mentioned are easily accessible from U.S. 12.

Events
Gaelic Festival
June 19, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. at Sunset Hill County Park in Valparaiso. $5 fee (children 8 and under free).

Swedish Midsummer Festival
June 27, 12–4 p.m. at Chellberg Farm. Free. Call the National Lakeshore at (219) 926-7561.

Sand Sculpture Contest
July 10 at Indiana Dunes State Park. Registration begins at 9 a.m. Free with park admission ($8 per out-of-state car, $4 in-state). Call (219) 926-1390.

Chesteron Art Fair
August 7–8, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. at Hawthorne Park in Porter. $5 admission. Call (219) 926-4711.

Owl Night Hike
August 14, 7 p.m. at Indiana Dunes State Park. Free with park admission. Call (219) 926-1390.

Want to know more?
For more information and links to all of the natural and cultural destinations mentioned here, please visit us at chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/summer2004/weekenderexplorer.html.
BIRDERS HAVE LONG KNOWN
Paul Douglas Forest Preserve for its grassland birds. Located in the northwestern corner of Cook County in Hoffman Estates, the 1,800-acre parcel of former cropland has large stretches of treeless territory for birds to breed in, free from the danger of hidden raptors.

But since the restoration of a large wetland near Poplar Creek three years ago, many open-wetland species can now also call the preserve home. Pied-billed grebes (see page 27), state-threatened ruddy ducks, and state-endangered yellow-headed blackbirds have returned to nest in this newly resurrected habitat. Nesting platforms erected in the marsh at the south end of the preserve have attracted a dozen or more great blue heron pairs.

In fall of 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County completed the first stage of this project, installing a water control structure on a tributary of Poplar Creek. The device was designed in part to mimic the effect that beaver dams provided some years and not others. Since the marsh would frequently dry up, vegetation wasn't able to establish itself, and neither were nesting wetland birds. The Forest Preserve District can now raise and lower water levels as needed to mimic the optimal conditions for this "hemi-marsh" (a marsh where plants are interspersed with open water).

Since the structure's completion, the wetland has started to recover, and native plants (including some sedges from the seedbank) have returned.

According to local birder Carolyn Fields, the preserve's main wetland with its heron rookery is close to the parking lot, making it a convenient and popular spot to see numerous wetland birds (visitors should stay at least a few hundred feet from the rookery during nesting season, March through midsummer). But those who want more immersion should head northwest of the main wetland, to one of the preserve's larger grasslands. Here, bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, sedge wrens, and Henslow's and savannah sparrows forage and nest in the grasses and goldenrod. With a little luck, a visitor may spot a coyote hunting in one of these fields. During the winter months, this is a good location to find rough-legged hawks, northern harriers, and the occasional northern shrike.

For a break from the summer sun, head toward one of the wooded areas surrounding the grassland. Majestic oaks, up to 100 years old, provide a home to raccoons, great-horned owls, and songbirds. Look for remnants of the old farming days along the way: aging fence posts and barbed wire, overgrown with vegetation, are scattered across the preserve along with some interesting old farm equipment.

The preserve was named after Paul H. Douglas, an Illinois senator and conservation hero who fought for land preservation in the 1950s and helped to preserve the Indiana Dunes. It is open daily one hour after sunrise to one hour after sunset. All trails are unmarked. Contact the Forest Preserve Volunteer Resource Center at (773) 631-1790 for volunteering opportunities.

—Thomas Bentley
Into the Wild: Summer 2004

Natural Events

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

Early Summer

UNARMED TREE HUGGER Black rat snakes are our most arboreal serpents. With bodies adapted to climbing trees, they can move up the craggy trunks of oaks with little effort. Naturally, the early summer diet of these constrictors includes a high percentage of fledgling downy woodpeckers. On the ground, these big, black snakes move slowly, deliberately, in a straight manner.

Black rat snakes were often called pilot black snakes in the older field guides. These great snakes live in Will County, and a few may still live in rural parts of northwest Indiana.

THRASHIN' Fledgling brown thrashers shouldn’t worry about long falls from the nest. Most nests of this species are built low to the ground, a few feet high, often within tangled vines and thorny thickets. Low nests allow the parents to remain close to the young as they forage through the leaf litter. The male is a tenacious defender of the nest and its young occupants.

Middle Summer

QUEEN OF THE PRAIRIE Queen of the prairie is an appropriately named flower. During midsummer, her blossoms are a cluster of pink buds and poofy flowers. A close-up view of the tiny flowers show five little pink petals, with long, white stamens capped with deep pink anthers. Exquisite! The queen is rare in our land—endangered in Illinois, her reign is restricted to a handful of scattered, springy calcareous fens.

YOUNG COOTS I learned at an early age not to mess with old coots, those interesting-looking water birds that paddle through our marshes with large, lobed feet. They live as a nuclear family, with mom and dad sharing the parental responsibilities throughout the summer. Two friends and I were swimming in the back slough of Bakers Lake, when we abruptly came across a coot family sitting on a wet platform in the reeds. The female and her highly precocious "cootlets" scattered, while the protective father flashed his blood-red eyes, shook his wings, and let loose a long, throaty hiss. We made a hasty retreat to shore.

