



Prairie Breeze

Winter 2012

"Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together."

—Vesta M. Kelly

Workday Schedule

Saturdays

February 4
February 18
March 3
March 17
March 31
April 14*
April 28

Sundays

January 29
February 12
February 26
March 11
March 25
April 8
April 22

* Annual Brush Cutters' Brunch at the site after a shortened workday

Except as noted, all workdays start at 9 a.m. at the Poplar Creek Forest Preserve in Hoffman Estates.

December 4 through March 31
WINTER HOTLINE: 630-894-3499

www.poplarcreekprairiestewards.org

Steward's Annual Report

With the advent of another calendar year, it is time once again to look back on the multiple advances in the restoration of Poplar Creek Prairie. Interns finished the invasive tree removal along the western slope of the Shoe Factory Nature Preserve bordering the service road running towards Shoe Factory Road. This was no easy task and required weeks of effort but the view up to the hill top is quite stunning, and will be even more so when the prairie fills the sparse vegetation. These same interns herbicided reed canary grass and woody resprouts before they began the tree removal. We have been fortunate to have hard-working interns in previous years but this crew of three outdid all previous groups.

In the early fall, contract workers hired by the FPDCC sprayed herbicide on eight acres of cattails and reed canary grass throughout our main drainage area. They will return in early spring for a second spraying, which should begin to allow native wetland species to compete and prosper. The District burn crew was able to get a burn once more in the main woodland, along with a very thorough burn through the western half of the main prairie. To top it all off, the Nature Preserve and especially the adjoining slopes experienced the hottest and most thorough burn ever. Considering the horrible fall weather conditions this crew had to deal with, the results were nothing short of spectacular.

The most remarkable accomplishment this year, as has been the case for over 22 years, is the work of all the volunteers throughout the year. Our seed leaders, led by **Diana Granitto** and **Diane Benson**, outdid themselves to gather more seed than ever to fill the joint Poplar Creek/Schaumburg Grasslands needs. Our chain saw crew has expanded to include **Jill Flexman**, **Tabitha Thomas**, **Tom Kastner**, and **John Martin**, joining long-time cutters **Steve Flexman** and

Rick McAndless (see photo on p. 2). This crew has been so effective that we finally see the end of the tunnel in clearing the Nature Preserve woods. This has been a priority since the beginning of the restoration, and the increase in student volunteers and chain saw capabilities has made it a reality. Hundreds of volunteers collected and planted seeds, removed weeds, and cut brush regardless of the location or the weather conditions. We have expanded our high school student volunteer program into at least six local high schools, keeping Jill Flexman busier than ever. **Tom Peters** and **Brian McCarthy** have arrived early on many weekends to start the brush piles fires that greet the hardy volunteers who arrive during winter's coldest days. Behind the scenes, **Suzi Becker** and **Jan Ahrensfield** spend many hours on the work of the Human Resources committee in addition to their contributions at the site. It's easy to forget how many people have been responsible for so much work these many years. The Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards are and have been a cast of thousands since 1989. Some may be more visible than others but all work to transform former farm fields into a truly beautiful natural environment—a safe and permanent home to threatened plants, birds, animals, and insects for generations to come. Some folks talk the talk while others walk the walk. Congratulations and kudos to all our volunteers who chose the vastly more difficult but infinitely more rewarding path.

—John Navin, Steward

Not for Brush Cutters Only...

Everyone is invited to celebrate the successes of the winter and the coming of spring at our Annual Brush Cutters' Brunch on Saturday, April 14. We'll work until around 11:00 am and then meet in the back shelter for a potluck meal. Bring your appetite and a dish to pass and join us!



The “Chain Gang” has been hard at work in the Nature Preserve woodland. Our trained and certified chain saw operators celebrate a productive day: (from left) Rick McAndless, Tom Kastner, Tabitha Thomas, John Martin, Steve Flexman, and Jill Flexman.

Schaumburg Road Grasslands

Great progress has been made in the last six months at the Grasslands. Thanks to our friends at Audubon Chicago Region we had a college student, **Travis Tzioumis**, come out for three weeks to inventory shrubs in Field 5 (to the east of where we have been planting). One nice find was some Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*), from which we later harvested seed. Unfortunately for Travis, he picked the hottest, most humid weeks of a hot and humid summer to join us.

We (special thanks to **John Martin**, **Lee Ramsey**, and **Jill Flexman**) spent considerable time battling common teasel (*Dipsacus sylvestris*) with the help of **Kirk Garanflo**, garlic mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*), autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), and silver grass (*Miscanthus sacchariflorus*). Additionally, we had help from the FPDCC by way of contract workers on woody hedgerow resprouts and interns on reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). The very good news is that we were able to follow up on the weed infestations we worked on last year, plus expand our coverage. Also, although there is a large population of the invasive leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) north of Golf Road, which was treated by the FPDCC, the suspected populations at Schaumburg Road turned out to be immature butter and eggs (*Linaria vulgaris*), a non-aggressive alien that looks like leafy spurge when immature, and even has similar white sap, and even has the same poison in it! Our weed control efforts were complicated by discovery of some patches of bird’s foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculata*) and crown vetch (*Cornilla varia*) that required our attention.

This fall we returned to working on the miles of barbed wire fencing at the site with a number of weekday workdays (including one that featured a brushpile burn and venison chili). We took out all the barbed wire from around the woodland we are working on this winter, and from another hedgerow northeast of the parking lot. This allowed the indefatigable **John Yapelli**, of the FPDCC, to take out two hedgerows for us this fall. He also took one out between the seeded prairie (Field 4) and the shrubland (Field 5).

We finished up the year with a Christmas Eve morning brushcutting workday, attended by 11 volunteers who preferred the outdoors to the malls, and who were treated to a beautiful, sunny day.

