

PRAIRIE BREEZE NEWS
Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – October 2018

Annual Holiday Party – Saturday, December 15; save the date; announcement to follow

COME ONE AND ALL – SEED PROCESSING
NEW DAY AND NEW LOCATION – NOV. 17

It is time to separate seed from the seed heads of the many different plants collected during the fall, using a variety of methods depending on the plant. We need your help to free the seed! Please mark your calendars and set your GPS:

Saturday, November 17, 10:00 a.m. Forest Preserve District's Northwest Resource Management facility at 640 Cosman Rd. in Elk Grove Village. Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/wGRkd6Vw2BN2>

The building is located on the edge of Busse Woods, which is just east of Route 53, right off of Arlington Heights Road. You can't miss the large red barn on the property. Follow the signs to the work building.

Jeff Rapp and the team at Crabtree Nature Center have taken such good care of us for nearly three decades, it almost feels like leaving home! But as attendance at this event has grown, as well as the amount of processing equipment that we use, we've found we simply need more space. Many thanks to Kris DaPra, who offered us the use of this larger facility (with its own restrooms) and is working with us down to the last detail to make it happen!

The workday begins at 10:00 and we'll break for lunch at 12:30. Pizza, salads and beverages will be provided, but we look forward to the desserts that volunteers bring to share. If there's still more seed to process, we'll continue working after lunch.

No RSVP necessary. We provide all training and materials. See you there!

MONITORING AT POPLAR CREEK PRAIRIE – Cliff Trahan

As usual, populations of insect species fluctuate from year to year. This monitoring season I saw fewer Great Spangled Fritillaries and Red Admirals compared to last year. On the upside, I saw lots of Black Swallowtails, Monarchs and Eastern Tiger Swallowtails (more than ever before. The Eastern Swallowtail is not common at Poplar Creek). Dragonflies' numbers were about the same except for a lot less Meadowhawks. For the first time I spotted a Dot-tailed Whiteface. I have only seen it in Wisconsin. This year I saw several Snowberry Clearwing moths which are bumble bee mimics.

On 6-29-18 as I entered the nature preserve on the east side, I witnessed unusual butterfly behavior for the first time. About 6 male Black Swallowtails were defending territory. They attacked Monarchs and large dragonflies!

While monitoring bumble bees, it appeared to me that the numbers were way down. So I contacted *Bee Spotter* which led to a series of emails with two professors of entomology and the person in charge of the user's website at the University of Illinois at Urbana, Illinois. Anecdotally, as two of them said, it seemed that the numbers were down for them. One of the professors thought he saw more bumble bees. He noted that a number of monitors were seeing lots of *Bombus pensylvanicus* at various sites including Peoria and Bloomington. In addition, some

saw *B. fervidus*. Both species are in decline. I responded that I only saw one *pensylvanicus* at the end of last year's monitoring sessions and none this year. I did say I saw quite a few *Bombus auricomus* (in fact they were the most common this season and the bumble bee is quite uncommon!). So the professor found my comments interesting and suggested the abundance of the uncommon species were quite localized.

Finally, I want to mention another unusual behavior seen 8-11-18: I was walking on the horse trail with the new culvert that goes past the nature preserve. Just west of the culvert and extending about 100 or more feet along the trail a male *B.auricomus* was defending his territory in search of females. He kept flying back and forth often attacking large dragonflies, butterflies and Carpenter bees. *Auricomus* is fairly big and is an excellent flier. It took me about 45 minutes to photograph this active bee. He never attacked people who walked by though it did hover around me a few times. I checked the literature and confirmed this type of behavior.

HISTORIC NOTE

Charles Ingalls's first encounter with prairie at age eight or nine may have looked quite similar to our restoration. According to the new book *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder* by Caroline Fraser, his family left New York State around 1838, likely skirting below Lake Erie, to Detroit and then on to Chicago. From there, the Ingalls family headed 40 miles west to Elgin, Illinois, a frontier outpost on the Fox River. "This was Charles Ingalls's first sight of the open plains." Charles' family acquired 164 acres in Kane County near Plato Corners. Later the family would move north to Jefferson County, west of Milwaukee.