GO ASK ALICE It’s no secret that rabbits breed prolifically throughout the summer months. Some of our female rabbits will give birth to 15 young this year. And many females born this summer will themselves be giving birth by fall. Even so, rabbits don’t lead an enviable life. From birth, they are targets of predators, 24/7. Most eastern cottontails don’t survive two summers in the wilderness. I remember making the argument in college that rabbits might actually dash in front of cars for recreational purposes, as a way to relieve stress from their lives.

During the summer growing season, cottontails find an interesting way to get more nutrients from green plants. They eat—and digest—their food twice, by eating their own feces. This practice is known as coprophagy.

Late Summer

ALL THE YOUNG NEWTS Newt babies are 5/16ths of an inch when they hatch from gelatinous eggs in early summer. Fish-free ponds are the safest places to live if you’re developing salamander. Young newts will spend the next few months swimming about the pond, passing, tadpole-like, through its larval stage. By fall, they may transform into the mysterious creature, the red eft.

Efts, as crossword puzzle aficionados know, are the land (not water) stage of the newt. While scientists have found newt eggs, larvae, and aquatic adults in Chicago Wilderness, they almost never find the mysterious eft stage, prompting speculation that our newts don’t become efts. In recent years, however, efts have been found in DuPage and Cook Counties.
Bobby Garro Sutton: drawing connections to nature

On his way to a science class at the University of Chicago, Bobby Garro Sutton looked up and saw a bird of prey perched in a parkway tree. An undergraduate studying art and Spanish literature, Sutton couldn’t identify the species. So he rushed to class to tell his professor, who brought in a field guide. When Sutton identified the bird as a Cooper’s hawk, he said to himself, "I’d like to see those every day." For the native of Hyde Park in Chicago, now age 40, this was the start of a long process of getting closer to nature through art.

As a youngster, Sutton made comics to sell to friends. He painted temporary murals on the rock walls at Promontory Point along Chicago’s southern lakefront. For a while he even dabbled in tattoos. After high school, Sutton became a certified pipe fitter and worked in construction. After spending some time in Rome, where he took art history classes at the American University, he decided to fulfill a promise to himself, and he returned to enroll at the University of Chicago.

In 1996, Sutton sought a summer internship with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Working with a restoration crew in natural areas around the county, he learned firsthand about many more creatures that inspired him. In his downtime, Sutton began making botanical drawings of wildflowers. "Drawing something is my personal way of acknowledging something sacred about it," he says in a quiet, patient voice.

Since then, Sutton has helped with restoration at numerous preserves, most recently with the North Branch Restoration Project, close to his current home near the Chicago River. He also volunteers with Mighty Acorns, taking children on trips to natural areas. Working as a pipe fitter for part of the year allows Sutton to devote the rest of his time to his art, as well as to roam the countryside of Peru, his mother’s homeland.

Through such experiences, the natural world has become more and more prominent in Sutton’s paintings and drawings. He often sits for hours in the forest preserves to draw, sometimes revisiting a single plant many times over the course of weeks to see how it has changed. His projects range from seasonal sketches of volunteers restoring Paintbrush Prairie to elaborate ink depictions of cosmically interconnected ecosystems. He often creates pieces for specific events, such as the portrait of the late conservationist Deb Petro (CW, Summer ’03) he recently unveiled at a workday held in her memory.

There’s also the cabinet-like diorama, called a retablo, that he brought to a Somme Woods workday a few years ago. "Each side of it relates to a different part of nature and a different cardinal direction," Sutton says, explaining how the forest preserve volunteers used the retablo’s symbolism, based on Oglala Indian beliefs, to explore the forces at work in natural-arear restoration. The south side, painted yellow, symbolized growth. The west was black, for thunder and rain, the powers of destruction and of making good. For the volunteers, it also symbolized fire, a natural process that allows for new growth. "And north is white," says Sutton. "That’s the cleansing wind, the great white giant."

The last side, the east, was red, symbolizing the “herb of understanding” and the way conservationists often must learn by “sitting on a log, looking at the plants, and trying to understand what the plants are trying to say.”

Ben LeFort

Sutton is currently a resident artist at the Chicago Printmakers Collaborative. He has illustrated several past articles for Chicago WILDERNESS.

Visit BobbyGarroSutton.com and see page 30 in this issue to view more of his illustrations.
Pied-billed Grebe: diver in laughing waters

Each summer, my sister and I visit Black Tern Marsh in McHenry, Illinois, to look for a certain small wetland bird. Quite often, we see its diminutive pied-billed grebe (Podilymbus podiceps) and several of its even more diminutive, stripe-backed young, cruising the Fox River backwaters in July or August. We can’t help exclaiming “Isn’t that cute!” as the chicks cling to mom’s back or parade so closely that they seem glued to her body.

Pardon the fawning, but everything about this bird is cute, from the way it looks to the way it behaves. Well, almost everything.

When this species goes a-courting, it issues a loud and maniacal call from the wetlands, usually at dawn and dusk. It’s as if the wetlands were laughing.

If males are defending territory, they’ll call with their heads held high and their bills turned up—but their bodies turned away from their challenger. The song is their defense, as well as their ticket to a lady’s love.

