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What is Chicago Wilderness?

Chicago Wilderness is some of the finest and most significant nature in the temperate world, with a core of roughly 300,000 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 185 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 Web site at
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CHICAGO WILDERNESS

A Regional Nature Reserve

Wilderness Anniversary

The story of Chicago Wilderness begins roughly 14,000 years ago when the last glacier began its retreat from the southern tip of Lake Michigan. Indeed, it left a rich and varied landscape of ridges and moraines, broad valleys carved by meltwaters, outwash plains, glacial potholes, and, of course, Lake Michigan itself.

Our region is the place where, two centuries ago, settlers traveling west came upon their first wide-open spaces. They saw a vast sea of grass dotted with lone oaks and clusters of widely spaced trees called savanna, which evolved under the periodic fires set by lightning and native peoples. They saw the wild onions growing in profusion along the streambanks that the Pottawatomi called “Che-ca-gou.”

The transformation by farms and industry—the near obliteration of our original Midwestern wildlands—led visionary conservation leaders to launch a remarkable regional collaboration ten years ago: Chicago Wilderness. Founded with 34 public and private organizations in April 1996, the consortium today has 185 member groups and will continue to grow. In the past ten years, Chicago Wilderness has achieved much. It has helped set the stage and provide the forum for hundreds of major projects, each adding to our knowledge and paving the way for new ideas in conservation. The new Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan,

outlined on page 14, is just one encouraging outgrowth of this progressive environment. But the challenges remain very great.

Over the next year, this magazine will bring you news of challenges met and obstacles remaining, beginning with Senior Editor Stephen Packard’s essay “Chicago Wilderness 2030” on page 6. As you’ll see, the vision remains bright—and compelling.

“In the Chicago Wilderness, for the first time in history, millions of people will live in and around a living wilderness that depends utterly on the action, restraint and wisdom of their deliberate stewardship of biodiversity,” wrote the founders of the consortium in a 1995 strategic document. “Unlike the Native people who managed the land with fire for attracting game or gaining advantage in warfare, we will be thinking of genes for agriculture and industry.

“We will also be reaping the aesthetic, economic and recreational benefits, scientific knowledge, and a re-established connection

with the natural world. There will be many differences between the Chicago Wilderness of the 21st century and the Che-ca-gou of the Pottawatomi. But there will be a continuity for thousands of species of plants and animals who will continue this journey with us.” Happy Anniversary, Chicago Wilderness. Journey on.



Photo: Pat Waddecki

Debra Shore

EDITOR



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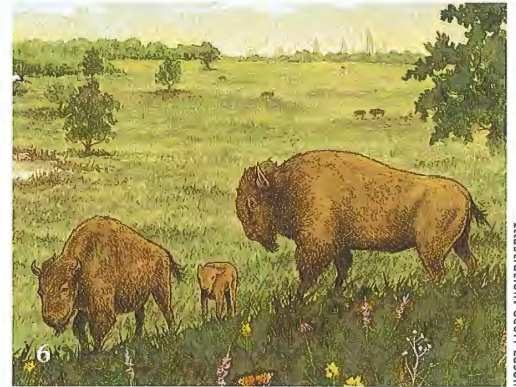


Illustration: Geoff Jason



Photo: Mike Macdonald/ChicagoNature.com



Photo: Arthur Morris/Birds As Art



Photo: Carol Freeman



Cover: The threatened Henslow's sparrow is making a comeback in some of the region's larger prairies. This one is serenading a mate and defending a territory for just that purpose. Photo by David Schwaegler.

Opposite: Wild hyacinth, gooseberry, and woodland phlox find expression in Chicago-region oak woodlands. Photo by Joe Nowak.

The Chicago Wilderness consortium, an alliance of more than 180 local conservation organizations, has been chosen as an **AVEDA EARTH MONTH PARTNER.**

APRIL IS EARTH MONTH, and this April, Aveda seeks to raise \$1.5 million to support the conservation of rare and endangered plants. Aveda will also be collecting signatures to support the Endangered Species Act.

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— Horst Rechelbacher, founder

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CHICAGO WILDERNESS

Chicago WILDERNESS

Volume IX, Number 3

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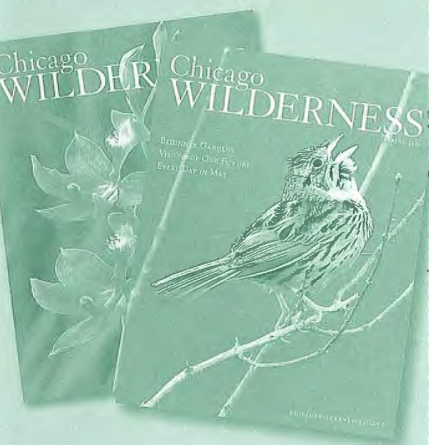
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MOURNING CELEBRATION

Dear Editor,

I subscribe to *Chicago WILDERNESS* Magazine, and live in Riverside, part of the Chicago Wilderness. I'm fortunate to live very close to a small portion of a Cook County Forest Preserve within the village limits. On Thursday, January 12, I decided to take a walk through the back of the woods. I knew I was going to find something special, seeing as how the weather was so nice. I thought it was possible that a turtle might be sitting on a log in the Des Plaines River, taking in the sun. That was not to be.



However, on my return trip back towards Miller Road, I spotted a butterfly. Since I always walk with a camera (one never knows what one will find), I took a couple of photographs. After the butterfly had disappeared from view, I raced home to see what I had found. The Audubon guide I used identified this as a Mourning Cloak. Later that night, I "Googled" to see what I could find, and it brought me to the Chicago Wilderness Web site [chicagowildernessmag.org] and a very informative article about this beautiful creature (CW, Winter 2002).

I've lived in Riverside for 35 years and have never, in winter, seen a sight like this. What a treat!

Juanita Ray
Riverside, Illinois

Editors' note: The mourning cloak is one of the few butterflies that overwinter around here as an adult—most butterflies overwinter as eggs or chrysalises. The monarch and some others overwinter in the south. But from time to time, we see adult mourning cloaks up and restless for a little excitement on a winter's day.

BOOKS TO GROW ON

Dear Editor,

On my shelf, right next to Joel Greenberg's *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*, is a much older book entitled, *A Naturalist in the Great Lakes Region*, by Elliot Rowland Downing, University of Chicago Press, 1922.

You will enjoy this delightful little gem if you can find it. Particularly interesting to me are the chapters on glacial Lake Chicago and its old beach lines, on the dunes and its wildlife, the beech-maple and oak-hickory forests, the prairie, and the river valley. The text is abundantly illustrated by line drawings and charming old photographs. As Downing has said: "Chicago is the center of a region of quiet but varied beauty—to him who wanders along the North Shore, explores the Dunes, or rambles over the wooded hills of the nearby moraine country there are presented bits of landscape that charm even the casual observer with their wealth of form and color."

Arn Slettebak
Seattle, WA



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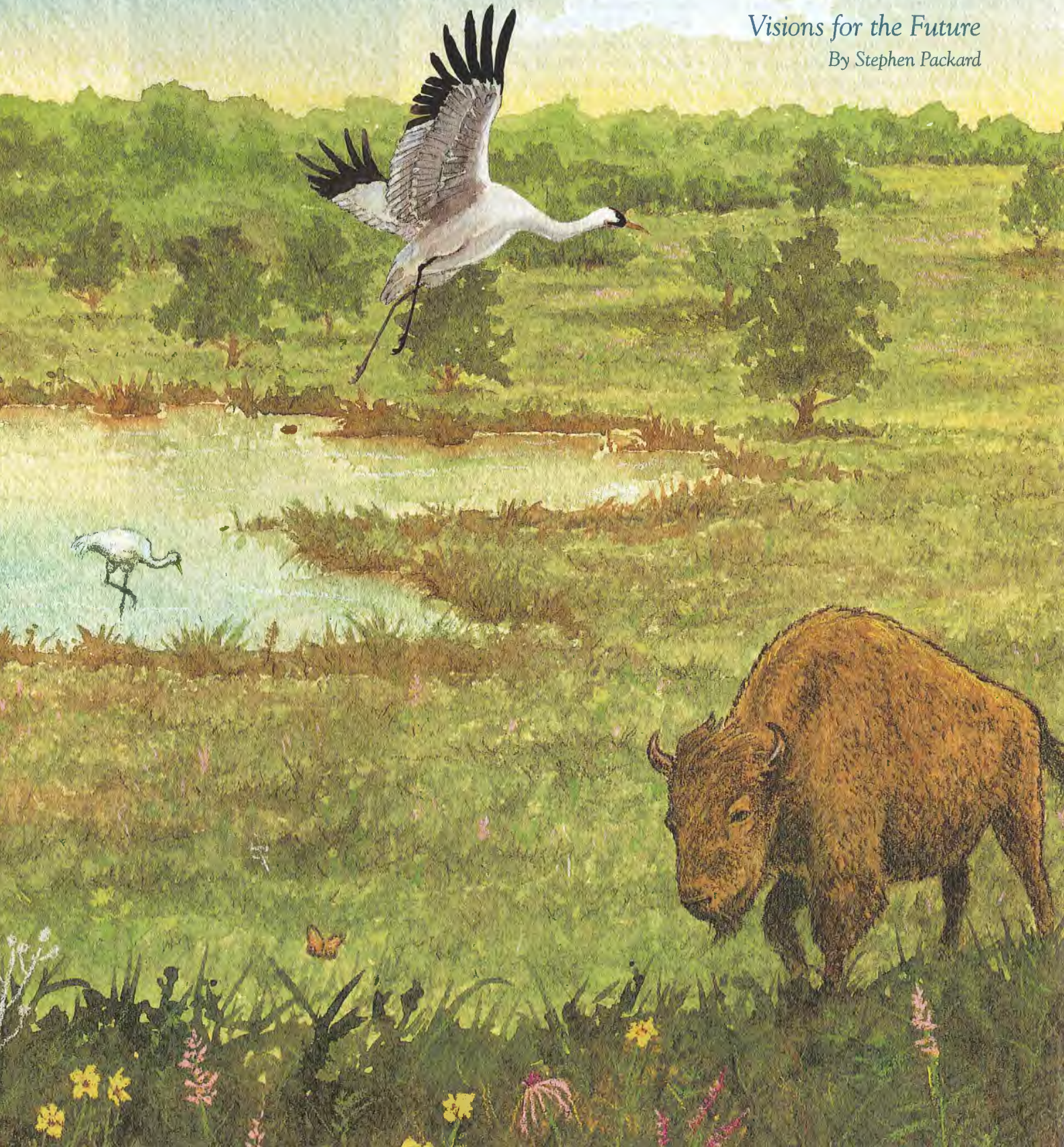
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Chicago Wilderness 2030

Visions for the Future
By Stephen Packard





*Imagine a region transformed—for people and nature.
Illustration by Geoff Lason.*

No major achievement of any kind is possible without a vision.



Chicago Wilderness, the coalition born ten years ago that helped to galvanize hundreds of individual programs into a regional conservation movement, arose from the common vision of thousands. They have been heads of institutions, weekend volunteers, scientists, conservation organizers, journalists, carpenters, computer programmers, teachers, moms, dads, and students, all sharing the idea that the remnants of wild nature that still survive among us are worth saving and restoring. Considering the status quo in 1996—rampant suburban sprawl, advancing invasive species, widespread ecological ignorance, and a generally shallow regard for our forest preserves—these ideas may have felt a little out of touch with reality.

One visionary who was accused of having reality problems was Henry David Thoreau, who wrote in 1854: “Do people accuse you of building castles in the air? Fine. That’s just where they’re supposed to be. Now put the foundations under them.” He seemed impractical, but his ideas launched the conservation movement.

Some ambitious visions inspire great work. Others waste people’s time. But without vision from people such as Daniel Burnham, Dwight Perkins, and Jens Jensen, the land that is now our forest preserves—refuges for play, study, art, exercise, and inspiration—might all have become just more development. We live in a world made richer by visionaries and dedicated implementers. And whatever the future becomes—for nature and everything else—will result from what we envision now.

The First Vision

In 25 years, half of our region’s 250,000 acres of conservation lands (mostly the forest preserves) will be restored to good-quality prairies, wetlands, and woodlands, rife with red-headed woodpeckers, cerulean warblers, yellow lady’s slippers, ginseng, purple fringed orchids, and nearly every species of plant, butterfly, mammal, and frog that lived here for thousands of years.

On those 125,000 acres of quality habitat will live four pairs of bobcats and 100 packs of coyotes. The coyotes will avoid people, because the tamed and therefore aggressive ones have consistently been shot, while the wild, compatible, wary ones have been protected. There will be a few thousand white-tailed deer on land that today is overpopulated with four times that many—so more isn’t always better. This is one vision.

The Second Vision

The conservation community increasingly suffers from squabbling and shortsightedness. The volunteer movement gradually dries up as professionals take over every aspect and existing volunteers age or move on. In the absence of a vibrant constituency supporting their work, the natural areas professionals are some of the first to go at budget cutting times. Our high-quality areas continue to degrade and shrink as they are doing today, except that the process speeds up. Fire is less and less used as a tool, as the remaining dedicated staff have less and less time to solve political challenges. A few aggressive species entirely supplant biodiversity on most conservation lands. Some preserves become “deer parks,” where people bring their kids to see the deer living pet-like in badly degraded ecosystems. This vision is not an optimistic one. But it’s possible.

The Third Vision

Here’s a big one. By the year 2030, our region’s conservation land has increased from the 250,000 acres of 2006 to 2.5 million acres. The tenfold increase in just 25 years was a response to public demand and economic necessity. We needed the oxygen, the recreational amenities, and the prestige of being the first metropolitan area to surround itself with national, state, and county parkland—including large acreages of permanently dedicated organic croplands and pastures. These preserves, largely converted from cornfields, halt most suburban sprawl forever and make Chicago Wilderness one of the world’s great places to live. The inner suburbs and city thrive, in part because misspent sprawl dollars have been redirected to improve the infrastructure and jobs where the people live. These changes save billions of dollars in road construction, as well as water, sewer, and other infrastructure. They mitigate flooding, improve water quality, and increase air quality by sharply reducing driving. They contribute to rising real estate values and overall business climate. Average commuting time has decreased to one-fifth the 2005 level.

In 2030, every young person studies ecology and restoration in primary, secondary, and high school. Each does one year of community service in ecological, military, or social work, as they choose. (The military has become more like the Army Corps of Engineers, since there have been no actual wars since 2015.) Conservation jobs in government, private, and research sectors are up from about 400 in 2006 to about 32,000 jobs today (a full-time job is four days a week, of course). One in four people during their free time are stewards, citizen scientists, nature teachers, or other Chicago Wilderness participants. About 2,000 gardeners raise \$500,000 worth of rare local seed in their yards annually to donate to forest preserve restoration

To learn more about how you can get involved, or to discuss alternative visions on our message board, visit chicagowildernessmag.org/vision.