One surprising sighting was an Osprey hunting over Poplar Creek. Yes, the creek. It liked what it saw enough to return a couple of days later for another hunting expedition! Of course we (Jill, Lee, Steve, **Jenny Vogt**) had a host of nesting sparrows: Henslows, Grasshopper, Savannah, Field. We also had some great bird sightings in the shrubs in Field 5: six Orchard Orioles at one point, four Brown Thrashers at another, and nesting Eastern Kingbirds.

—Steve Flexman, Steward

The Eagle Has Landed

No, this isn’t about the moon landing in the 1960s. A small group of us were lucky to be at the right place at the right time. On Friday, December 23, **Marge Trahan** and I were giving a tour for Margie’s sister, Amy, and her girlfriend, Chris, who was visiting from the east coast during the holidays and wanted to see our prairie site after hearing about our activities. We headed north along the eastern horse trail. Around the spot in the trail where the trees on the eastern side of the preserve and the nature preserve are easy to see, Chris and I, who were in the lead, noticed a big bird sitting on a massive branch of the very big bur oak tree on the edge of the treed area. We looked at each other trying to figure out what it was. It seemed too big to be a hawk. All of a sudden the object of interest jumped up into the air and started flying about. The white tail of the huge bird identified it immediately for us. We started yelling, it’s an Eagle! Standing in awe, with grins and eyes full of joy, the group of us watched as it circled several times around the trees and part of the nature preserve. Then the magnificent bird flew off to the northwest. All of this happened between between 11:30 am and 12 pm. It made our day, our holiday season (yes, there is a Santa Claus) and certainly my year!

—Cliff Trahan

Holiday Party and Auction

Once again, the Poplar Creekers showed that they are not only good at restoration efforts, but they are good at having fun with each other. We had a lovely evening at **John Navin**'s house, with laughter and shenanigans abounding. Amidst all this revelry, we also managed to raise money towards the purchase of safety Kevlar boots for our chain-sawyers. Thanks to all who donated items and purchased said items, and also to all who joined us for an evening of celebrating our efforts and our camaraderie. —*Jill Flexman*

Butterfly and Skipper Observations

One of the top five sights at the Schaumburg Road Grasslands last summer was the Pearl Crescent (107 sightings). These small beauties start coming out in late July. Their favorite areas are the horsetrails. They love to puddle for nutrients when there is water available on the trails or if the trails are soaking wet a day or more after a rain. For two years now the Great Spangled Fritillary (49) is in abundance (at both sites). The Monarch (44) numbers were respectable. One of my favorites, the Buckeye (26), was fairly abundant. It likes low vegetation or the horsetrails in the northern area. The fast, low flying Common Wood Nymph (20) finishes off the Top 5 list.

The two mainstay swallowtails, the Tiger (12) and Black (19), were seen. I thought the numbers for the Tiger Swallowtail seen at this site and at Poplar Creek Prairie were down a bit. The woodland butterflies sighted were the Northern Pearly Eye (1), the Comma (1), the Appalachian Brown (16) and the Little Wood-Satyr (4). In the more open area, the Appalachian's cousin (Satyrodes family), the Eyed Brown (12), was present. The Azures' (11) numbers seemed down from prior years. I usually see lots of them along the shady, wooded horse trail area and just outside of the woods. I saw an Eastern-Tailed Blue late in the monitoring season. Azures dominate the Schaumburg Road Grasslands site, whereas the Eastern-Tailed Blue dominates the Poplar Creek Prairie site. Last year there was a bumper crop of Red Admirals. This year I only saw two.

Some of the other sightings were the Orange/Clouded Sulphur (5), and the Cabbage White (21). I spotted a few skippers: a duskywing—most likely a Wild Columbine Duskywing, a Least skipper by one of the ponds in the north and the gorgeous Silver-Spotted skipper.

It should be noted that the butterfly monitoring network sets a two-hour limit on observing. Since the Grasslands is a large site, this rule makes things difficult. In addition, the network says to stop around August 6 each year. To circumvent these rules I might make “unofficial” observations that allow me to stay out longer and also supplement the observations by going out past the August cutoff date. This will make it easier to check out skippers and increase my sightings.

Lastly, I have seen the Peck's and European skippers by my house numerous times. When in Wisconsin in July, I saw a Broad-Winged skipper and the magnificent Milberts's Tortoiseshell. After our tour of the fens in the Lake in the Hill area, a Long Dash skipper landed on **Marge Trahan**.

—*Cliff Trahan, Butterfly and Dragonfly Monitor*

Prairie Poop

- Many outside groups have joined us for workdays this fall season. Our usual welcome visitors from Students Today Leaders Forever from Minnesota came with 55 trippers and five locals. Eight volunteers from St. Raymonds Church came. We had six students from Elgin Academy Environmental Club and 14 students from Elgin High School Student Council. We had four volunteers from Sears Holdings, our neighbors to the north across the tollway.
- The Field Museum has a new permanent exhibit, Restoring Earth, which, along with the rain forest and the Amazon, features our local restoration efforts. FPDC sponsored an evening reception to show off the exhibit in November. Restoration volunteers heard remarks by **Laurel Ross** (Field Museum), **Arnold Randall** (Superintendent Forest Preserve District of Cook County) and **Toni Preckwinkle** (Cook County Board President).
- FYI, check out our website, poplarcreekprairiestewards.org, where you can get info on workdays, what to wear, what we do and where we are. Are you on Facebook? We are, too. Search Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards. During the past year we had 1070 views at our Facebook page and 1278 visitors to our website. We are also represented on StewMAP-Chicago (the Stewardship Mapping & Assessment Project).

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