The pied-billed is the only grebe species that regularly nests in Illinois, and its largest breeding populations statewide are in the Chicago Wilderness region. It also breeds across Wisconsin and in some portions of Indiana. This species needs good-quality marshes for successful reproduction, and many conservationists restoring local wetlands have been encouraged by the quick return of grebes to these previously disturbed sites. The Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board recently recommended their removal from the state threatened list because of increasing populations.

The pied-billed has a brown body, black throat, a stout, chicken-like, light-colored bill with a black ring on it, and a short, barely noticeable tail. Its feet are set so far back on its body that it waddles awkwardly on land. But give it some room to swim and the pied-billed grebe is like a fish in the ocean. Those well-placed feet, like those of the loon, help the grebe dive to 20 feet quickly and expertly. It can stay underwater for at least 30 seconds, often emerging far from where it submerged, giving observers a bit of a chuckle, if not a bit of a conundrum.

The grebe dives to find aquatic invertebrates, crustaceans such as crayfish, small fish, adult and larval amphibians, and occasionally aquatic plants. To help digest those critters, the grebe regularly plucks and eats its own feathers to line its stomach.

The pied-billed grebe also dives to escape intruders, such as hawks, or sinks into the water until only its eyes and bill are visible. One of the few diving birds with this ability, it can cruise like an avian submarine, complete with periscope, until it’s safe to surface.

During the nesting season, birders may see grebes with what looks like seaweed dripping from their mouths—that’s nesting material. The female anchors a floating nest of decaying wetland vegetation to living greenery so that it blends with the wetland scenery. When an intruder approaches, the adult grebe covers the eggs and slips beneath the water.

The pair takes turns incubating their four or five eggs, and in about 28 days the young hatch and immediately climb onto the adult’s back to get their first bird’s-eye view of the water. Within days, they are swimming with their parents and learning how to dive. Come September and October, small flocks of pied-billed grebes congregate on lakes and marshes before flying as far south as Panama, leaving only the memory of laughing waters in Chicago Wilderness wetlands.

— Sheryl De Vore

A young pied-billed grebe with its distinctive striping.

Photo: Jim Flynn/Root Resources
Summer hikers will stop in their tracks when they come across the prairie lily, **Lilium philadelphicum**, typically in the very finest prairies. Illinois naturalist Virginia S. Effert certainly took notice: “Blindingly, the morning sun strikes that vivid blossom,” she wrote, “and the light rays bounce off the brilliance so that the flower almost seems to hold an aura of light around it.” North American Indians noticed another kind of aura around the plant; they called it *mnahe ha*, meaning “very smelly flower,” for its pungent scent.

The prairie lily's deep orange-red, purple-spotted flowers spread gracefully upward from a slender base at the top of the stem, unlike the downward-facing flower of the similar but more common Turk's cap lily. Though the flower appears to have six orange petals, every alternating “petal” is actually an orange sepal (a protective covering that is green on most other plants but mimics the petal color in all members of the genus *Lilium*). A long style emerges from the center of the flower, surrounded by six long stamens with purple-brown anthers poised at the tips. Usually between one and three feet tall, the prairie lily has one or two whorls of leaves at the top of the stem, with alternate leaves below. By August, the flower ripens into a three-chambered capsule that bears rows of seeds stacked like Pringles chips.

The prairie lily usually blooms from mid-June to mid-July in our area, growing in rich, moderately moist to moist prairies and sandy oak savannas. Some of its usual neighbors are dropseed grass, purple prairie clover, and lead plant. In *Plants of the Chicago Region*, botanists Floyd Swink and Gerald Wilhelm pinpoint populations “in magnificent grandeur along the swale margins at Illinois Beach State Park after a prairie burn.” Previous botanists have recorded the prairie lily in most of the Chicago-region counties, although Swink and Wilhelm have seen specimens from only three counties and consider it to be a very rare tallgrass prairie species.

Two varieties of *Lilium philadelphicum* cover, between them, most of North America. From Ohio west to British Columbia and New Mexico spreads the *andinum* variety, commonly called the prairie lily, western lily, or Rocky Mountain lily. It is the true prairie species found in Chicago Wilderness (and happens to be the floral emblem of Saskatchewan). The *philadelphicum* variety, known as the wood lily, ranges from Maine to Quebec and south to North Carolina and Kentucky. While the two varieties differ slightly in leaf width, capsule length, and habitu preference, they are difficult for most casual botanists to tell apart.

Because *Lilium philadelphicum* has such a wide geographical range, it has lots of other common names, including fire lily, flame lily, freckled lily, red lily, orange cup lily, glade lily, and wild tiger lily. Indians also called it “mouse lily” because mice (and even porcupines) often dug up and ate the bulb.

—Patricia K. Armstrong
Test Your Wilderness IQ!

Answers on reverse side.

What is the official bird of the city of Chicago?

What are the three species that had been lost from the region but have been restored?

What animal makes tracks like the ones typed out below?

On the average plowed Midwestern farm field, how many bushels of topsoil are eroded away for each bushel of soybeans produced?

What is one way nature ensures geese will take care of their goslings?

How many species of native bees live in the Chicago region?

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The Natural Facts

The peregrine falcon, elected by popular vote in 1999. This raptor originally nested on cliffs and tall, dead, craggy trees, but now most often nests on tall buildings.

The beaver, peregrine falcon, and Mead’s milkweed have all returned to call Chicago Wilderness home.