(currently, there are 200 such gardeners). And helping out on controlled burns has become a seasonal ritual—as much a part of our culture as are clambakes or surfing somewhere else.

In this third vision, our 2.5 million acres of natural land, in both public and private ownership, include everything from neighborhood pocket nature parks, where every child in the region can discover grasshoppers and frogs, to five 100,000-acre wildernesses, each with bison, wolves, whooping cranes, rare fish and mussels in the streams, and Swainson's hawks.

By 2030, the Chicago region will be proudly funding more ecosystem research than any other region of the country. Other scientific advances include improved crops from the native genes of crop plant relatives. We discover and promote fungi, algae, and bacteria that help maintain the richness of agricultural soils.

As early as 2010, people will have launched a program to transplant rare remnant ecosystem fragments in peril. Every shovelful of transplanted virgin soil restores the soil biota in nearby habitat restorations—contributing fungi, bacteria, nematodes, and a long list of other life forms, many still unknown to science. People will have catalogued every scrap of high-quality ecosystem left, and matched the scraps with conservation landowners. They keep tabs on development plans so they can alert squads to perform celebratory rescue dramas.

By 2030, Chicago Wilderness will have celebrated the return of the regal fritillary—one of the prairie's great butterflies. A long list of other small animal species—from crayfish to Franklin's ground squirrels and Kirtland's snakes—will have benefited from the establishment of additional populations on large restored sites.

What about larger creatures that humans mostly moved from this landscape long ago? Bison on some of our larger prairies will teach us a powerful lot about eastern tallgrass prairie ecology. Deer, bobcats, timber wolves, and geese will be the focus of many groups and efforts. A "Friends of the Coyote" group will help establish a better relationship between predators and the public. Chicago Wilderness will continue its world leadership as the urban area most in touch with wild nature.

Laying Foundations

What will it take to support our sky castles? Many would argue that we've laid a good portion of the foundation already. Hundreds of trained citizen-scientists already monitor plant and animal populations. Thousands of restoration volunteers chip in a few days a year. Youth education programs reach thousands of students. Populations of prairie white fringed orchid are increasing dramatically thanks to volunteer-fueled pollination programs. All these little bits add up. We work much like medieval

townsfolk who helped build the great cathedrals, a task that took generation after generation. In a way, contributions like this can make us immortal.

One ambitious plan already under way in Chicago Wilderness could require many people to devote major parts of their lives to it, and yet the results could be extraordinary. In cooperation with Chicago Metropolis 2020, a program launched by the Commercial Club of Chicago (which gave us the influential Burnham Plan a century ago), Chicago Wilderness has prepared a plan to restore many preserves of 20,000 to 100,000 acres each. The areas have been mapped and published. They include areas of high biological significance that are remote from major roads. The plan also proposes smarter planning of roads, water and sewer systems, and other infrastructure.

To restore minimal good health to our 43,000 acres of forests would cost an estimated 56 to 107 million dollars. That's in addition to hundreds of thousands of hours of staff and volunteer work—to conduct burns, pull weeds, gather seeds, and more. Additionally, immediate "first aid" must be given to more than 100,000 acres of the region's most significant savannas, prairies, and wetlands. Remedial work, followed by continuing care, may require 2 to 4 billion dollars or more. It's a lot. But considering the benefits in health, economy, flood control, aesthetics, recreation, and other areas, the necessary resources could be raised.

Realizing this vision will require a lot of dedicated people, including leadership by elected officials, volunteers, and professionals with many types of expertise. It will also need advocacy group volunteers to summon the public will and funding to accomplish it. But some people, it always turns out, just love to take on significant challenges.

So perhaps it's best to end with some options for people who are thinking about what sorts of things they might like to do. What is it in life that really sings to you? What are your best skills? Do you wake up thinking about plants, birds, children, engineering, poetry, zoning laws, journalism, or what? Have you ever enjoyed negotiation? Are you the "glue-ball" kind of person who can assemble and motivate thriving groups of people? Might you like to become an expert on identifying rare nematodes or symbiotic fungi? Every scientific challenge, every social and economic challenge is looking for people to invent, or popularize, or implement. Whether you're a beginner or a veteran, Chicago Wilderness is a welcoming community that could use you.

This article was adapted from a talk Stephen Packard gave at the "Wild Things" Conference for People and Nature in 2005. He is senior editor of *Chicago WILDERNESS*, director of Audubon-Chicago Region, and steward of Somme Prairie Grove in Northbrook, Illinois.



Photo: Mike MacDonald/ChicagoNature.com

Nature *in* Your Backyard

By restoring native habitats where we live, we can establish an everyday rapport with wild beauty. We'll also have cleaner air and water and a healthier environment.

By Patricia K. Armstrong

WHY GO NATIVE? Did the 2005 drought wreak havoc on your landscape and give you outrageous water bills? Maybe it's time to think about reducing the amount of lawn in the yard and planting more native plants instead. Since native plants evolved in our area over tens of thousands of years, they have adapted to our soils and climate and need relatively little maintenance to survive. Besides, they are beautiful and provide habitat for native insects, birds, and other animals. There are native plants for all types of soil, for wet and dry areas, for sun and shade. All you need to do is assess your site and match the native plants to your conditions.

How Long Will It Take?

Don't expect to replace your lawn or rose garden with a full-fledged prairie in the first year of your garden's transformation. The conversion takes time and a lot of initial effort. Instead, set your sights on a more realistic three- to five-year plan.

First, you'll need to kill existing plant life, such as turfgrass. Many methods don't involve herbicide—try covering lawn with plastic, newspaper, woodchips, or combinations of these, or flopping sections of turf upside-down. Be sure to allow a month or two before planting to make sure you have won the battle.

Even once you've planted everything and you think you're in full swing, it can take a couple of years or more for a native garden to become well-established and robust. Especially if you start from seeds, some plants may only begin to make a strong showing after three or more years. That's natural. So be patient and enjoy the ride.

Know Your Yard

Before starting, take this opportunity to get to know your property. Spend time in the yard and take notes. Are there places puddles always form, places that regularly dry out? Which zones are sunny or shady, and for how long each day? What's growing now, and where? (Hearty grass, for instance, is a sign that the soil underneath is fairly fertile.) Think about the views you'd like to create from various vantage points.

Nothing can be more disappointing to a novice gardener than carefully planning and planting a complex garden, only to find out that none of the plants can survive in the backyard. One way to avoid this is to start small—some people really enjoy working with a small plot, maybe just a few feet, and trying only a few plants to see what works. But if you're transforming your yard, consult books and nursery experts before you invest. Determine your soil types by bringing a few samples

to your local nursery or university extension. Or judge soil makeup by shaking up a sample in a glass jar with some water. Since sand, silt, and clay are of different densities, they form layers to reveal what proportion of each you have.

Choosing Plants

There are hundreds of plants adapted to the woodlands, prairies, and the multitude of variations on those habitats. To learn the strengths and weaknesses of specific plants for your garden situation, pick up *Native Plants in the Home Landscape* by Keith Gerard Nowakowski. Talk to volunteers with native gardening groups when they hold native-plant sales. One of the best ways to learn native plants and how to manage them is to volunteer at a natural area near your home. You'll be able to see for yourself the situations where plants grow best. You may even find a place that inspires your design. For still more detailed information about plant associations, the pros use the hefty *Plants of the Chicago Region* by Floyd Swink and Gerould Wilhelm.

Take a Class

Those who take the first steps toward a native garden may quickly realize that they've entered a complex and exciting world. They may suddenly find themselves inspired to learn why a bee balm gets along better with a yellow coneflower. There are plenty of great classes with which to satisfy your curiosity and answer questions. Try these places: College of DuPage Field Studies, (630) 942-3763; The Morton Arboretum, (630) 719-2469; The Chicago Botanic Garden, (847) 835-8261; The Natural Garden, (630) 584-0150; forest preserve districts; Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, (877) 394-9453.

Good Books

- *Gardening with Prairie Plants*, Sally Wasowski
- *100 Easy-to-Grow Native Plants*, Lorraine Johnson
- *Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Urban and Rural America*, Gary L. Hightshoe
- *Go Native*, Carolyn Harstad
- *Planting Noah's Garden*, Sara Stein

To Start a Small Prairie Garden

- Find the sunniest spot and lay out the shape of your prairie. It could be a circle, triangle, square, or freeform shape. Make it at least 15 to 20 square feet.
- Kill the grass by covering it with several layers of newspaper and four to six inches of sand.
- Buy an assortment of prairie plants (grasses and flowers) and plant them one per square foot.
- Plant the tallest plants in the back, or in the center if you can view your garden from all around.
- Be sure to include some flowers that bloom in spring, summer, and fall.
- Prairie plants can grow in many kinds of soil, so gardeners don't need to do anything special to the soil.



Photo: Stephen Packard

The well-kept prairie garden

SUGGESTED PRAIRIE PLANTS

Prairie plants usually take three years to flower when grown from seed, spending the first year or two creating a thick root system. Buying potted plants or plugs can speed the process a bit.

Spring



Tradescantia ohioensis, Spiderwort; *Zizia aurea*, Golden Alexanders; *Geum triflorum*, Prairie Smoke; *Phlox pilosa*, Prairie Phlox; *Baptisia leucophaea*, Cream Prairie Indigo

Summer



Petalostemum purpureum, Purple Prairie Clover; *Echinacea pallida*, Purple Cone Flower; *Rudbeckia hirta*, Black-eyed Susan; *Asclepias tuberosa*, Butterfly Milkweed; *Veronicastrum virginicum*, Culvers Root

Fall



Aster novae-angliae, New England Aster; *Aster laevis*, Smooth Blue Aster; *Solidago rigida*, Stiff Goldenrod; *Solidago speciosa*, Showy Goldenrod

Grasses



Andropogon scoparius, Little Bluestem; *Andropogon gerardii*, Big Bluestem; *Sporobolus heterolepis*, Dropseed; *Sorghastrum nutans*, Indian grass; *Panicum virgatum*, switch grass

Photos: All photos unless otherwise noted, Lake County Forest Preserves; Cream Prairie Indigo, Jim Nachel; Spiderwort and Prairie Dropseed, David Riecks, University of Illinois

To Start a Small Woodland Garden

- Make a circle around a tree in your yard, 10 to 20 feet in diameter.
- Cover the whole area with four to six inches of wood chips and chopped leaves (woodland plants need this rich humus).
- Plant shrubs or small trees to protect sensitive woodland plants from harsh sunlight and wind. Plant some at the edge of the circle or at the drip line of the tree (the edge of its branches), especially on the south and west sides.
- Plant spring woodland wildflowers, ground covers, and ferns by digging into the soil under the wood chips.

With good planning and a diverse plant selection, your native garden can be beautiful and interesting all year long.



Woodland planting with asters and goldenrods

Photo: Stephen Packard

SUGGESTED WOODLAND PLANTS

Woodland plants are harder to grow from seed than prairie plants. If you buy a mature plant, make sure that it has been grown from seed in the nursery, not taken from the wild.

Spring

Geranium maculatum, Wild Geranium; *Mertensia virginica*, Bluebells; *Aquilegia canadensis*, Wild Columbine; *Stylophorum diphyllum*, Celandine Poppy



Ferns

Dryopteris marginalis, Marginal Shield Fern; *Pteritis pensylvanica*, Ostrich Fern; *Polystichum acrostichoides*, Christmas Fern

Ground Covers

Asarum canadense, Wild Ginger; *Viola sororia*, Violet; *Podophyllum peltatum*, May Apple; *Tiarella cordifolia*, Allegheny Foam Flower



Three-Season Plants

Polygonatum canaliculatum, Solomon's Seal; *Smilacina racemosa*, Solomon's Plume; *Actaea pachypoda*, White Baneberry

Fall

Aster shortii, Short's Aster; *Aster macrophyllus*, Large-leaf Aster; *Solidago ulmifolia*, Elm-leaved Goldenrod; *Solidago flexicaulis*, Zig-zag Goldenrod



Shrubs

Corylus americana, Hazelnut; *Hamamelis virginiana*, Witch Hazel; *Viburnum rafinesquianum*, Arrowwood; *Cornus alternifolia*, Pagoda Dogwood

GET MORE ONLINE!

Get more plant ideas, resources, and tips, including a listing of native plant sales this spring. Visit us at chicagowildernessmag.org/gardens.

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Photos: White Baneberry, Dan Buseneyer; Hazelnut, Kitty Kohout/Root Resources; Witch Hazel, Jim Nachev; Christmas Fern and Wild Ginger, David Reeds; University of Illinois

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Make No Small Plans

Chicago becomes the first major U.S. city with a plan for biodiversity

By Ron Trigg

THIS SPRING, THE CITY OF CHICAGO WILL INTRODUCE the Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan, a document more than a hundred pages long and two years in the making. If it lives up to billing, the plan could lead to the acquisition of hundreds of acres of currently unprotected natural land and the conversion of almost one thousand acres to quality habitat. Perhaps most importantly, the document would reinforce Chicago's commitment to being a leader in the greening of America's cities.

Mayor Richard M. Daley has taken a personal interest in the project from the beginning. Recognizing that "nature is an integral and important part of Chicago's fabric," he says the plan is "one important step along the path toward making our city a place where people and nature live in harmony."

Jerry Adelman, chair of the Mayor's Nature and Wildlife Committee and executive director of Openlands Project (he's also a board member of this magazine), was instrumental in the plan's development. He describes the plan as "visionary and exceptional, a dramatic statement for this city to make." Chicago is, according to Adelman, the first major U.S. city to make such a commitment. "This is more than beautification and tree planting," he says. "It shows that Chicago is a place where nature really matters, and since the City of Chicago is the very heart of Chicago Wilderness, this is a significant development for the whole region."

The city's Department of Planning and Development and Adelman's Committee sought input from representatives of more than 30 conservation organizations,

including Chicago Wilderness and many of its members. (The plan's authors acknowledge the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan as a major inspiration in its development.) In February, the Chicago Plan Commission approved the plan unanimously. The Chicago Park District and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County will also be asked to sign on.

The first of the plan's four major goals is to protect remaining natural areas. The plan calls for the acquisition of as many as 800 unprotected acres. It suggests cooperative efforts with conservation and state agencies to make natural and manmade structures friendlier to wildlife (consider the Chicago River Fish Hotel), strengthen river setback requirements, and limit motorized traffic on some waterways.

The plan's second goal is to manage existing open space to sustain and expand the viability of native flora and fauna. It identifies 921 acres as land to be restored as habitat, and calls for the coordination of existing restoration plans and the promotion of volunteer programs to involve a variety of organizations and individuals in management activities.

The third goal of the plan is to monitor sites and compile research, including baseline inventories, which will increase the scientific data necessary to make responsible decisions and set priorities for habitat improvement. It will set up programs to monitor threatened and endangered species and to evaluate how various human activities impact biodiversity.

The fourth and final goal is to educate the public by spreading information on the importance of biodiversity conservation

Chicago's Nature and Wildlife Plan involved participants from more than 30 conservation organizations. The city will release it this spring.



“We must embrace the vision that Chicago is a place where biodiversity protection and habitat preservation are fundamental assumptions.”

—Lee Botts,
Alliance for the Great Lakes



Photo: Jerry Goldner

Yellow-rumped warbler at LaBagh Woods

and developing outreach programs in coordination with partner organizations.

Those involved in the plan’s preparation view it as a work in progress, a living document that will evolve over the years and spawn more new initiatives. While the plan sets its sights on new ground, it is in many ways a compilation of ideas and projects already in progress. The city’s inventory of its habitat sites, which appears prominently in the plan (see “Habitat in the City” below right), is one example. The Department of Planning and Development, working under a grant from the U.S. Forest Service, began to survey sites in 2002, before the plan was underway. The effort identified and mapped 97 habitat sites, located primarily along the Chicago River and the shorelines of Lake Michigan and Lake Calumet. In total, surveyors found these sites to comprise some 3,800 acres of existing habitat—roughly 2.6 percent of the city’s land base. In the new plan, detailed aerial maps of each site identify unique natural characteristics and goals for improvement.

The plan leverages previous innovations such as a recently created zoning category that specifically recognizes and protects wildlife habitat: Parks and Open Space–Natural Areas (POS-3). The plan recommends applying it to sites across the city, “to prevent their redevelopment for other uses.”

Another example of this synergy is the working of a more comprehensive biodiversity perspective into already existing programs such as the Calumet Open Space Reserve, Chicago Water Agenda, Chicago River Agenda, and the Lights Out program, which protects migrating birds. The city’s Department of Environment is also preparing a new Chicago Bird Agenda based on the plan’s recommendations.

Ultimately, the Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan will be judged by how successfully it achieves its goals. Chicago has been the wellspring for many visionary ideas over the years: the creation of the forest preserves, the preservation of the lakefront for public use, the establishment of excellent city parks, the birth of the study of ecology. Will future generations look back on the Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan as another? Or will it become just another well-meaning program introduced with great fanfare only to be quickly forgotten?

Adelmann is convinced that this plan will succeed. “It has strong support from Mayor Daley,” he notes, “and the Mayor’s Nature and Wildlife Committee will shepherd its implementation and push an active agenda.” Many of the plan’s supporters, including Adelmann and others involved in its production, cite

the collaborative nature of the development process as one of the plan’s strengths. The final document represents the consensus of a wide variety of participants representing a broad array of interests and views. Maintaining this cooperative spirit is crucial to the plan’s success.

Longtime environmental activist Lee Botts, a life board member of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, thinks the plan is a “terrific beginning,” but she views education and promotion as the keys to making it succeed. “The people who live, work, and do business in the city,” she says, “must embrace the vision that Chicago is a place where biodiversity protection and habitat preservation are fundamental assumptions. That’s the real challenge.” Making that happen is a daunting assignment, but this new plan seems a promising first step.



Photo: Brook Collins/Chicago Park District

McCormick Place Bird Sanctuary

HABITAT IN THE CITY

The plan’s land inventory found that 3,815 acres out of a total 146,240 in the city qualify as existing natural habitat—roughly 2.6 percent. It identified 921 acres as sites suitable for conversion to habitat.

Natural Community	Acres
Forest/Woodland	1,772
Aquatic	982
Wetland	535
Riparian/Water Edge	290
Prairie/Grassland	170
Savanna	36
Dune	22
Naturalistic Planting	8



Marsh marigolds proliferate in the wet woods of Pilcher Park, Will County.

With millions of wild birds flying over this spring, Chicago Wilderness becomes a veritable conveyor belt of color, sound, beauty, and fun. But how to get started taking it all in?

Compiled by Don Parker



Photo: Donna Lee

Into the Wild: Birding for Beginners

Why Do It?

Anyone can go birding (aka birdwatching), virtually anywhere. It's a fun, often unpredictable adventure that only deepens with experience, and it's free. As light or serious as you want, birding changes with every season, every year, and every location.

Get Out There



The best way to start birding is to set up a trip with an experienced birder. You can meet some at a guided bird walk or workshop. For a list of local birding groups and a master schedule of Illinois birding events, visit bcnbirds.org.

Most birders recommend getting out early in the morning, when birds are most active. Your choice of where you go will determine which kinds of birds you're likely to see. Two pamphlets, **The Chicago Region Birding Trail Guide**, (312) 744-7606, and the **Chicago Lakefront Birding Trail**, (312) 742-7529, give good leads on where to go and what time of year. For more locations, use **A Birder's Guide to the Chicago Region**, by Lynne Carpenter and Joel Greenberg.

Get the Gear



Binoculars. Don't worry about buying binoculars right away—borrow them instead. Experienced birder-friends may lend an old pair, which is a good way to preview different models. Once you're hooked on birding, try stores such as the Wild Bird Center, Wild Birds Unlimited, Helix, or Eagle Optics.

Field guide. There are lots of choices, each with different systems of organization. Make sure the guide includes birds of central and eastern North America. **Birds of Illinois**, by Sheryl De Vore, Steven D. Bailey, and Gregory Kennedy gives lots of focused information on every local bird you may encounter, as does **Birds of Chicago** by Chris Fisher and David Johnson.

Pencil and notebook. Helpful for recording observations.

Birdspotting



Many beginners lose track of birds between spotting them and bringing the binoculars to their eyes. To improve this transition, practice focusing on a stationary object and smoothly bringing the binoculars up without moving your eyes.

Birdbrained Lingo



Glass. To see something using a scope or binoculars. "I glassed a vireo."

Lifer. A bird you're seeing for the first time in your life. "I got a lifer."

Jizz. The way a bird looks and flies. "I determined it was a goldfinch by the jizz."

The Next Level



Veteran birdwatchers can do things that seem almost supernatural. They can ID birds without looking, or identify tiny dots on the horizon without binoculars. But it's not a sixth sense—it's a toolbox of observational skills that come with practice.

Go birding often. Pay attention to the **markings** and **shapes** of different birds, and their **flight patterns**. (Do they dip or fly straight? Do they flap or glide?) Sketching the bird may help you absorb more details.

Listen for bird calls to reveal the identities and whereabouts of hidden birds. (To order a bird-call CD, visit birdwatching.com. These are particularly entertaining if you have cats.)

Study birds in their habitats. Great birders know that a willow flycatcher is more likely to fly out of a shrub in an open prairie than a great crested flycatcher. For more tips, try **The Complete Birder: A Guide to Better Birding** by Jack Connor.

Enjoying Birds All Year

Every year, the procession of birds comes in a mostly predictable order.

- **Spring** Look for early migrants such as red-winged blackbirds, woodcocks, and sandhill cranes in March. April brings kinglets, phoebes, and flickers. The onslaught of color really hits in May with warblers, tanagers, and orioles.
- **Summer** A little quieter, but a good time to observe birds mating and nesting—pied-billed grebes, green herons, bluebirds. By August, birds such as nighthawks and swallows amass in preparation for migration.
- **Fall** Look for the same species migrating as in spring, but in reverse order. September is best for the colorful warblers. Some species have different fall plumage, usually duller.
- **Winter** Our resident birds, such as crows, woodpeckers, and short-eared owls, all stick around in the colder months. Migrants from the north such as juncos enjoy our "warm" winters. By February, owls begin to nest and cardinals start singing.

Manners

Especially at popular birding spots, be respectful of serious birders (and the birds themselves). Speak quietly, move slowly, leave your dog at home, and be aware of other birders so as not to scare off birds they're viewing. Slamming the car door is the classic *faux pas*.

Into the Wild: Lake County, IL

Almond Marsh

At a Glance

THE SCENE High-quality marsh and sedge meadow, savanna

HIGHLIGHTS Great blue heron rookery, popular birding spot

STATS 292 acres, with 110-acre Nature Preserve

BEHIND THE SCENES Part of the 3,200-acre Liberty Prairie Reserve. No trails or visitor facilities, and closed on weekends; but regular volunteer workdays and guided hikes

GETTING THERE (The Easy Way) Take I-94 to Rte 120. Take 120 W to N. Almond Rd. Turn left and enter the preserve on west side of road. Both the Fox Lake and Antioch Metra lines stop at the nearby (2.75 mi.) Prairie Crossing station

DON'T TAKE THE EASY WAY to get to Almond Marsh. Although this Lake County forest preserve is readily accessible by major highways, take the slow backroads of Casey and Almond Roads instead. Drive past working farms and the preserved open spaces of the 3,200 acre Liberty Prairie Reserve, where 292-acre Almond Marsh Forest Preserve is one of the “noisier” gems.

“Loud” is the way Lake County Forest Preserve restoration ecologist Ken Klick describes the marsh on the north side of the preserve. Sandhill cranes, belted kingfishers, pied-billed grebes, and green herons provide a daily concert while spring migrants such as northern shovelers and pintails, green-winged teals, hooded mergansers, and buffleheads glide and listen. In the oaks to the west and south of the wetland, a variety of warblers, bluebirds, indigo buntings, and rose-breasted grosbeaks add higher notes to the chorus.

In the early 1980s, a neighbor on Almond Road disrupted a tile line draining through his property to create a small pond in his backyard. Over the following decade, an “accidental” wetland slowly grew between his land and Route 120—land that

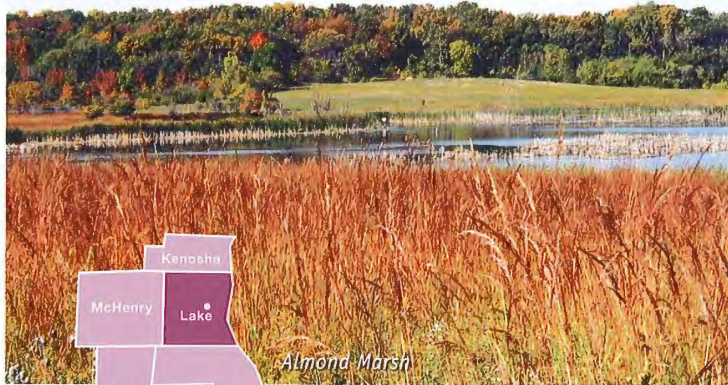
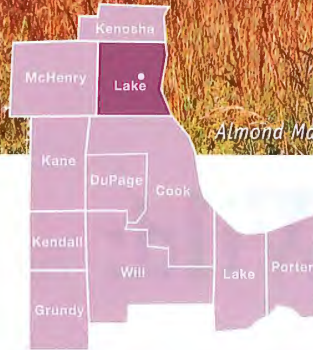


Photo: Lake County Forest Preserves



the Forest Preserve District purchased in 1990. By the late 1990s, the rising water had killed large cottonwoods in the middle of the marsh, attracting a nesting colony of great blue herons.

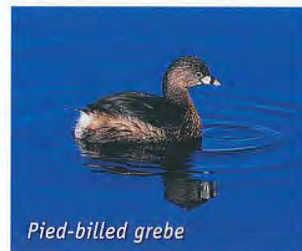
In recent years, green herons and double-crested cormorants moved in, increasing the housing stock to about 40 nests.

While the “hemi-marsh” and its rookery on the south side of Route 120 are highly visible to passersby, the actual Almond Marsh hides away as it meanders around the south half of the site. Dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1990, this 110-acre marsh and sedge meadow complex is home to at least ten sedge species including beaked sedge and the rare wheat sedge. Oak woods, savanna, and old fields ring the sedge meadow and marsh.

“You really get the feeling here of what the early settlers called oak openings,” says Klick. Shooting stars, cow parsnip, and wild phlox bloom in the wide spaces between the middle-aged red and white oaks and the centuries-old bur oaks.

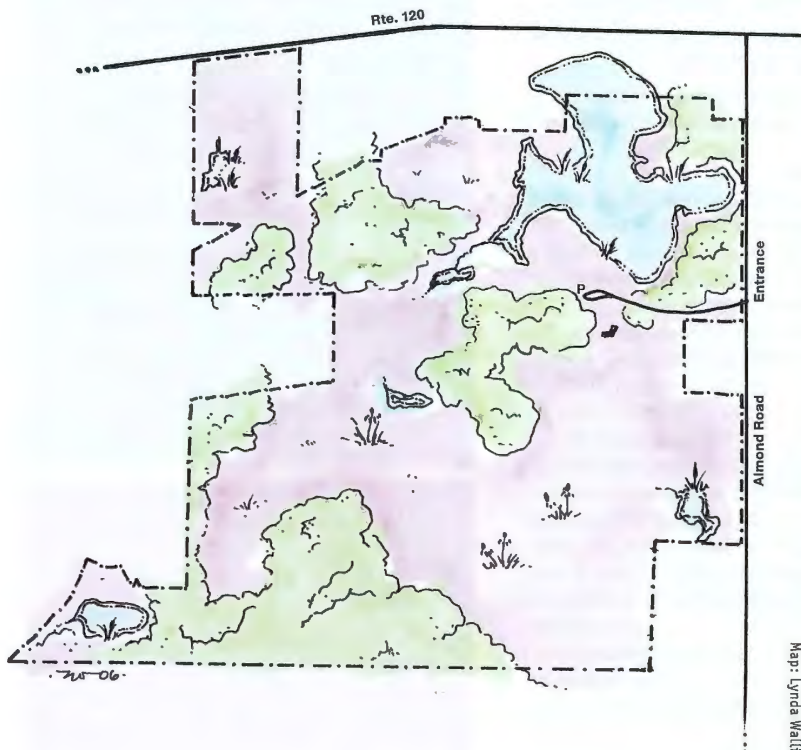
Access to Almond Marsh Forest Preserve—also home to Forest Preserve offices—is very limited. A small employee parking lot provides the best view of the rookery, but it is open only on weekdays during work hours (roadside parking is dangerous and inadvisable). Since the preserve has no formal trails, the best way to see Almond Marsh is to join co-stewards Jerry Kolar and Don Wilson on a volunteer restoration workday. They gather from 9 to 11 a.m. on the third Saturday of each month between March and December. Or join one of the district’s regular guided tours; this spring, they’re leading a “birdwatching primer” at Almond Marsh on March 26. To volunteer or join a tour, call (847) 968-3321 or visit lcfpd.org.