Those are mink tracks! As this long, sinuous animal bounds ahead, its back feet land in the same spot as its front feet, leaving widely spaced pairs of tracks.

Three bushels of soil are lost for each bushel of beans produced.

New goose parents drop all of their flight feathers at once, and are grounded for the time needed to raise the goslings to flight.

Nearly 300 bee species. They range from black-and-yellow to hairy metallic blue-green.

These and many other fascinating facts can be found in the pages of Chicago WILDERNESS magazine.

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Thismia americana:
a mystery that still haunts—and helps—the Calumet region

Avenue in Chicago to collect plants to show her students. She saw the tiny pearl of a Thismia flower in moist soil shaded by goldenrod, swamp milkweed, irises, and black-eyed Susans. She brought back a specimen, which stumped the university botany faculty, so Pfeiffer wrote her dissertation on the little plant, becoming the school’s youngest Ph.D. in 1914. She collected specimens for five seasons, linking the little flower to a family of non-chlorophyll plants from rainforests of the Southern Hemisphere. Thismia’s nearest relative, the fairy lantern, grows only in Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania; but Thismia americana has never been found outside the Calumet area. How such an isolated population arrived here remains a mystery.

No one has seen a living Thismia americana since 1916. In 1949, from her post at a plant research institute in New York, Pfeiffer sent Field Museum botanist Julian Streymark a map, but his subsequent search with six eminent colleagues amongst the mosses and goldenrod around Lake Calumet was unsuccessful. The original site of Pfeiffer’s discovery was developed some years later, and is now covered by fill.

In the early 1990s, ecologists George Johnson and Linda Masters called out the botanical equivalent of a posse for four summers running. After identifying 22 likely sites near the original prairie, they sent volunteers searching for a plant most of them had never seen. They prepared by scrutinizing a ghostly photograph of a specimen, ethereal and translucent—the Shroud of Turin of a vanished flower. They held clay models created by the staff artist at the Morton Arboretum. And they handled small beads, pea-sized and white to imitate Thismia blossoms, which were then scattered on four sites to test the likelihood that even a careful search would uncover the small flowers.

Though in just that first weekend, volunteers catalogued 17 species not previously known to the Calumet area—helping to build consensus in opposition to a proposed Calumet airport—they found no Thismia at all. Intriguingly, they also found no beads, until a few volunteers were told exactly where to look. Even then, many of the beads remained lost.

The possibility of Thismia’s discovery also added an undertone of excitement to the Calumet BioBlitz in 2002 (CW, Fall ’02), as 150 scientists combed the area feverishly to catalogue species. Others have searched, alone and in groups, but none have succeeded.

Still, by their very existence, Thismia and thousands of other rare species here have inspired the public to preserve critical pockets of biological richness in one of the Midwest’s most intriguing places. Organizations ranging from The Field Museum to the Wolf Lake Initiative hold Calumet workdays, events, and meetings to promote the restoration of key areas. The City of Chicago plans to preserve parts of the Calumet area as an ecological sanctuary.

And this year, a pair of bald eagles, a sight absent from the region for even longer than Thismia, attempted to nest here.

Masters still holds out hope that Thismia may survive in an isolated colony: “I like to think Thismia americana is still out there.”

—Ryan Chew
Jerry Sullivan, a lifelong naturalist and lover of the wild realms of Chicago Wilderness, had a profound impact on conservation in this region. A gifted interpreter and author of the Chicago Wilderness Atlas of Biodiversity, Sullivan probably was known most widely for the Field & Street column he wrote for more than ten years in the Chicago Reader. This was his forum for sharing with city folks his passion for exploring and restoring nature.

When Sullivan died of cancer in 2000, his wife, Glenda Daniel, asked people to direct gifts in his memory to Chicago Wilderness. The ensuing donations from Sullivan’s friends and colleagues led to a fitting tribute: a book. Released in April from the University of Chicago Press in association with the Chicago Wilderness coalition, Hunting for Frogs on Elston, and Other Tales From Field & Street is a stirring compilation of Sullivan’s best columns.

The book is full of the warmly self-deprecating and instructive humor that Sullivan was known for. He takes the reader on adventures that range from snake hunting (“To get a better look at the ground I walked bent at the waist, and I lifted my feet so high between steps that I looked like a man trying to see if there was dog s-t on the sole of his shoes”) to searching for firefly larvae in his garden (“I haven’t found any yet, but I will keep looking — at least until the neighbors start complaining about this weird man who spends half the night crawling around his backyard shining a flashlight on his tomato plants”).

The hopeful result of Frogs is that Sullivan will continue to inspire readers long after his passing. "...I think we desire to learn things in order to make some sense of the world," he wrote in 1997. "When we look at nature we can be overwhelmed by all the simultaneous stimuli that hit us. There are so many different kinds of plants, and while we try to sort them out, grasshoppers are leaping about and butterflies are fluttering by and dragonflies are zooming past and birds are calling. To the extent that we can sort out all these impressions, we alienated, atomized, postmodern people can feel at home, connected to something beyond ourselves."

— Don Parker
Hunting for Frogs on Elston Avenue

On the evening of May 5, I went along with a party of six frog surveyors whose territory is the northwest side of Chicago and adjacent suburbs. Party is the right word here. You put seven people in a van and send them in search of frogs along Elston Avenue, and a certain hilarity is almost bound to result....