—Gary Mechanic



Pied-billed grebe

Photo: Arthur Morris/Birds As Art



Map: Lynda Wallis

Into the Wild: Porter County, IN

Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve

COFFEE CREEK WATERSHED PRESERVE in Chesterton, Indiana, offers five miles of easy to moderate trails that wind through 167 acres of woodland, upland prairie, savanna, and wetland. While natural habitats comprise roughly 130 acres of the property, they mix with built structures and more manicured greenery on about 40 acres, making Coffee Creek a noteworthy experiment in the integration of nature with modern human uses. The combination of boardwalk, brick, woodchip, and granite trails make Coffee Creek comfortable to hike in all seasons.

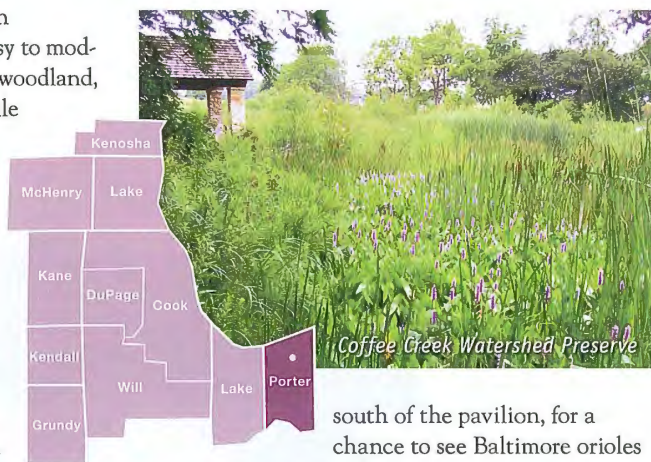
Donated as a green space conservancy by developers of surrounding Coffee Creek Center, the preserve opened to the public in 1999 and remains under the stewardship of five environmental organizations. Hundreds of native plant species inhabit the preserve's natural acreage, including woodland species such as false Solomon's seal, wild ginger, wild geranium, and bloodroot.

Meandering the length of this acreage, Coffee Creek is the preserve's centerpiece. Seven bridges cross the creek at various spots, creating popular stopping points like the Creek Overlook, Trellis Overlook, and Weir Bridge. Hikers can head onto an elongated three-mile loop trail along the creek corridor by crossing Bridge 1 and choosing the granite path that heads left through an open field. Or they can walk around the pavilion toward Bridge 3, where sounds of spring peepers from the marsh pond ahead catch the ear. The land rises steeply at a right fork,

affording at its peak an overview of rolling tall-grass prairie and the distant woods. Look for signs of skunk cabbage along the path that skims the creek. Bridge 4 marks an exceptional spot to pause by spring-melt rapids. Around the bend on the lowland trail, look for signs of beaver at the edge of woodlands. Stands

of old oak host a palette of unusual fungi formations.

Birders have identified 90 species within the preserve's diverse ecological habitat. Yellow-rumped and Nashville warblers, American woodcocks, marsh wrens, and dickcissels all stop over in the spring. Bridges 2, 4, and 5 have gained a reputation as particularly good birding spots. Try Bridge 2,



south of the pavilion, for a chance to see Baltimore orioles and warbling vireos.

A natural amphitheater and a large rental pavilion provide open-air venues for summer events. Atop the preserve's comfort station, a green roof supports prickly pear, bluestem grasses, hens, and chicks. Behind the amphitheater, a stream of water cascades steeply into Phillips Pond, issuing from an innovative system that recycles stormwater runoff, filtering most of it back through the ground.

The preserve is open from dawn until 10 p.m. (After dusk, lights along boardwalks encourage walkers to stay out to see the bats, owls, and other night animals.) Kiosks and maps are located at the Sidewalk Road parking entrance and on Village Point Drive at the north end of Phillips Pond. To make reservations for a guided hike with preserve director Steve Barker, or to volunteer, call (219) 926-1842.

—Paula McHugh

At a Glance

THE SCENE Woodlands, open wetlands, upland prairies, and savannas flank a winding creek corridor

HIGHLIGHTS Spring woodland flora and rare warblers, boardwalks skirting wetlands, innovative green design

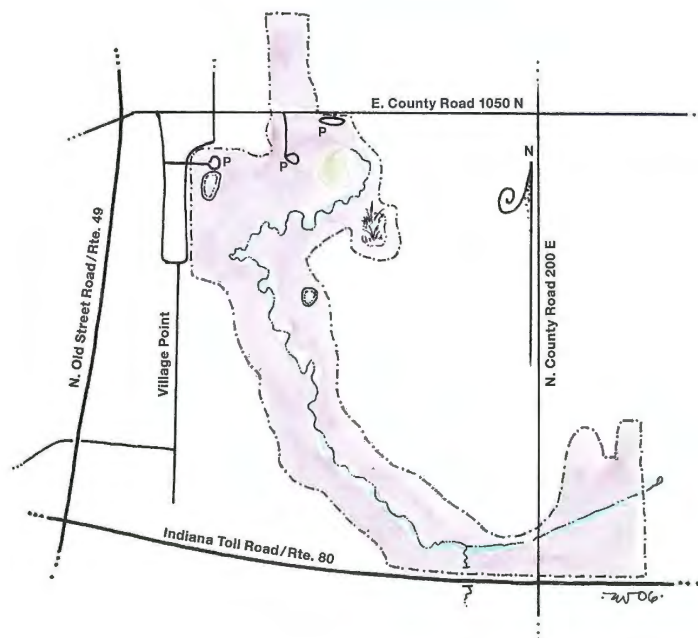
STATS 167 acres, 5 miles of trails, 7 bridges

BEHIND THE SCENES Volunteers can help with ecological restoration, beginning in April, first Saturday of each month

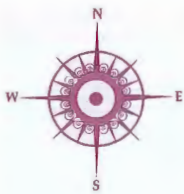
GETTING THERE Take I-80/90 to Chesterton/Valparaiso exit and drive east on Gateway Blvd past Rte 49. Turn left on Village Point Rd. Parking available at Phillip's Pond. From I-94 E, take the Chesterton/Valparaiso exit south to Rte 49. Stay on 49 about 2 miles. Turn left at Voyage Blvd and continue east to pavilion parking area



Wild geranium



Dick Young Forest Preserve by Jayne Bohner



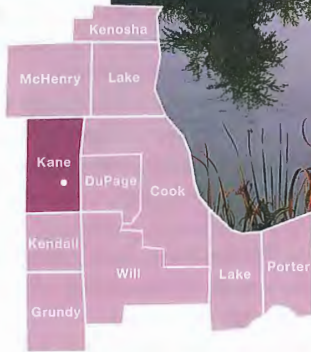
AT 1,010 ACRES, Dick Young Forest Preserve is by far Kane County's largest single holding. Popular among Scout groups and botanists alike, many regard it as the county's flagship for biodiversity. The preserve, a bowl-like depression encircled by uplands, is home to a 10,000-year-old marsh; a fen, prairie, woodland, and savanna; a 40-acre lake; and rare flora and fauna.

After The Nature Conservancy held the property for a brief time, the Forest Preserve District of Kane County purchased the first parcel in 1978. Originally named Nelson Lake Marsh Forest Preserve, the site was renamed in 2001 in honor of renowned local conservationist Dick Young.

Because of its enviable mix of rich wetland, woodland, and grassland habitats, Dick Young Forest Preserve is known most as one of the premier birding sites in Kane County. The preserve also harbors rare butterflies that exist in only a few preserves across Chicago Wilderness, including the Baltimore checkerspot



Dick Young Forest Preserve



and muskrats navigating through the wetter terrain, and coyotes, foxes, and voles moving along the uplands.

A stone silo marks the parking lot on Nelson Lake Road, a handy landmark for visitors who walk the three miles

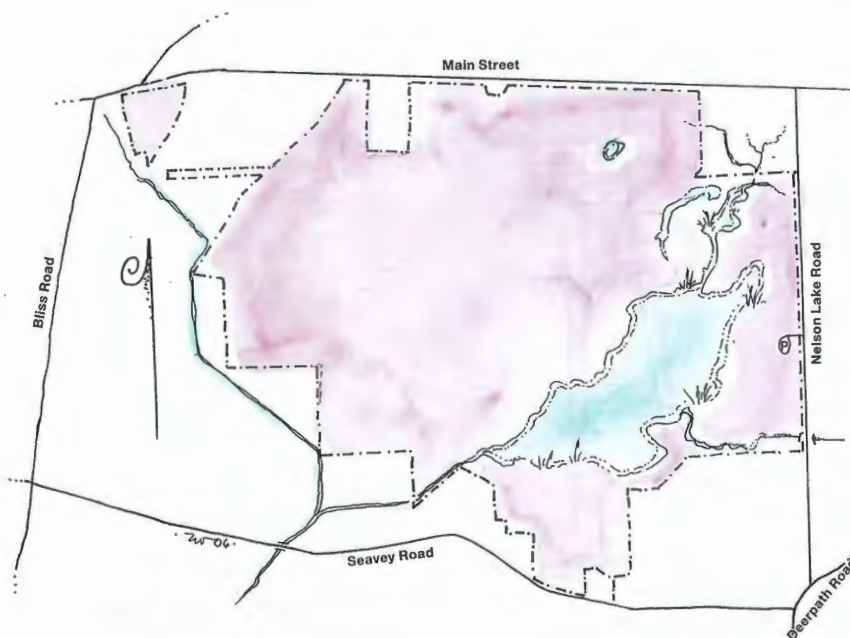
and swamp metal-mark. Visitors may also see beavers

of looped trails that circle both the marsh and lake. The silo also serves as a reminder of the land's farmers, who were unable to drain this basin and so left its original ecosystems largely untouched. A shortcut heads due west from the parking lot through the preserve's grassy landscape to an observation deck on the edge of the water. There, in spring and fall, birders have reported greater white-fronted geese, snow geese, and as many as twenty kinds of ducks. During summer, the site is popular with herons, egrets, and cormorants. Visitors may also spot nesting sandhill cranes picking their way through the shallows, while yellow-headed blackbirds cling to emergent plant stems.



Canvasback duck

The main loop heads north from the parking lot until it hooks west and finds Nelson Lake Marsh. The marsh is the heart of 172 acres that were dedicated in 1981 as an Illinois Nature Preserve. Geologically speaking, the marsh is a "kettle," a scar left by blocks of buried, slow-melting ice separated from the



Map: Lynda Wallis



Emergent vegetation is popular with some nesting birds

Photo: Mike MacDonald/ChicagoNature.com

Wisconsin Glacier some 10,000 years ago. It's a fertile sanctuary for plants—from mucky peat moss to swamp milkweed, great water dock, water parsnip, mad-dog-skullcap, and blue flag. Coots, American and least bitterns, and soras spend time in this wetland vegetation.

The trail continues counter-clockwise through the middle of the preserve where the marsh and 40-acre Nelson Lake border farmland that the Forest Preserve District is now restoring to prairie. The wide open spaces attract eastern meadowlarks, dickcissels, and many native sparrow species. Birders have spotted Brewer's blackbirds, rusty blackbirds, horned larks, lapland longspurs, and snow buntings, too. From this side, the trail heads east across the Audubon Bridge, skirts along an adjoining farm, and travels through woodland habitat on its way back to the parking lot.

In addition to foot traffic, the preserve's mowed paths welcome cross-country skis and snowshoes, when weather permits, as well as leashed dogs. The site also has a latrine, picnic tables, and a water pump at the parking lot, as well as benches along the trail. To volunteer to help restore the native landscape at the preserve, call Angelique Dunning at (847) 741-8350.

Roaming

For those looking for further outdoor adventure, **Fabyan Forest Preserve** at 1925 Batavia Avenue in Geneva, (630) 232-5980, offers hiking and bicycling trails, riverfront fishing, a Japanese garden, and an 1850s windmill, which is now open for tours on Saturdays and Sundays between May 15 and October 15, from 1 to 4 p.m. Part of the

former estate of George and Nelle Fabyan, the preserve also features the **Fabyan Villa Museum**, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The Batavia Depot Museum, 155 Houston Street in Batavia, (630) 406-5274, is located in an 1854 station that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The museum features the Lincoln room, with furniture from Batavia's Bellevue Place where Mary Todd Lincoln stayed in 1875, a 1907 caboose that showcases early railroad life, and artifacts from Native American tribes who once lived in the area. The museum is open every day but Tuesday and Thursday, from 2 to 4 p.m., March through November.

The museum is a short walk across the Fox River from the **Batavia Riverwalk**, (630) 879-5235, which features a play area, picnic area, shelter, and fishing area, access to the Fox River Bike Trail, and a series of Batavia-made windmills, which give the town its nickname, the "The Windmill City."

Foraging



A restaurant for every appetite lies near Route 31 between Batavia and Geneva. **Kathy's Riverwalk Diner** at 134 W. Wilson in Batavia, (630) 879-5299, is a cozy, warm establishment that is open for breakfast and lunch. (Don't forget to try their famous pancakes.)

For still more festive fare, **Don Manuel's** at 1890 Mill Street in Batavia, (630) 879-7979, offers an authentic, gourmet Mexican menu. Don Manuel's is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday.

O'Brien's Pub & Grill at 12 N. River Street in Batavia, (630) 406-9200, features sandwiches, salads and dinners with a touch of Irish flair. Take advantage of sidewalk seating and an outdoor beer garden in the warmer months.

Bedding Down



In Geneva, both the **Oscar Swan Country Inn** at 1800 West State Street, (630) 232-0173, and the **Herrington Inn and Spa** at 15 South River Lane, (630) 208-7433, offer unique overnight experiences. An 1860s farmhouse turned 1930s country

At a Glance

THE SCENE 10,000-year-old marsh surrounded by woodlands, savanna, and prairie

HIGHLIGHTS Waterfowl and grassland birds, observation deck overlooking wetlands

STATS 1,010 acres, 3 miles of mowed trails

BEHIND THE SCENES Arrowheads found in the area suggest an Indian settlement existed along the east end of the marsh. The site's lake sediment holds plant pollen 17,000 years old—one of the oldest plant records in the state

GETTING THERE Take I-88 W to Rte 31. Head north on 31 to Main St in Batavia. Go west/left on Main to Nelson Lake Rd and south quarter-mile to preserve entrance.

estate, the Oscar Swan Country Inn is now a bed-and-breakfast with multiple dining rooms and a garden room with floor-to-ceiling windows. Rooms range from \$99 to \$169 per night and include breakfast. The Herrington Inn and Spa features rooms and suites, each with fireplaces, jetted tubs, and turndown service complete with milk and cookies. The rustic stone lobby features a lounge and the entrance to Atwaters, which serves lunch, dinner, and Sunday breakfast. Rooms start at \$199.

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/spring2006/we.html.

Into the Wild: Cook County Paddock Woods

At a Glance

THE SCENE Open oak woodland

HIGHLIGHTS "Trillium hill," other fine woodland plant communities

STATS 250 acres, 2 miles of trails

BEHIND THE SCENES Ask at nearby Fitzjoy Farm Stables, (708) 361-7977, for information on trail rides in the Palos Preserve

GETTING THERE Take I-55 South and exit South at Rte 45 (LaGrange Rd). Turn left/east on Rte 83 (Cal-Sag Rd) and turn right onto S. 86th Ave. Turn right into preserve

CITY DWELLERS USED TO INSTANT GRATIFICATION will delight in Paddock Woods Forest Preserve in southwestern Cook County. Springtime flowers sweep down a hill visible from the parking lot, and a larger encore of blooms is located just a few hundred yards down the preserve's looping pathway. What the two-mile trail through the 250-acre Paddock Woods lacks in length it makes up for by the instant disappearance of roads and buildings, replaced by sweeping oak trees and rich wildflower displays. "It's a nice secluded woods," says site steward Ken Stoffel. "You can get out here and feel like you're in a non-urbanized area."

Paddock Woods sits in the southeast corner of the enormous Palos and Sag Valley Preserves, which contain some of the first green spaces purchased by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. These preserves once seemed quite remote from the city. Now they're surrounded by homes and businesses.

Although controlled burns haven't been done in Paddock Woods for more than a decade, the initially high-quality preserve has retained much of its character as an open woodland. Vegetation under the preserve's red and white oaks is relatively free of the usual invasive plants, such as buckthorn, honeysuckle, and garlic mustard. Look instead for native woodland wildflowers living among "glacial erratics," small boulders deposited here by the Wisconsin glaciation thousands of years ago. (Most of the western edge of the preserve is located on the Tinley Moraine, a long, snaking hill created by the glacier. The southwest corner is on the Valparaiso Moraine.)

Paddock Woods is especially a sight to see in the springtime, when so-called "Trillium Hill" offers a magnificent display of its namesake flower a short ways north along the trail from the eastern parking lot. The three-petaled trillium cover the trail's left side with a blanket of white, mingling with yellow-green Solomon's seal, purple Joe Pye-weed, and creamy-yellow Dutchman's breeches. Throughout the year, red and white oaks watch from overhead, although many of the preserve's red oaks have died off from oak wilt disease. They remain standing,



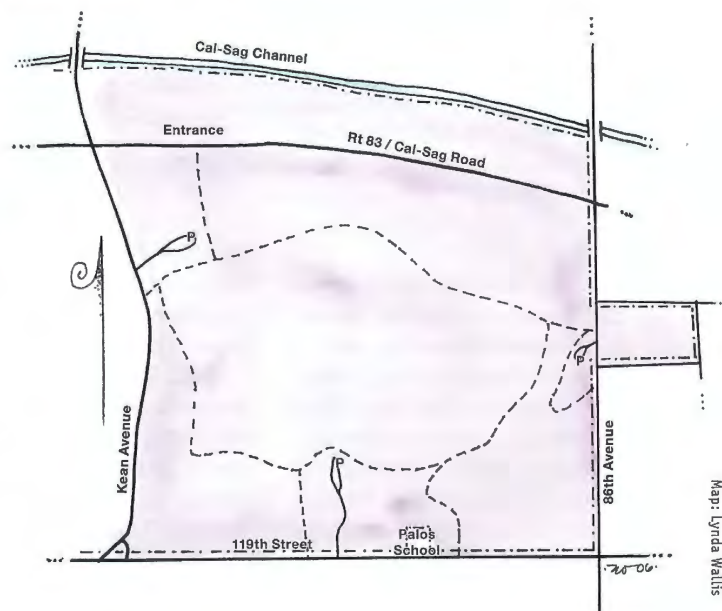
though—woodpeckers call them home, and so do the insects those woodpeckers call dinner. Without leaves, these deceased oaks let in more light to the understory below. Along Kean Avenue

on the western side of the preserve, look for ephemeral ponds that appear during rainy periods.

Habitat monitors conducting a "woodland audit" at Paddock Woods in recent years have noted that wildflower abundance and diversity on the inside of the main loop trail is markedly greater than that on the outside. They attribute this to several controlled burns conducted on the inner section years ago.

Since its trails connect to adjacent preserves, hikers, cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders can connect a visit to Paddock Woods with a longer trip through the Palos Preserve system. Given these mixed uses, please observe posted markers indicating appropriate trail traffic.

—Allison Knab



Map: Lynda Wallis

Into the Wild: Spring 2006

Natural Events

Early Spring

REGAL APPOINTMENT During his annual royal visit to the Chicago Wilderness, the little kinglet enjoys flashing his crown of gold. He confronts his adversaries by tilting his shoulders forward and raising the small tuft of orange and yellow feathers on the top of his head. What a show-off.



Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Golden-crowned kinglets are tiny grayish birds that seem to be in a constant state of agitation, flicking their wings every few seconds. They pass through our area during the middle of March and are gone by May Day, on their way to the evergreen palace north of the Great Lakes. There's a single record of golden-crowned kinglets breeding in Illinois, from June 2003—a pair that raised a family in a small grove of spruce trees on a hill at The Morton Arboretum.

YELLOW-HEADED STRANGER The male yellow-headed blackbird practices polygamy. He returns to his cattail home in late April, a short time before his female counterparts. When the girls finally arrive, he greets his prospective mates with humility; head bowed, wings out, rasping a variety of scratchy vocals. The ones he successfully impresses weave their over-water nests amongst cattails and rushes. They use wet vegetation for the warp and weft, which will dry and bind itself tightly to the upright supports.

Yellow-headed blackbirds are primarily a western bird. One of the largest populations of nesting yellow-headed blackbirds east of the

Mississippi River is in the Chicago Wilderness. These beautiful, state-endangered birds can be found in large marshes throughout the region.

Middle Spring

GREEN PARTY When male and female smooth green snakes mate during May, it's an affectionate affair, often taking place in the romantic confines of an ant-hill. A few weeks later, with warm enough weather, the female will deposit small, elliptical, thin-shelled eggs in decomposing vegetation. If the weather stays cool, she may retain the eggs until conditions are favorable. In a few cases, the eggs have hatched while still inside Mom's body, slithering out as they would in an animal that bears live young.



Late Spring

LARGEST HARDWOOD Eastern cottonwoods are very, very big trees and one of the very, very biggest is growing in a quiet neighborhood in the quiet town of Downers Grove. Close to record size at more than 7.5 feet in diameter, it's a real stunner of a tree.

Sexually speaking, cottonwood trees are dioecious, with male and female flowers found on separate trees. During

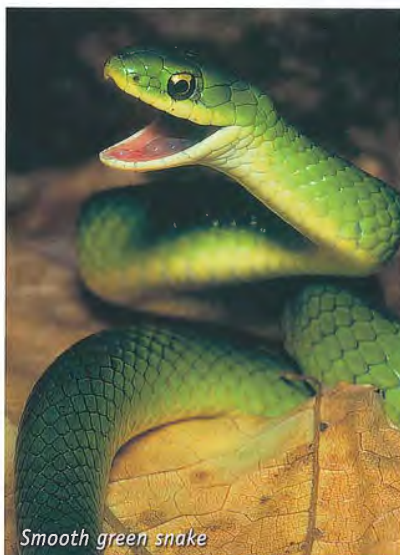


Photo: A. B. Sheldon/Root Resources



Photo: Arthur Morris/Birds As Art

the early days of spring, the male tree produces long reddish flowers, with stamens literally dripping with pollen. At the same time, the flowers of the female cottonwood elongate, forming a string of capsules that will enclose the seeds as they develop.

Toward the end of spring, the cottonwood releases white fluffy seeds in the showy display that earned the tree its name. It looks like a blizzard in June, with drifts of seeds blanketing lawns and piling up along curbs, alleys, and sidewalks.

Until recently, the big-tree national champion eastern cottonwood was the ten-foot-diameter beauty that grew along the Illinois and Michigan Canal in Grundy County. I visited that tree often, including the day after a June 1992 storm sadly brought it down.

LAKE STURGEON I really believe that on some future June day, lake sturgeon will again spawn locally, slipping gracefully through our waters and occasionally breaking the surface like prehistoric porpoises. The future seems bright. In recent years, several hundred-thousand lake sturgeon hatchlings have been reintroduced into parts of the Milwaukee and Manitowoc Rivers. In addition, 200 yearling sturgeons have been reintroduced. It's conceivable that a few could venture this way some year soon and perhaps stay for a while.

Local reports of sturgeon are rare. In March 2000, a fisherman caught and released a 45-inch lake sturgeon in Wolf Lake on the Illinois-Indiana border. According to its tag, attached on August 1994, this fine fish had a fantastic voyage that began in the Wolf River in northeast Wisconsin and ended in the Chicago Wilderness, more than 250 miles and countless obstructions away.

Illustrations: Karl A. Urban

Beth and Jim Harris: making frogs famous

Jim Harris focuses the camera. Beth, his wife, adjusts the lights. In waist-deep water, they move quietly, hoping their presence won't ruin the shot. In the spotlight sits a chorus frog, staring up at the moon. It puffs up its throat and begins to call, adding its voice to the springtime choir. Then, for a moment, the pond grows silent. Like a finger against the teeth of a comb, its voice

Australia, Illinois has no dangerous lions or reptiles that can be wrestled, so kids don't get very much exposure to the incredible native biodiversity that surrounds them. "I'm trying to encourage kids to notice what's around them," explains Jim, "and hopefully even to protect and save it."

"If we can personalize some of the disappearing habitats and the animals

The end product was a fun, educational video featuring chorus, wood, leopard, and tree frogs, spring peepers, and more. All species but wood and cricket frogs were shot on their property. Indeed, theirs is one of the few places that can boast of having both plains and leopard frogs, as well as both American and Fowler's toads. (All these species' ranges rarely overlap.)

The video's narration was geared towards young children, but the video's intimate and cinematic images allow any audience to see frogs in ways that normally require crouching for hours in hip waders. The couple made it a priority to show and describe the markings of each species as well as their calls, so that the video would help amateurs identify frogs.

When it came time to put the movie on DVDs, the Harrises looked for assistance from state and local organizations, but had no luck. At that point, they bit the bullet and paid for 1,000 professional copies by themselves. They sent their video to grade-school teachers and environmental groups across the state, but still wish they had been able to do more. Jim says he's holding out hope that an interested organization with some extra cash will see the video and help them get it into schools all across the state.

Yet, with or without additional funding, the Harrises plan to continue making videos. Based on survey responses from students, Jim and Beth think they'll soon be delving into the insect world, filming dragonflies or butterflies for their next project. Until then, they plan to further restore their backyard prairie as a haven for local species that have few places left to go. And every spring, as these animals climb out of the ponds and fly out of the trees, the Harrises will be there with their camera and lights, waiting to catch the perfect shot.

—Tegan Jones

To order *Frogs of Illinois*, call (815) 427-9844.



Photo: Beth and Jim Harris

suddenly echoes alone. Jim and Beth smile at each other. They finally have their shot.

This late-night scene became one of many great close-ups in the 2004 independent educational video, *Frogs of Illinois (Volume 1: Northern Illinois)*. In the film, Jim and Beth Harris capture the beauty of the native amphibians that live near their country home in St. Anne, Illinois, in Kankakee County. Behind their home, ten acres of restored native prairie and a three-quarter-acre pond put the perfect filming location at their fingertips.

The Harrises, both computer consultants by day, created this video out of concern that kids today are only familiar with the "cool," exotic animals that they see on television. Unlike Africa or

that live there, then we can communicate their value to other people, especially kids," Beth agrees.

This communication began as a video dialogue between the Harrises and their nieces and nephews. When the kids came to visit from nearby Bourbonnais, Jim would walk them through the prairie and other wild spots, trying to capture new, interesting species on video. When the kids were away, he would often film things that he thought they would enjoy when they came back.

After seeing how well their relatives responded to those videos, Jim and Beth decided to do something more with their hobby. Over the next three years, the Harrises shot hours of video, edited clips, dubbed narration, and wrote music.

American Woodcock: springtime song and dance

It's late March. The sun has set. The robins and red-winged blackbirds have hushed. I've been waiting quietly in an open area near the edge of woods. Without prelude, a distinct buzzing call breaks the silence: "Peent! Peent!" The insect-like sound, similar to the call of a nighthawk, repeats from the ground 20 to 40 times, then stops. Moments later, a loud twittering takes its place, and the silhouette of what looks like a large, chubby hummingbird flies right past me and circles high into the sky, nearly disappearing into the twilight. A new noise—this time a chirping chortle—signals descent a few minutes later as the bird seesaws down to earth, dive-bombing the last 20 feet and landing where it started. On the ground and out of sight, it launches into a head-bopping floorshow, strutting back and forth. Soon, the peents are back, and the whole ritual repeats itself. On evenings when a full moon is shining, the bird will perform late into the night.

This grandiose performance is the mating dance of the male American woodcock, *Scolopax minor*. Repeated every night for several weeks in the spring, often with other males, it may be just as impressive to humans as to the female woodcock. Groups of nature lovers and birdwatchers head out to the trails every March and early April to watch this normally shy, elusive bird make a spectacle of itself.

Also known as the timberdoodle, bog sucker, and Labrador twister, the woodcock is a plump bird with almost no neck and slender legs. Elaborately feathered in a handsome tweed of tawny browns, glossy black, and cream, it measures 10 to 12 inches, including a 2.5-inch-long bill. A woodcock's eyes are located far back on its head so that it can see predators while it's feeding. Ear holes slightly in front of the eyes help locate its favorite food—earthworms—which make up about 80 percent of its diet. (The bird's ears and eyes are so large, that its brain actually rests upside-down to accommodate them.) The flexible tip of its long bill—which reportedly can detect a slime trail up to 24 hours after a worm

lays it down—allows it to grasp worms, beetles, larvae, seeds, and berries without opening its entire bill.

Although the American woodcock is classified as a shorebird, it stays inland for most of its life. It arrives in the Chicago Wilderness area every March after a four- to six-week journey from its winter home in the Deep South. Until the bird returns south in November, hik-

combination of habitat destruction and the lingering effects of banned pesticides. In addition, the low-flying woodcock collides with our large buildings in higher percentages than many other birds. The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, a national effort headed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has identified the Chicago region as important for the species' recovery. Habitat restoration

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder



ers may encounter it in our woodlands and shrubby fields.