We started at North Park Village, where American toads were trilling in the marshy pond near the nature center....

We got our second species, the western chorus frog, at stop number four, the northeast corner of LaBagh Woods Forest Preserve....

Once we turned onto Elston Avenue, our chances of hearing frogs dropped to about zero. One of our stops was right in front of the secretary of state's driver testing facility, where, needless to say, we heard no frogs. Since the secretary of state will be up for reelection soon, we might consider asking him just what he plans to do about reintroducing a healthy amphibian population to his branch offices.

We didn't hear another frog until the last stop on our itinerary, a forest preserve north of Oakton Street along the North Branch of the Chicago River. These were chorus frogs again, and we sat along the roadside to enjoy the music. Our presence attracted the police, but after one of us offered the sensible explanation that we were counting frogs, the policeman drove off, his expression suggesting that we were nuts but probably harmless nuts.

How to Find Nests

Give birds enough time, and they will show you their nests. In years past I couldn't fully appreciate this truth because I didn't know how to approach the birds, how to persuade them to reveal their secrets. Looking back I realize that what I thought of as nest hunting was really mostly random wandering and aimless staring. I may have thought I was searching diligently, but mostly I was standing around hoping a bird would walk by carrying a nest....

Sitting down and shutting up turns out to be the secret of nest finding. It's a learnable skill....

I spent over two hours hanging around one little patch of ground watching and listening to [a male blue-winged warbler], but I knew that my chances of finding the nest were slim. Blue-wings nest down in the brush where things are dense, and their nests are only three or four inches across.

But I watched and listened and sat still until the male landed on one of his singing perches with a caterpillar in his beak. This was the break I needed. I watched him fly into a narrow strip of trees and brush and then walked to a place about 20 yards from the strip and sat down to watch. Presently he flew up from the base of a tall tree. I figured he had just fed the female on the nest, and since I didn't have a very clear idea of where he had been down in the brush around the tree, I waited. After about 15 minutes he was back. I saw him emerge from the brush a few yards from the trees. I walked over and started to search....I saw a flash of movement in the brush. It was the female leaving the nest. Just under the crown of leaves of a buckthorn sprout, I saw a few brown dead leaves. I remembered that the field guides said that blue-winged warblers use dead leaves as a foundation for their nests. I parted the crown of live leaves, and there was the nest. Three tiny eggs no more than three-fourths of an inch long were inside. I took a good look at them and then got the hell out so the birds could get back to their parental duties. I danced down the trail back to my car.

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Broad-based Coalition Forms to Restore Land Acquisition Cuts

In crafting his 2005 budget, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich proposed a one-year “holiday” from funding the Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) and Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) programs. Since 1989, when the General Assembly added $1 to the real estate transfer tax and dedicated half to support these programs, park and conservation districts all across the state have been able to match state dollars with their own to protect high-quality natural areas and wildlife habitat. In addition, a portion of these funds supports the state’s Natural Heritage Program, the Endangered Species Program, and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). The governor’s proposed cuts, which amount to approximately $32 million, would force the layoff of about 49 professional biologists and ecologists.

Currently the INPC protects 319 nature preserves in 79 counties and 106 land and water reserves in 48 counties. The majority of these are in Chicago Wilderness.

During each of the past five fiscal years, the value of private land protected under INPC programs has exceeded the INPC annual budget. In 2003, for instance, with a $1.2 million budget, the INPC dedicated $2.9 million of private land for protection in perpetuity.

The governor’s proposal prompted an immediate outcry from park districts, forest preserve districts, environmental organization, sportsmen, cyclists, and many others across the state. Soon a new coalition called Partners for Parks and Wildlife had formed (see partnersforparkswildlife.org), and more than 100 groups swiftly signed on to seek restoration of these dedicated funds.

The Illinois Association of Park Districts held a lobby day in the Capitol on Earth Day, April 22, drawing people from across the state to meet with legislators. Efforts to restore funding for these popular and critically important programs drew widespread bipartisan support.

As this issue went to press, the fate of the dedicated funds for OSLAD and NAAF remained uncertain. To check on the final status of the 2005 budget and get updates on this funding issue, visit ilenviro.org.

Debra Shore

Bald Eagles Back

Call it the “Eyrie Canal.” In early March, employees of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago taking samples along the Little Calumet River made a startling discovery. A large stick nest, or “eyrie,” had been built in a tree along the shore.

Soon employees of surrounding industrial companies became aware of a pair of bald eagles in the vicinity. The story quickly hit the press that eagles were nesting in the Chicago region for the first time in more than a century (the last recorded nesting was in the Indiana Dunes in 1897).

Since that time, the eagles have disappeared from the nest. According to John Rogner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this indicates that the birds probably have not laid eggs. Once the female bald eagle begins laying eggs, she and the male take turns continuously incubating them in the nest for about five weeks. The pair has not been spotted in the area since the end of April.

Walter Marcia, a native of the area and an experienced birder, thinks the eagles may have left because they are a young couple, not because of human interference. Bald eagles are often unsuccessful at their first nesting attempt, and these birds reportedly had some brown still on the white plumage of their heads, an indication that they are four to five years old (the age when breeding begins).

If given enough quietude and healthy habitat, bald eagles may become a more common occurrence in the Chicago Wilderness. After all, mated pairs can breed for decades and usually return to the same nest site year after year.

Dan Spencer

Stellar Spring Burn Season

“Overall, this was by far the best burn season in ten years,” said Drew Ullberg, director of planning and development for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County.

Taking advantage of several weeks of dry weather this past spring, forest preserve districts burned almost 6,000 acres. While high winds sometimes precluded the usual spring focus on grasslands, crews shifted to woodlands that they were unable to burn last fall due to cool, damp conditions.

Alison Carney Brown

Illinois Updates Endangered Species List

In February, the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board announced changes to the Illinois endangered and threatened species lists, the first since 1999. The revisions include many species found in Chicago Wilderness.

The river otter and three birds—the red-shouldered hawk, pied-billed grebe, and brown creeper—have been removed from the threatened species list due to increased populations. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ program to reintroduce the otter has been so successful that the mammal is beginning to expand its range beyond the original areas of reintroduction. The red-shouldered hawk, like other raptors, has benefited from reductions in DDT levels.
in the environment. Its population is
estimated to be twice as large as it was
in 1977, when the hawk was first listed.

The Henslow's sparrow and the peregrine falcon, two birds found in the
Chicago region, have been moved from the
dangered to the threatened list. The Henslow's sparrow has benefited
in part from the federal Conservation
Reserve Program, in which farmers set
aside cropland, partly as habitat, for peri-
ods of 10 to 15 years. The peregrine fal-
ccon has made a comeback since 1985,
when the state began to reintroduce the
birds. From 1990 to 2003, the population
has increased from one to ten breeding
pairs. So far, the raptors nest exclusively
in buildings and other urban structures.

Biologists also have located a tiny fish,
the Iowa darter, in several new locations
in northern Illinois, prompting its move
from endangered to threatened status.

On the plant side, the board added
the sedge Carex formosa to the endan-
gered list. In this case, the listing was
a positive sign; the plant had been
unknown in Illinois until citizen-sci-
entists Jane and John Balaban discovered
it in a Cook County forest preserve.
Buffalo clover, moved from endangered
to threatened status, has been recovering
now that the savanna communities it
lives in are getting the controlled burns
they need. Though it hasn't been seen in
Chicago Wilderness since 1947, conserva-
tionists hope that the plant will spring
up here from seeds left in the soil.

There are many other species in
Illinois, however, that are in decline.
The cerulean warbler has been added
to the threatened list, as well as the
Franklin's ground squirrel. Once com-
mon across the state, the squirrel is now
confined to a few small colonies.

The board's revisions must undergo a
review process, scheduled for completion
in fall, before they become final. To view
the full revised list, visit dnr.state.il.us/
espb/datelist.htm.

—Lucy Elam

5 Threatened Prairie Buttercup
Discovered in Kane County
June Keibler discovered the state-threat-
ened prairie buttercup (Ranunculus
rhomboideus) while conducting a routine
restoration burn in Kane County last
April. Though this rare native plant has
been found in other Illinois counties,
News of the wild

this is the first sighting in Kane County.

Keibler has been a volunteer conservationist for more than 20 years and is a part-owner of an ecological restoration business, Witness Tree Native Landscapes. She and other volunteers were burning on land recently brought under restoration as part of the Dundee Township Open Space program. "When this area was first saved, we had no idea it was so ecologically significant," she says. "Every time we burn up there, another species comes back."

While preparing to ignite a patch of scrub, Keibler caught sight of some bright yellow blooms. "I knew right away it was prairie buttercup because I'd seen them in another prairie area," she says. So far, Keibler and her husband, Steve, have counted 24 individual plants in the area. Found in dry prairie areas, this native plant has hairy stems and five-petaled yellow flowers. Sky blue aster, shooting stars, and droopseed are often found growing around it and were also present at the site in Kane County.

—Viveka Neveln

6 Chicago Wilderness Educator Named Teacher of the Year

Deborah Perryman, an environmental science teacher at Elgin High School, was named 2004 Illinois State Teacher of the Year. She was selected from among 12 finalists (out of 300 nominees).

Perryman has been a major partner in the Mighty Acorns program, enlisting her high school students as mentors to the fourth-through-sixth graders. She estimates that her students have taught more than 10,000 young children about Illinois natural history. Her students

Hunting for Frogs on Elston

AND OTHER TALES FROM FIELD & STREET

Jerry Sullivan
Edited by Victor M. Cassidy
With Illustrations by Bobby Sutton

"Part of the fun of reading Hunting for Frogs on Elston is that you can then fascinate your friends at the next backyard barbecue with what you've just learned."

—Chicago Sun-Times

"Jerry Sullivan explained wildlife with the breezy authority of a grizzled old political reporter explaining aldermen. He described terrain as familiar to us as our own backyards and made us realize we didn't know the first thing about it. Field & Street was more than an introduction to nature; it was a long conversation with nature, which turned out to be eccentric, ingenious, always unpredictable company."

—Michael Miner, Chicago Reader

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collect stream samples and examine macroinvertebrates to assess water quality. They work to restore habitat in nearby nature preserves. And they built a nature trail on 34 acres adjacent to the high school.