Although females may occasionally join in on the sky dance, it's more typical for them to be "called in" by the festivities, joining the male at the site of his floorshow. The pair then proceeds to a nesting site, and if the female woodcock is receptive, mating occurs. Males may display in several different locations, and they usually mate with more than one female. The female will lay eggs in a shallow depression on the ground and takes about six to eight weeks to raise the young.

American woodcock populations have slowly declined during the past 20 years. Although overhunting has been suspected, the cause is more likely a

here in the bird's breeding territory could help the species as it recovers across the eastern United States and the Midwest.

Those wishing to see the woodcocks' avian exhibition can join one of the many "woodcock walks" in spots such as Wolf Road Prairie in Westchester and The Hollows Conservation Area in Cary. (Consider reading Aldo Leopold's oft-cited woodcock account, "Sky Dance," in *A Sand County Almanac* before heading out.) Forest preserve naturalists also may be able to guide you to the perfect spot to view them on your own. It's well worth an evening or two, and it may just become one of your spring rituals.

—Sabine Vorkoeper

Great Lakes Big Stakes

In late January, Chicago WILDERNESS Editor Debra Shore sat down with two representatives from Illinois' Congressional delegation, Democrat Melissa Bean (IL-8) and Republican Mark Kirk (IL-10), to discuss their environmental agendas, their favorite places, and the prospects for the Great Lakes Restoration Act.

When Melissa Bean won a seat in Congress in November 2004, it was considered one of the biggest upsets of that election. She defeated the longest-serving Republican member of the House of Representatives, Phil Crane, and the environment was one of her strongest issues.

Bean, 44, lives with her husband, Alan, and two daughters, Victoria and Michelle, in Barrington in northwest Cook County. "We actually live out on a small lake," Bean said. "My daughters love it. They can fish and go out on the water. When we bike, we go to Cuba Marsh by Ela and Cuba Roads. My in-laws have a place in Hayward, Wisconsin, which is where we disconnect best because it's just so quiet.

"People who've moved to the 8th District really appreciate the value of open space," Bean said. "Air quality and water quality are big issues. And people have had some really sad stories to tell. There were some people living in Wauconda near a Superfund site that may have been leaking vinyl chloride into their wells, contaminating their water. With Senator Durbin's help, we were able to get them about \$750,000 in federal funding so they could get access to city water." This issue remains contentious for many residents who appreciate access to safe water supplies but still want the contaminated site cleaned up. Bean says she is continuing to seek a solution.

Bean and Congressman Mark Kirk are both sponsors of the Great Lakes Restoration Act of 2005 (HR 792; introduced by Illinois' Rahm Emanuel), along with most other members of the Illinois delegation and many from the Great Lakes states. The Act recognizes the vital importance of the Great Lakes as a source of fresh water for more than 40 million residents of the United States and Canada and seeks funding to restore health to the fishery, protect against invasive species, clean shorelines

of polluted sediments, and reduce beach closings, among other things. In 2003, for instance, there were a record 1,473 beach closings due to high bacteria levels in Lake Michigan alone.

Bean has begun an initiative to involve area small businesses in Lake Michigan restoration. By recruiting local companies with an interest in the lake's quality, she is working to bring residents, government entities, and the business community together in common purpose.

"If we can get the Great Lakes Restoration Act through," Bean says, "it calls for a public education campaign. That legislation is about committing to the *concept* of moving forward. It's more about planning and targeting than appropriations at this point. Without pay-as-you-go budget rules, it's just harder to even find the money to do anything you want to do. Once we get our fiscal house back in order, we can do so much more."

Still, Bean is proud of her efforts to defeat proposals to permit drilling for oil in the Great Lakes, and she saluted her fellow Congressman's support. "Mark Kirk came out to our press conference when we talked about drilling for oil in the Great Lakes," she pointed out. "He may have been the only Republican to do so."

Mark Kirk was elected to Congress in 2000 from Illinois' 10th District, encompassing the eastern part of Lake County and northern Cook County. Part of a group of moderate Republicans seeking to promote environmental protection and fiscal responsibility in Congress, Kirk is one of three representatives from the Chicago Wilderness region to serve on the powerful House Appropriations Committee. The others are Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. (IL) and Peter Visclosky (IN).

An intelligence officer in the Naval Reserves and an attorney, Kirk lives with his wife Kimberly at the former Fort

Sheridan in Highland Park. He has been a strong advocate for open space preservation, helping to ensure that the bluffs of Fort Sheridan remain protected from development, voting in favor of a provision in the energy bill that permanently bans drilling for oil in the Great Lakes, and opposing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. "Anybody who seeks to drill [in the Great Lakes] now needs an Act of Congress," Kirk said, stressing how difficult that will be.

Kirk has a great affinity for Lake Michigan, paradoxically because he nearly drowned in the lake at age 16. His favorite place now, he says, is the bluffs along the Winnetka shoreline. In working to save the bluffs and ravines of Fort Sheridan, Kirk notes that the primary threat to the site was not invasive species, but developers.

Lately he's been drafting a bill in Congress to provide more favorable tax treatment for landowners who donate open space. "Especially in exurbia," Kirk says, "you've got land holdings owned by people with strong aesthetic values. We don't want a life in which the entire ride to school is along a strip mall."

Kirk was cautiously optimistic about the prospect of bringing the Great Lakes restoration legislation to the House floor this spring. Even without that important new initiative, Kirk points out, we already have 69 federal programs devoted to protecting the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Legacy Act, for instance, has provided money—up to \$30 million—for

cleaning contaminated sediments in harbors, from which Waukegan has benefited greatly. "As a result of the \$21 million we will be able to spend to clean up Waukegan Harbor," Kirk said, "property values in Lake County will go up by \$800 million and the average house value in Waukegan will increase by \$53,000." The federal government can pay up to two-thirds of the cleanup costs, but the state and local authorities will need to pick up the rest, which has been the obstacle so far.

The Great Lakes Restoration plan could potentially engage 128 members of Congress (those whose districts touch upon or are affected by the Great Lakes). "If they all share a dream," Kirk said, "you have a force far wider and more powerful than what we had for the Everglades."

To protect the Great Lakes from the further introduction of invasive species, Kirk plans to introduce legislation that will require all foreign freighters entering the Great Lakes to disinfect their ballast tanks. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Canadian Mounted Police would share responsibility for enforcing this law.

"Sometimes I look at Lake Michigan," Kirk mused, "and I wonder what was the wildlife like, what was the shoreline like, what was the lake like when Marquette paddled here. And in 100 years, could a lot of the lake look like that again?"

Photos courtesy of Mark Kirk and Melissa Bean.

Aerial: DigitalGlobe.com © 2005

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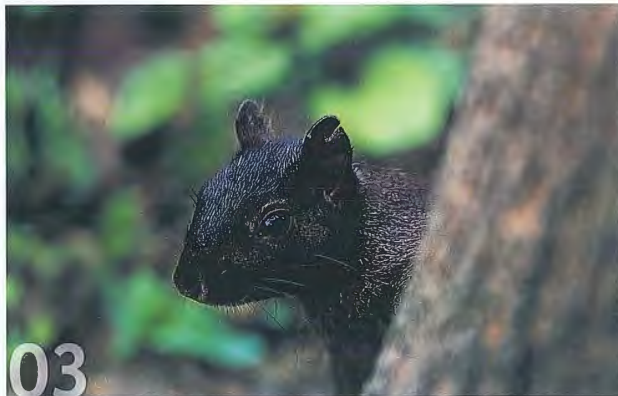


every day in may

A Month-Long Search for Warblers and Wilderness

Words and Photos by Carol Freeman

As a nature photographer, I view May as one of the most glorious months to be outside. Ephemeral wildflowers bloom and waves of birds migrate through—especially warblers. While I appreciate all of nature, I am obsessed with warblers. In the past, I never had much luck seeing or photographing these tiny wonders from the neotropics. They pass through Chicago so quickly, here one day and gone the next, on to their breeding grounds up north. So when fate unexpectedly left me with an entire month on my hands, I decided to dedicate myself to finding and hopefully photographing some warblers. My plan was to go out every day, rain or shine. My motto became “Every Day in May.” And so I did just that, and I did find a few warblers. But I also played tag with bobolinks, witnessed endangered dog violets, helped to restore the Chicago River, and more—in all I visited 28 different places, photographing 174 plant and animal species. As it turned out, fate had a plan better than any I could have dreamed of myself.



03 The Grove in Glenview—cold, dreary, and windy. No warblers, so I stay around the interpretive center. I see some nice birds at the feeders—and this black squirrel.



07 Today I'm at the Magic Hedge, on Montrose Point along Lake Michigan in Chicago. Don't see many warblers but hit the jackpot with other birds. Even see the endangered American bittern.



10 The winds were from the south last night. If the warbler gods are nice, I will find wave after wave of warblers in Ryerson Woods in Deerfield. One challenge I face is that in this mature woodland, many warblers stay in the tall treetops, out of the reach of my lenses. I follow some sweet bird song to a clearing in the woods anyway, and see an amazing warbler, the Nashville, with its unmistakable white eye ring.

11 Today is really a nasty day, but I stop by the Magic Hedge on the way to a meeting downtown and catch a photo of this great crested flycatcher.

16 Another annual May event is bird banding at Shaw Prairie in Lake Forest. I go up there today to lend them a hand. I get to see some beautiful birds up close, including a common yellowthroat (in hand) and a magnolia warbler.

17 Went looking for lady's slipper orchids today, but found this crab spider instead, clinging to a cream wild indigo blossom. I am always amazed at what I find when I am looking for something else.

19 There were storms last night and the day is starting out with rain and clouds. I have been told that this kind of weather can produce a great bird day. The birds are knocked down by the rain, giving birders good views. I wind up at the top of the Chicago Botanic Garden waterfall garden. The place is hopping, literally hopping, with birds all over the place. I see magnolia, Wilson's, yellow-rumped, Canada, chestnut-sided, and the jewel of all warblers, the Blackburnian warbler. This Wilson's warbler is just stunning. It simply took my breath away when it showed up. I only got a few shots before it flew off, but what a show!



20 I feel rushed and stressed today. With only three hours of sunlight left, I head for the Chicago River near my house. I know if I sit very still in one spot for 15 or 20 minutes, the birds will show up. The river is making a nice riffle sound where I am. The birds like this spot. A small bird has flown into the tree near me—a bay-breasted warbler! I have never seen this bird this close before. Leaving the river, I feel completely refreshed, with a new attitude.

22 Back to the Grove, where I find a painted turtle sunning on a branch. I walk along the boardwalk and scare up a green heron.

23 I am transported back in time at Volo Bog in Ingleside today, where the prehistoric ferns are just unfurling. The bog is from the last ice age and I think little has changed since then. I notice several articles taped to the nature center door telling of the state budget cuts that have eliminated virtually

all their staff! I am heartbroken. While searching Volo Bog for some of the smallest birds, I am treated to one of the largest in our area when a sandhill crane flies by.

25 I go to Crabtree Nature Center. Hoping for warblers, but looking for frogs and turtles, too. One of the things I like most about this place is the sign they have out front, that says wildlife comes FIRST here. It's fairly quiet today, but a walk around the wetlands rewards me with a brand new fawn.

26 Walking for a while at the Chicago Botanic Garden, I come upon a cedar waxwing, right in front of me, in a flowering tree. This almost never happens—birds are usually in the ugliest tree on the barest branch, or behind leaves in the dark. But here is this cedar waxwing eating the flower blossoms. I realize that I am on this path to find this bird in this tree at this moment.



27 It's Chiwaukee Prairie today. Here, everything pales in comparison to the showy display of shooting stars. I walk around the prairie and find bird's foot violet. Next I go to nearby Illinois Beach State Park. Here in the sandy soil, the lupines are in bloom. I hear something rustle in the leaf litter. I follow the sound and then I see it—a beautiful western fox snake. It is shaking its tail, sounding just like a rattlesnake. On closer examination, I see the tail has no rattle. The snake is just shaking it on the leaves, impersonating a venomous snake. How clever! It certainly kept *me* at a safe distance.

29 Today, I go to Bluff Spring Fen—I love this place. It has a creek, a fen, small rolling hills called kames, prairie, forest, wetland—a little of everything. The combination is magical, and many rare and unusual plants and animals call this place home. This is one of the only spots I know of to photograph Baltimore checkerspot butterflies. It is too early to see the butterflies, but I spot the caterpillars right away.

The big wave of birds finally came yesterday. I could sense that it had to come soon, and I went to Montrose Point. When I arrived, the place had that feel, almost a buzz. The birds were all over the trees, moving fast. They seemed to know they were late, and were feeding in a hurry so they could move on as soon as possible. With the trees fully leafed out, though, it was hard to get a good photo.

31 Early in the morning, I head for the nearest prairie, Somme Prairie Grove in Northbrook. I love to tell people I live five minutes away from a prairie. Actually, I live five minutes away from two prairies, several woods, two rivers, wetlands, and other nature. For living in a city, I am lucky to have so much nature nearby. Today I catch the buds of carrion flower, looking amazing with dew. A great way to end the month.

*Carol Freeman lives in Glenview.
To view more of her work, visit carolfreemanphotography.com.*

1 Pipe To Be Diverted from Apathy Canyon

If all goes as planned, Apathy Canyon will be history. The 1,000-foot-long, 20-foot-deep erosion gully at Theodore Stone Forest Preserve in Hodgkins, Illinois (CW, Fall 2005), may stop advancing and actually disappear. In February, the Village of Hodgkins announced that it would seal off the pipe that for decades has funneled runoff from a shopping mall parking lot into the forest preserve. The massive erosion ditch carved the deep scar into the preserve, toppled and engulfed ancient oaks on the bluffs, and dumped loads of sediment and polluted water on a rare dolomite prairie below.

The village says it will seal off the pipe at the edge of the preserve and connect it to the main storm sewer line, which runs outside the eastern border of the preserve. Three new sections of connective piping will handle the main spillover, as well as another overflow on the east side of the preserve. Village officials hope to finish work this spring. The Forest Preserve District itself committed to filling and repairing Apathy Canyon to its former state—a forested bluff.

The motivation for the village's decision may have been twofold. It received an ultimatum from the hardware chain Menards, which said it would not move a new store nearby until the situation was resolved. But according to Hodgkins village president Noel Cummings, citizens

also enjoy this forest preserve and don't like to see it ruined. Cummings has suggested that he would like to see schoolkids visiting the preserve on a regular basis.