Through Perryman’s efforts, Elgin High School has become a “Stenciling Clearinghouse” for the Conservation Foundation. The distinction came when Perryman’s students learned that stormwater is not treated before it enters creeks, rivers, and lakes and then worked on a class project entitled “2,000 in 2000.” Using stencils and paint, the students aspirered to stencil 2,000 storm drains in the Poplar Creek Watershed. By last fall, the students had marked 3,800 drains with signage stating “Dump No Waste, Drains to River.” The foundation now provides equipment and training to any community organization interested in the project.

In 2002, Perryman received a BP Leader Award to support a reading program in which her school students read books with an environmental message, then volunteered to do conservation activities.

Midewin Opens 5,000 Acres to Public
The 19,000-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie opened roughly 5,000 acres to the public on June 5. Nearly all of the preserve, formerly a military weapons arsenal, has been off-limits to visitors while officials prepared it for a massive longterm prairie restoration.

The newly opened acreage consists of two areas—the East and West Units. The majority of the 2,000-acre East Unit is currently agricultural fields and will remain so for the next two or three years. The remainder is woodland. Prairie Creek flows through the landscape, past rows of former explosives storage bunkers (a few will be left open for visitors).

The 3,000-acre West Unit was grazed but not farmed, so a few wetlands remain. Numerous grassland birds have nested in the former pastures.

Pat Thrasher, interpretive specialist for the U.S. Forest Service, emphasizes that Midewin is currently a “prairie in name only.” He hopes that visitors will explore the five miles of interm trails to witness the “process and progress” of bringing native species back to the Chicago region’s largest single preserve.

For directions, tours, and events, call (815) 423.6370 or visit www.fs.fed.us/mntp. —Elizabeth Riotta

Houston Wilderness Takes Lead from Chicago
Anyone who happened not to be in Houston, Texas, this past April 16 missed the formal launch of a regional conservation effort modeled in large part on Chicago Wilderness. Houston
Wilderness encompasses more than 19,000 square miles of diverse landscape, including prairie grasslands, upland forests, marshes, bayous, and seashore.

Rosie Zamora, president of a public opinion research concern in Houston, led a group of committed individuals in conceiving the organization. They searched for groups engaged in similar efforts and felt Chicago Wilderness was a close match. “Once we learned more about Chicago Wilderness and what you’ve achieved,” Zamora said, “the consensus was that we needed something similar in our region.” The 24-county region included in Houston Wilderness extends north of Matagorda Bay and south of Sam Rayburn Reservoir, east to the Louisiana border and west through the post oak savanna of Washington County.

Zamora is pleased with the progress the organization has made to date. “We are working on a geographical information system (GIS), an atlas on biodiversity, and a passport program to acquaint the general public with the over 100 recreational sites.”

Visitors can already log on to the Web site at www.houstonwilderness.org.

The group has set lofty goals for its first ten years. These include getting at least 45 percent of area residents to visit a designated Houston Wilderness site each year, making sure every child has been on at least one school-sponsored outdoor environmental education experience by the time they complete seventh grade, receiving 15,000 hits per day on their Web site, and getting more than 90 percent of the area chambers of commerce to support the organization.

—Karen Tornberg

Chicago Wilderness Welcomes Broaddtree Adventures

In March, Chicago Wilderness welcomed Chicago-based Broaddtree Adventures in Education as a member, bringing the total membership in the coalition to 172. From kayaking and camping to picking up a local beach, Broaddtree’s diverse environmental programs enable youth to develop the personal, social, and academic skills they need to empower themselves and positively change their communities.

For more information, contact (773) 895-5076 or visit broaddtree.org.

Residents Preserve Right to Protect Ecosystems

This April, ecologically minded residents of Beverly Shores, Indiana, won a victory for the health of their woodlands in a lawsuit against resident Thomas Rossi.

The litigation traces back to the fall of 2000, when the town board voted to allow the culling of deer populations due to tremendous depredation of the native plant communities there. In November 2001, Rossi filed a lawsuit to prevent four families from allowing bow hunters on their own property. He contended that hunting in a residential area is unsafe and that excess deer would die naturally over the winter.

In June 2003, the court dismissed Rossi’s suit as frivolous. Soon after, some of the families named in Rossi’s suit filed a countersuit against him, citing malicious prosecution and abuse of process.

“We wanted to send a clear message to the few individuals who tried to intimidate us with ongoing litigation,” says Philip Dickerman, one of the defendants.

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in Rossi’s suit and president of the Beverly Shores Environmental Restoration Group. “We will not shy away from adversity or controversy in our vigilance to restore the ecosystem.” This April, Rossi and his lawyer agreed to pay the families $26,900.

In response to Rossi’s claims that the hunting is unsafe, Dickerman says that the bow hunters are only allowed on property of two acres or larger. The hunters receive signed permission statements from the property owners, hunting is done away from the street and property lines, and each arrow is numbered by the Beverly Shores town marshal.

Many of the deer culled last February weighed only 60 pounds—less than half the normal weight—one sign that overpopulation takes a toll on the deer themselves, as well as their habitat.