—Don Parker

2 World Record at Bartel Grassland

On December 3, nearly 100 people gathered at Bartel Grassland in Matteson, Illinois, to attempt to set a new world record for planting seeds by hand. They gathered knowing that whether or not they set a record, they would be helping to restore the area's natural vegetation.

Owned by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Bartel Grassland was once a hayfield with dense hedgerows. For five years, volunteers have been working with Audubon and Forest Preserve staff to return the grassland to a more natural condition. They and contractors have removed miles of hedgerows, conducted controlled burns, pulled invasive plants, and seeded native grasses and wildflowers.

Dick Riner, volunteer steward for the site, organized the event as a fun way to engage new volunteers in the restoration effort. He said it drew people of all ages, ranging from families with children in strollers to people in their 80s. Within just a few hours, the group succeeded in scattering an estimated 25 million seeds. "When you look at \$10,000 worth of seeds, well, that's a lot of seeds," said Riner.

Riner had appealed to the *Guinness Book of World Records* for recognition for the most seeds hand-planted by the most people in one day. The approach to Guinness got widespread publicity, but the book in the end declined to add seed planting to its lists. Nevertheless, what counts to Riner is that a great social event brought volunteers to plant so many seeds that will improve this important nesting habitat for grassland birds.

In the spring, volunteers who return to the site will see rare birds such as bobolinks and Henslow's sparrows. The work will also improve the grassland for people like Riner who enjoy the peace and quiet of the preserve.

"I go out there just to

breathe the air," he said. "It's as close as you can get around here to being in a prairie wilderness."

—Stephanie Folk

3 Wolf Road Prairie in Trouble

In mid-February, the Westchester Village Board was slated to vote on a bid by Patric Greene Development Group to build 27 houses on ten acres adjacent to Wolf Road Prairie in Westchester. They instead deferred the vote to allow for a survey of potential ecological impacts. A state nature preserve, Wolf Road Prairie is one of the last and best remaining original blacksoil prairies.

Greene has proposed building an access road on a strip of untouched prairie along the preserve's west edge. While the strip is still zoned as a road (a technicality from an abandoned Depression-era housing project), actual construction would sever the preserve from adjacent buffer lands and disrupt site hydrology.

The development itself would be built on land that advocates have been trying for years to secure as a preserve buffer. A vote may come soon. To contact Save the Prairie Society, call (708) 865-8736.

4 Fall Burn Report

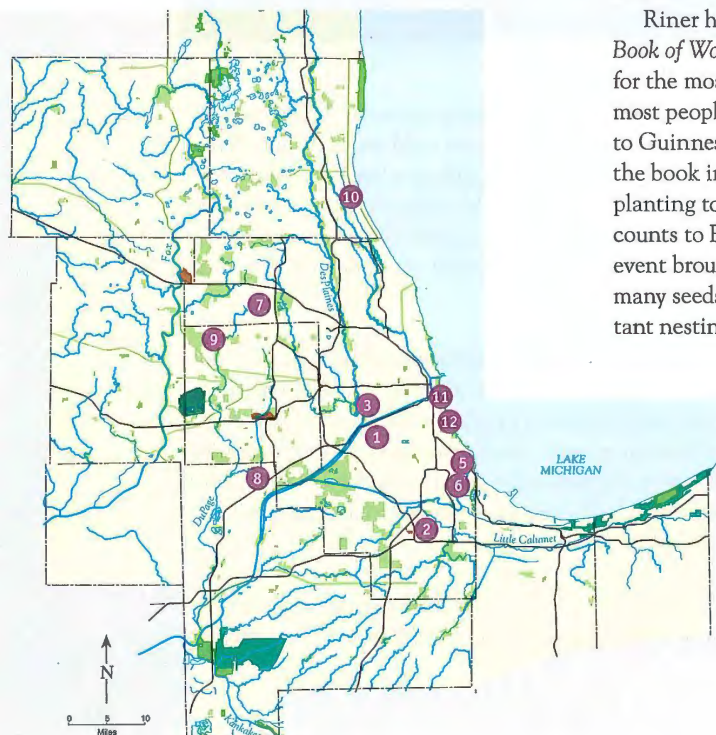
Following last summer's drought, land managers were able to burn more wet places usually resistant to fire, but limited burns in woods and uplands. "We were able to get good hot fires through several wetland sites because of the drought," reports McHenry County Conservation District's Brad Woodson.

Lake County Forest Preserves were able to burn for nine days at 12 sites. A five-day window in Will County saw crews burning at eight preserves.

Agency	Acres Burned	% of Natural Acres Held
COOK FPD	N/A	N/A
DUPAGE FPD	N/A	N/A
KANE FPD	223	2.5
KENDALL FPD	50	9.0
LAKE FPD	735	7.0
MCHENRY CD	493	3.5
WILL FPD	381	4.0

December's below-freezing temperatures brought the fall season to a halt. But mild days through January and February brought crews back out to add more fire to the mix of techniques that bring health to the land.

—Alison Carney Brown



5 Chicago Moves to Buy Eagle Nesting Grounds

A pair of bald eagles has returned for a third year to a nest along the Little Calumet River. They have yet to lay eggs, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hopes that it will not be long—and they have garnered support from the City of Chicago to help protect the nesting site.

On December 14, the Chicago City Council voted unanimously to purchase a 26-acre property surrounding an active bald eagle nest. The birds were first spotted in March of 2004 with the help of officials from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Their sighting astonished bird experts, as it marked the first known bald eagle nest within city limits in more than a century.

“The fidelity these birds have for this location is a great sign,” said Walter Marcisz, former president of the Chicago Ornithological Society. “Last year I saw them adding sticks to the nest. As long as they are not disturbed, they may

establish this place as their permanent home.”

Bald eagles mate for life and build large nests in trees close to water. A federally threatened migratory species, they often return to the same nest during the breeding season. “We attribute the return of a nesting pair to Chicago as a sign that the water quality may be improving,” says Kristopher Lah, of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Lah adds that the best thing to do for this pair is to limit development nearby and sustain the forested buffers around the nest tree.

City officials will seek federal and state grants to buy the wooded acreage from a local steel company. The plan, which will likely take more than a year to implement, will eventually turn the land over to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County for management.

Alderman Anthony A. Beale of the 9th Ward, where the nesting site is located, was pleased to see the motion passed. “Preserving wildlife and providing

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—Divina Baratta

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6 Hegewisch Marsh Gets Grant

Calumet’s Hegewisch Marsh is set to get a \$750,000 face-lift, thanks to a recent grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The 100-acre parcel of wetland owned by the City of Chicago qualified for the funding under the National Coastal Wetland Conservation grant program.

While at first glance, Hegewisch Marsh may not seem to have much of a coast, its close relationship to Lake Michigan categorizes it as a coastal wetland. In fact, it’s one of the last remaining wetlands within Chicago city limits.

For the past few years, the city and its partners have carefully laid their plans for the marsh’s rehabilitation. Leading up to the grant’s submission, they had to determine where to draw the line between different wetland types, which species should be kept and which others

should be culled. When they received the grant in January, it seemed they had come close to a plan that would work.

The money from the grant will be used to put in trails, remove invasive species, and restore natural species and habitats. One project will involve digging potholes in the landscape to combat dryness and encourage “hemi-marsh” conditions. They also plan to remove cottonwoods, which tend to soak up the water that is critically needed in the wetland habitat.

The initial rehabilitation is scheduled to begin in July and continue for two years. Nicole Kamins, project director with the Chicago Department of Environment, says that full restoration could take 10 to 20 years. “You know with restoration work, it’s always a project in progress,” she says. “So, this is just the first phase of work. We anticipate

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much more money and effort, including assistance from volunteer stewards, will be needed over the coming years.”

—Tegan Jones

7 Chicago Swaps Wetlands at O'Hare

In an attempt to swap one wetland for another, the City of Chicago has given the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County \$10.8 million for wetland mitigation in the West Branch Forest Preserve. This restoration money comes as a trade for the 69 acres of wetland surrounding Willow Higgins Creek, which have been taken for development as part of O'Hare Airport's expansion.

This trade follows federal law, which demands that a new wetland take the place of any that are taken. While it's never good to lose wetland, the 69-acre site being lost is not considered high quality. In its place, 90.5 acres of healthy, restored wetland could line both sides of the DuPage River.

Recently, this land has been used for farming and grazing horses, which has made life hard for a tiny but tenacious fen there. Farmers' drain tiles and herds of animals have sent out an open invitation for brush, buckthorn, and box elders to move in.

The restoration process will involve disabling these tiles, installing valves for flood control, leveling the topography to let in more water, and removing invasive species. Sedges and other prairie and wetland plants will replace the flora that is removed.

The Forest Preserve District's Natural Resources Coordinator Erik Neidy sees a promising future for the site. With the soil intact and possibly carrying native seeds, and with some native plant communities surviving on site, he says the wetland could resurge to a state of high quality.

Soil surveys and a pre-evaluation of the site have been completed. Design work should be finished by the end of 2006, and the actual restoration is slated to begin in 2007.



—Elizabeth Riotta

8 Bolingbrook Revamps for Nature

In December of 2005, the Bolingbrook Park District tapped Alice Eastman (profiled in CW's Fall 2005 issue) to

become its first ever Superintendent of Natural Resources. As superintendent, Eastman, formerly of the Downers Grove Park District, will help rebalance district priorities to better include nature and biodiversity.

Though the district owns natural areas such as Winston Woods, Hidden Lakes, Gateway Wetlands, and various greenways, it has until now focused its resources primarily on playing fields for organized sports. Park District Director

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Ray Ochromowicz noted, "Bolingbrook has always been a young active town, but increasingly I hear from citizens about wildlife and maintenance of woodlands, wetlands, and prairies."

Nearly half of the district's 955 acres of open space are woodlands, wetlands, prairie, or water. The district expects this acreage to increase as the greenways along the DuPage River and Lily Cache Creek expand.

"This is cutting edge," Eastman said of her new post, "an entire department devoted to natural resources and environmental programming. Being able to build a department from the ground floor up is a dream come true."

9 DuPage Purchases Largest Natural Parcel in County

The acquisition of more than 377 acres of wetlands and prairie in Wayne, Illinois, has finally secured for nature the largest remaining tract of private undeveloped land in DuPage County. After eight years of litigation, the Forest Preserve District prevailed in a legal tug of war with the Oliver-Hoffmann Corporation.

The district paid \$25 million for the chunk of land southwest of Army Trail and Powis Roads, where the Hoffmann Corporation was planning a 500-home development. This acquisition, one of the district's largest single purchases, will give conservationists the opportunity

to expand the area's wetlands and help protect the crucial Fox River basin.

According to district ecologist Scott Kopal, the new site is ecologically linked to Pratt's Wayne Woods and adjacent James "Pate" Philip State Park. With only a third of a mile of homes and yards standing between the new site and Pratt's Wayne, herons, cranes, egrets, foxes, and coyotes can move relatively easily through a nearly unbroken ecosystem of more than 4,300 acres. Area residents, who supported the acquisition, have already spotted sandhill cranes on the site.

Approximately 120 acres of the site were once wetlands but were heavily tilled for farming. Disabling the tiles will be one of the first steps toward restoring the area's original hydrology. The remaining upland will be reseeded into prairie.

—Elizabeth Riotto

10 Trail Opens at Fort Sheridan

For the first time in more than a century, Fort Sheridan—formerly an Army base—now offers public access to its natural beachfront along Lake Michigan. In November 2005, the Lake County Forest Preserves opened a new 1.6-mile asphalt trail from Old Elm Road at Sheridan Road through the preserve to the Lake Michigan shore.

The trail includes a bridge over an ecologically sensitive ravine and an

educational loop around the preserve's historic parade grounds. Visitors can bike, hike, and cross-country ski on the trail, but swimming and boating are not yet permitted on this section of Lake Michigan since officials have swept only the land and not the water for explosives that might remain from the site's former use.

Work is underway on ecological restoration and interpretive exhibits. A recent vegetation survey in the ravines and shore revealed several endangered and threatened plant species. The area is also a stopover for migrating birds.

Fort Sheridan is one of the few places in Illinois that offers public access to undeveloped Lake Michigan shoreline. "We are very excited to see the Lake County Forest Preserves opening this trail and starting ecological restoration of the very rare and fragile bluffs and ravines," said Joyce O'Keefe, deputy director of Openlands Project. Openlands has been working with the U.S. Army, Lake County Forest Preserves, and Congressman Mark Kirk to ensure that much of the site becomes open space.

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—Barbara Hill

11 Shedd Opens Aquatic Invasives Exhibit

Peering into the Asian carp tank in John G. Shedd Aquarium's new permanent exhibit on invasive aquatic species in the Great Lakes, visitors can see what the lakes could look like if this invasive species escaped into Lake Michigan from the Illinois shipping canals: a bleak, barren, monoculture of carp with no sign of biodiversity. In contrast, the next tank simulates a lake ecosystem without the carp invaders, displaying multiple types of native fish, an abundance of plankton, and other living things.

The exhibit is part of a conservation initiative to draw attention to the value and vulnerability of the complex Great Lakes ecosystem. According to exhibit placards, one new invasive species enters the Great Lakes every eight months, and each decreases water quality, reduces food sources for native species, and diminishes the overall health of the lakes. Display tanks show the effects of invasive water plants, such as water hyacinths, and point out the threat of ballast water from ships, currently the primary source of new species entering the Great Lakes. (The Shedd says that there is no possibility of these invaders escaping into Lake Michigan from the lakefront aquarium itself.)

The exhibit also highlights the abundance and importance of native Great Lake species, such as paddlefish,

bigmouth buffalo, and lake sturgeon. Placards suggest ways to reduce the impact of invaders, such as hosing off all equipment before moving between bodies of water, buying only native or noninvasive pet fish from reputable distributors, and never flushing live fish down the toilet. By giving audiences the opportunity to see both invasives and natives up close, the exhibit makes a frequently abstract topic tangible.

—Catherine Bendowitz

12 Crane Migrates Home

After seven years of directing Kew, England's Royal Botanic Gardens, Sir Peter Crane is returning to the University of Chicago. On July 1, 2006, Crane, who helped launch the Chicago Wilderness coalition in the mid-1990s, will rejoin the university's Geophysical Sciences department to teach students about the complex biology of plants. Though he says leaving Kew was a difficult decision, Crane is looking forward to spending more time teaching, writing, and doing research.

"I will miss Kew enormously," he says. "Not only my wonderful friends and

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colleagues but also the sheer excitement and challenge of running the largest organization in the world focusing on plant diversity." With more than 7 million specimens, Kew houses the world's largest collection of living plants. The Royal Botanic Garden was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003 and its Millennium Seed Bank Project has developed international partnerships in an attempt to conserve 20,000 species worldwide. The Chicago Botanic Garden is a partner site in this project and Chicago Wilderness volunteers have helped collect seeds for it.