—Betsy J. Green

New Map Shows Natural Connections

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) and Opalns Project have produced a new map illustrating the “green infrastructure” of 14 counties in southeastern Wisconsin, northeastern Illinois, and northwestern Indiana. Green infrastructure, as they define it, is “the interconnected network of land and water that supports native species, maintains natural and ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life of people and communities.” Funded by the Joyce Foundation, the mapping project incorporated data from 32 sources. “We hope this map can serve as a strategic framework for conservation and development,” says CNT’s Karen Hobbs, “so that linkages and key natural areas can be preserved before development occurs.” The map identifies 12 opportunities for greater cooperation between Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana for acquisition, restoration, and management of natural areas.

The map and detailed information from a vast database can be downloaded from www.greenmapping.org. For a free printed copy, contact Ruth Williams at rwilliams@opalns.org.

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

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Field Notes: Frequent Fire Miles

How many fires does it take to maintain a prairie? In 2001, Michael Jones and I, working for The Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois, looked into the past to find out. We resurveyed 62 sites identified by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) in 1976 as the highest-quality prairie remnants in the Chicago region.

Our first discovery was that 22.6 percent of these high-quality prairies have been either developed or completely overgrown with brush since the 1976 survey. While only one of the highest-quality (grade-A) prairies was lost, 35 percent of the still-remarkable grade-B sites disappeared.

We measured plant species richness (the number of native species), composition (the relative abundance of different plant species), and structure (the ratio of woody vegetation to grasses) at the 62 sites, ranking Somme Prairie Nature Preserve, in Cook County, and Spring Bluff Forest Preserve, in Lake County, richest among them.

Reviewing site management histories kept by land managers, we found that fire played a large—yet not large enough—role in maintaining these high-priority sites. Of the 39 sites with fire management records, about 60 percent had been burned four times or more over the last 20 years. We found that this burn rate prevented loss of native species richness in grade-A sites, and actually improved species richness in many grade-B sites.

However, we also found that much more frequent burning is required to maintain the structure and composition of prairies. For example, it may be necessary to burn more than 10 times in 20 years in grade-A prairies to prevent an increase in woody vegetation and loss of native grasses. Wetter prairies may need to burn even more frequently.

Unfortunately, 80 percent of the sites with burn records were burned less than 8 times in 20 years. Formerly dominant prairie grasses and forbs have declined, and species that are considered invasive are increasing in abundance. The study also found an increase in nonnative species in almost all prairies, and this increase was not affected by fire. Other factors, such as increased deer populations, may be enhancing the shift in vegetation.

As the data used for this study were collected only twice in 25 years, we offer the findings as projections to be confirmed with further monitoring.

—Marlin Bowles

Bowles and Jones are ecologists with The Morton Arboretum and Christopher Burke Engineering, respectively.
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Mist Opportunities

Every morning the world is new. You may not know that if an alarm wakes you in a closed room. But it is glowingly true every morning in prairies, fens, and woodlands.

The dimly visible hill in the background is a kame, with an esker tailing off it to the west — glacial topography created more than 10,000 years ago. But throughout each growing season, every morning of those ten millennia, new flower buds opened. New dew glistened. The first morning rays revealed a scene never seen before — and never to be seen again.

Certain mammals and birds are crepuscular — creatures of mornings, evenings, and cloudy days. Deer, nighthawks, foxes, woodcock, and many others sleep during the deeply dark hours, take long siestas during the bright sun hours, and exult in "life on the edge" between the two. I am one of those creatures. Many of the best photographers are as well.

The light that's filtered through the morning mists give such pure, rich colors that other times of day just can't compete. There is no harshness in this light, and often no wind, allowing for long exposures and clear focus. Gentleness, clarity, continual new beginnings. Worth getting up for!

Close-up photos of the flowers are as perfect as they can be this time of day. The flowers blooming in this landscape are compass plant, yellow coneflower, and nodding wild onion.

Notice that the mist hangs at two levels. Topography causes convection currents in the air, which dissipate fog. Fog forms best over flat areas. Up on the kame-top and down in the fen the ground is flat enough to allow the formation of what are essentially flat, little, low clouds.

Many of the photographs published in Chicago WILDERNESS — pictures that seem so astounding beautifully to people — are blessed by the early morning light diffracted by the prismatic droplets of early morning mist. If you like these holy photos, you might enjoy some daybreak walks.
Explore Nature in Chicago Parks!

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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 Woodland
    Southeast corner of W. 100th St. & S. Winchester Ave.
12. Indian Boundary Park
    2500 W. Lunt Ave.
13. Jackson Park
    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. North Park Village Nature Center
    5801 N. Pulaski Rd.
28. Ogden Park
    6500 S. Racine Ave.
29. Portage Park
    4100 N. Long Ave.
30. Prospect Gardens Park
    10940-11000 S. Prospect Ave.
31. Rainbow Beach Park
    2873 E. 75th St.
32. Ridge Park Wetland
    South Wood St. between 95th St. & 96th St.
33. Riis Park
    6100 W. Fullerton Ave.
34. Ronan Park
    Between Lawrence Ave. & Argyle Ave. on the North Branch of the Chicago River
35. Rutherford Sayer Park
    North of intersection at Shakespeare Ave. & New England Ave.
36. Sherman Park
    1301 W. 52nd St.
37. South Shore Nature Sanctuary
    7059 South Shore Dr.
38. Washington Park
    5531 S. King Dr.
39. West Pullman Woodland
    401 W. 123rd St.
40. Winnetka Park
    Northwest corner of Damen Ave. & W. Argyle St.

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