The former vice president for The Field Museum says he's excited to return to Chicago, "the only place that could have lured me away," and to get reacquainted with Chicago Wilderness. "It is such a wonderful initiative—really something that Chicago can truly be proud of—and I won't be able to resist doing what I can to help. I am especially interested in thinking about how Kew's Millennium Seed Bank can be helpful in promoting restoration and reintroduction activities."

Crane will return to the area as Sir Peter, knighted for his services to conservation and horticulture in 2004. Crane says that his knighthood has been a great honor, but that it hasn't greatly affected his personal life. "The most difficult bit was remembering which knee to go down on," Crane recalls. "I suppose there are only two choices, but it seemed disproportionately confusing at the time!"

—Tegan Jones

13 Openlands Releases "Troubled Waters"

In January 2006, Openlands Project, the Metropolitan Planning Council, and the Campaign for Sensible Growth released *Troubled Waters*, a report on the state of fresh water in northeastern Illinois. The report warns that growing urbanization has pushed many regions to the edge of sustainable water use, both from aquifers and surface sources, and outlines a shift to more sensible practices. Governor Rod Blagojevich launched a statewide water supply study the same day. To read the report, visit www.openlands.org.

14 Chicago Wilderness to Celebrate Anniversary

In April, the Chicago Wilderness consortium will begin a yearlong celebration of its 10th Anniversary. Events will celebrate successes and allow participants to plan for future work. Visit the Chicago Wilderness Web site at www.chicagowilderness.org for updates on events.

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

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Telling a Tree's Age

Tracing a tree back to its roots has never been simpler. With a newly developed aging chart, the life-spans of the region's giant old-growth trees are just a measurement away.

This useful tool resulted from a 1996 study of Chicago Wilderness' old-growth forests. Researchers Marlin Bowles of The Morton Arboretum and Michael Jones of Christopher Burke Engineering calculated the age of trees in Chicago region forests by collecting core samples from roughly 600 area specimens. The cores provided rings for the scientists to count without harming the tree (since the extractions were only 3/16" wide, the trees' living tissue was hardly affected).

The researchers say that aging forest trees can help nature enthusiasts learn more about the history of their local environment. "If you can understand how old trees are in a forest or a stand of trees, then you can have a better understanding of the history of the stand," Bowles explains.

Bowles, a plant conservation biologist, explains that an area with mostly young trees must have experienced a major logging or fire event that took out all the older trees. "If you have a stand with very old trees in it," Bowles continues, "you know that you can go back a long time before the stand was disturbed."

The study found that the oldest trees in the area, mostly white oaks, date back to the early- to mid-1800s, when settlers began to thin some of the wooded groves in northern Illinois. The data also confirms the conventional wisdom that human fire suppression has caused the number of sugar maples to increase, while oak and shrub populations decline.

For someone hoping to discover this sort of rich history in a nearby preserve, the process of calculating a tree's age takes a little botany and a little high school math.

First, identify the tree species. (For those just starting out, a field guide may be helpful, but a tree ID field trip with a naturalist is probably better for learning). Next, measure the tree's circumference with a tape measure or a length of string and a ruler. The tape should be wrapped around the tree at chest height to produce an accurate measurement. Then, divide the circumference measurement by pi (3.1416) to get the tree's diameter. Finally, check the chart to determine the specimen's age. Was the tree starting out in life as Du Sable was building the first cabin in Chicago in 1779? When Illinois was becoming a state in 1818? Or was it sprouting from an acorn when engineers reversed the Chicago River in 1900?



Photo: Marlene and Joe Nowak

We always knew our favorite forest giants were old. Now we can know how old.

This technique will prove 90 percent accurate for forest-grown trees listed on the chart. Trees that have spent some part of their lives at a small size (perhaps due to poor growing conditions) may be

older than size would suggest. Trees grown in the open, like those in a suburban backyard or a savanna, will be much younger for their size, because the added sunlight speeds their growth. As the chart shows, different species grow at different rates.

To read more about this research on old-growth forests, see page 5 of the July 2005 CW Journal: www.chiwild.org/members/cwjournal/docs/CWJournalVol3No2.pdf.

—Tegan Jones with Marlin Bowles and Michael Jones

Tree Species Ages at Different Diameters									
Inches	Centimeters	Bass-wood	White Ash	Sugar Maple	Bur/Swamp White Oak	Red Elm	Red Oak	Shagbark Hickory	White Oak
10	25	60	75	75	66	73	76	102	84
12	30	70	87	88	79	86	89	116	100
14	35	79	99	100	91	99	102	129	115
16	40	89	110	112	104	112	115	142	129
18	45	98	121	124	117	124	128	155	144
20	50	107	131	136	129	136	141	167	159
22	55	116	142	147	142	148	154	179	173
24	60	125	152	159	154	160	116	190	187
26	65	133	162	170	167	172	179	202	201
28	70	142	172	181	179	184	191	212	215
30	75	150	182	192	192	196	203	223	229
31	80	159	191	203	204	207	215	234	243
34	86	169	203	216	219	221	230	246	260
35	90	175	210	224	229	230	239	254	271
37	95	184	220	235	242	241	251	264	285
39	100	192	229	245	254	253	263	274	298

Spring Run, Marsh Marigolds, Bur Oaks

At Bluff Spring Fen near Elgin, a dozen clear, clean streams erupt out of the springy ground. Rare little fish live in these “spring runs” year round. Some rare plants grow along their edges and few other places.

Marsh marigold may be our earliest showy flower, growing on the banks and into the seepage areas that feed spring runs. The young foliage tastes good, but even if they weren’t protected here by law, who could bear to eat more than a nibble where they are so few and so gorgeous?

The half-dozen bur oaks that frame this sunrise are part of one of the little savannas that border the site’s gravel hills. The ancient tree on the right has such a distinctive shape. Every time I pass it on a walk, I wonder about it. As the main trunk shows, long ago when it was young it grew in a graceful arc, out from under the shade of some tree no longer there. But then something happened. Since this oak is the tree farthest out into the prairie fen, perhaps a blast of wind and puff of flames from a ferocious fire burned off the top.

Whatever the case, at this point there was enough light for one branch to grow straight up for a year or two. Then begins a strange stair-step effect, perhaps in response to the growth of the companion tree just to its left. Or not.

We don’t need answers to every puzzle here. It’s just a fine place to feel the history, and power, and inspiration of life.

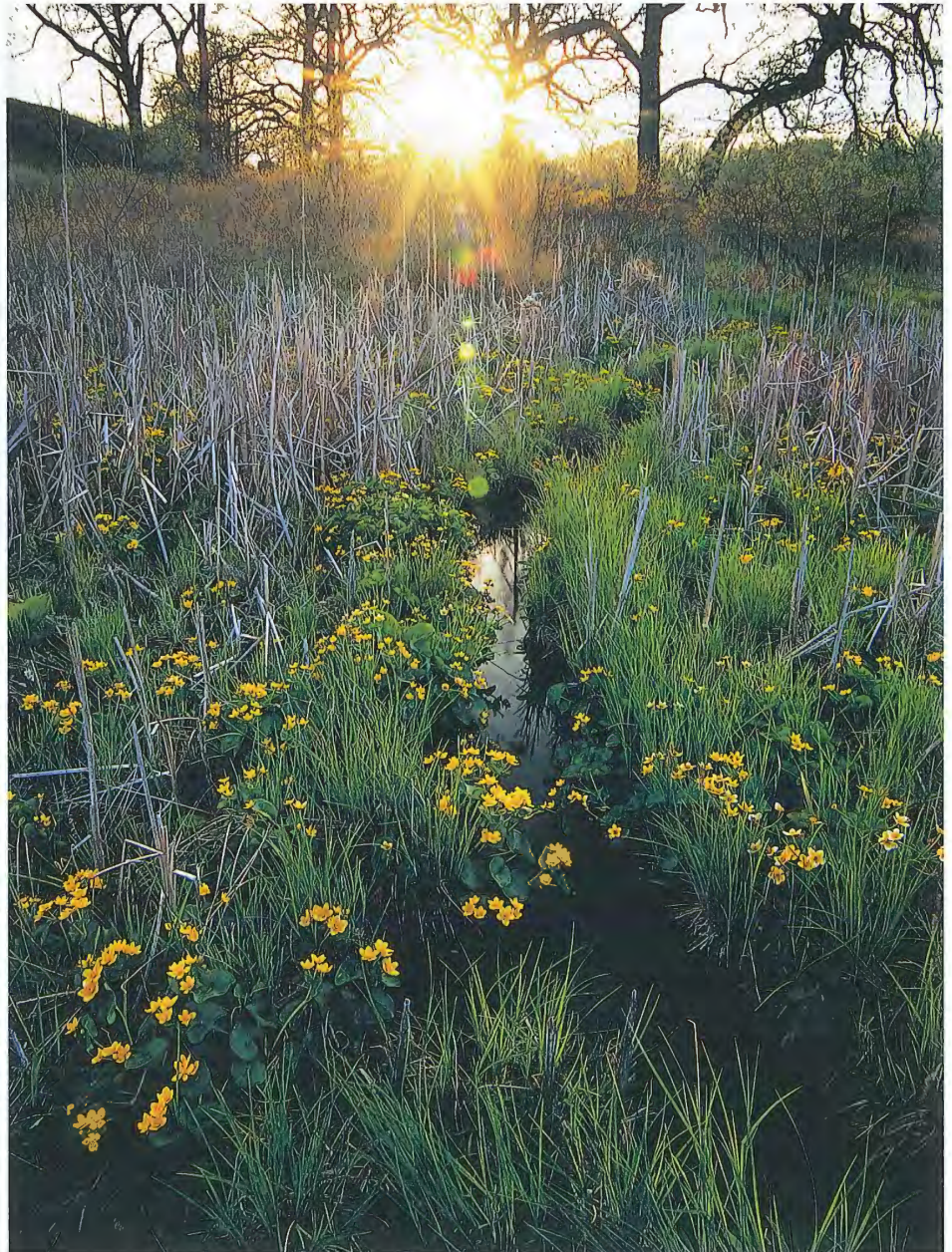
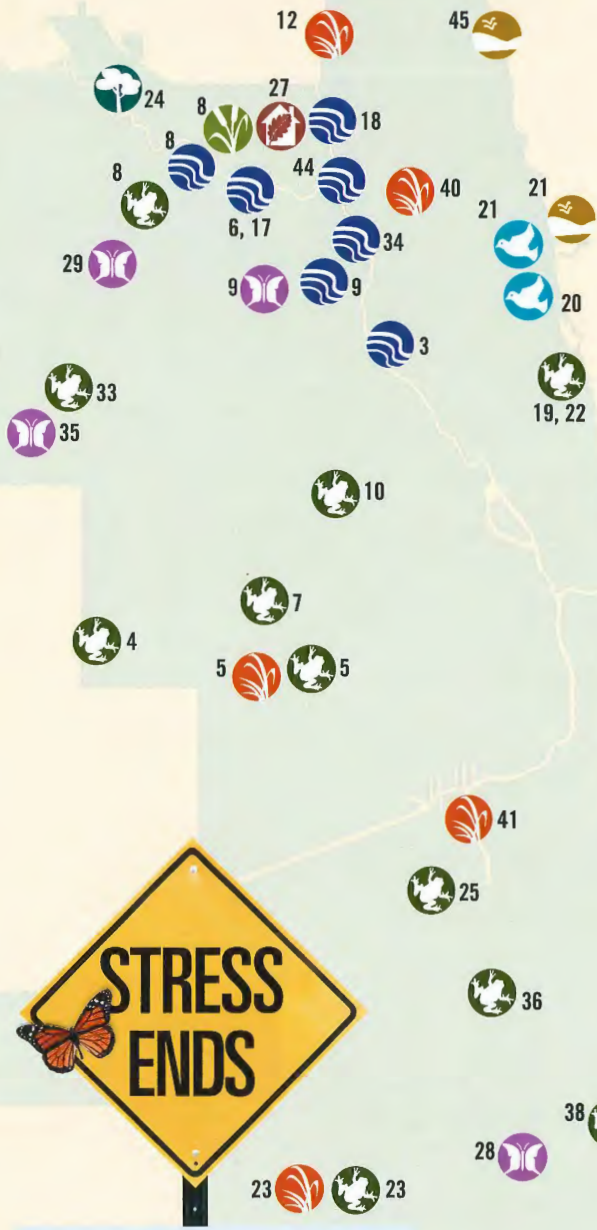


Photo by Mike MacDonald/ChicagoNature.com. Words by Stephen Packard. Bluff Spring Fen is owned by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and the City of Elgin and is dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. The expert volunteers of the Friends of the Fen have restored and managed the site for 25 years.

chicago park district







Explore Nature IN CHICAGO PARKS!



1. **Bessemer Park**
8930 S. Muskegon Ave.
2. **Burnham Nature Sanctuary**
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.
- Jackson Park**
13. **Jackson Park Lagoon**
57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.
14. **Bobolink Meadow**
57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.
15. **Jackson Golf Prairie**
E. Marquette Dr. and S. Richards Dr.
16. **Paul H. Douglas Nature Sanctuary (Wooded Island)**
57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.
17. **Kiwanis Park**
3315 W. Carmen Ave.
18. **Legion Park**
W. Foster Ave. just south of Devon Ave.
- Lincoln Park**
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 Beach Dunes**
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 Berkemeier 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 Sayre 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. **Winnemac Park**
Northwest corner of Damen Ave. & W. Argyle St.
41. **Canal Origins**
2800 S. Block of Ashland Ave.
42. **McCormick Bird Sanctuary**
South of McCormick Place at the Lake (2400 S.)
43. **Northerly Island**
1400 S. Lynn Dr.
44. **River Park**
5100 N. Francisco Ave
45. **Loyola Beach Dune**
Pratt Ave. & the Lake

Nature Area Habitats

- ARBORETUM 
- BIRD SANCTUARIES 
- DUNES 
- LAGOONS 
- NATURE CENTER 
- NATURE GARDENS 
- PRAIRIES 
- RIVER EDGES 
- WETLANDS 
- WOODLANDS

For more information about your Chicago Park District visit www.chicagoparkdistrict.com or call (312) 742.PLAY or (312) 747.2001 (TTY).



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General Superintendent & CEO



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The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. The Conservancy is a private, international, non-profit conservation organization.

For more information visit nature.org/illinois

Photo: Monarch on blazing star © TNC

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WILDERNESS

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