SCHAUMBURG ROAD GRASSLANDS UPDATE – Jenny Flexman

As usual, dense populations of woodland grasses, and some prairie species have made for some good seed collection so far this year. Most challenging was trying to pick little blue stem in 30mph gusts. We picked a lot despite the wind's efforts to sweep the seed out of our buckets. And it was a good thing we went out there, because the 40mph gusts plus snow pellets later in the day likely would have stripped most of that seed and sent it up to the next county.

Another year of invasive plant control is over. And it was a humid one. But we still got out, and thanks to the help of the Audubon/FPCC intern crew, and Merv Keeney, we reached new levels of eradication. For the first time we controlled teasel, bull thistle, and musk thistle in all the prairie areas, as well as the portion of the shrubland (Field 5) that we have been adding shrubs to. We both cut seed heads and sprayed basal rosettes in all these areas. Hopefully this will be a turning point in control of these species. We also did two complete sweeps of those same areas for bird's foot trefoil, and had the District spray three of the biggest infestations with a small boom sprayer that goes on their ATV. We also GPS'd all infestations and went back to recheck and, if necessary, respray them.

Our efforts on silver grass, dames rocket, phragmites and garlic mustard are seeing very clear results. And we made sweeps for autumn olive in all prairie and woodland areas, and most of their edges. There is more to do, but hopefully as we get the big seed producing plants we will start seeing less young ones also.

There have been some good raptors at SRG this summer and fall: Osprey, bald eagles, and a harrier. As of October 18 we still had at least one grassland bird hanging out and singing: an Eastern Meadowlark. Perhaps it is a young one practicing his aria for next spring!

VOLUNTEERS ON THE ROAD

PCPS volunteers don't spend all their time outdoors at our prairie restoration sites. This year they traveled far and wide visiting many interesting outdoor places. Some examples follow.

National parks are a major attraction. Tom Peters visited both Zion and Bryce Canyon where he was impressed by the latter's other-worldly look. For their 25th wedding anniversary Jenny Vogt and husband Gary took a road trip to the Badlands, Yellowstone and the Tetons. They enjoyed many memorable hikes and seeing marmots, bison, grizzly bears and Uinta ground squirrels. Jenny's birding highlights included Golden Eagle and a Peregrine Falcon on its nest. Diane Benson and husband Jeff Cour took a tour of Yellowstone and the Tetons this summer which included an outstanding raft trip on the Snake River. Meanwhile, heading west, Jenny Flexman drove through Yellowstone where she spotted some wolf pups. Other notable events on the drive were spotting a swimming black bear cub in the National Bison Range, Montana and having lunch on a ridge surrounded by glaciers of Mt. Baker in Washington State. No one encountered each other along the way.

State parks also enticed volunteers. Dave Webb and his family camped at both Governor Dodge State Park in Wisconsin and Forestville State Park in Minnesota (perhaps duplicating a little early prairie living?). They particularly enjoyed biking on the Root River Trail (MN) and the Great River Trail north of La Crosse, Wisconsin. This year Tom Peters also visited Niagara Falls State Park and was most impressed with seeing the falls from the river looking up and the Maid of the Mist. Jenny Flexman experienced the Old West, spending time in Big Sky Country where the mountains, prairie and wetlands meet at the TNC's guest ranch on The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Preserve in Montana.

Lee Ramsey and Diana Granitto traveled with the local Tuesday Birders group to the Shawnee and Cache River areas of Southern Illinois. One highlight was the breathtaking Heron Pond, a cypress/tupelo swamp accessed by a floating boardwalk, made even more magical by a very cooperative Prothonotary Warbler. In addition to logging 84 bird species, the group had an up-close encounter with a Cottonmouth snake. Yikes!!!

Moving farther afield Diana Granitto took a trip to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula with Sunrise Birding LLC. She saw 236 bird species ranging from our migrating warblers to endemics such as the Cozumel Emerald Hummingbird and the Yucatan Wren. A side trip to the Mayan Muyl Ruins featured a serenade by a very vocal Yucatan Black Howler monkey.

In the opposite direction, Jeff Maddux recently returned from a continually eventful trip to Alaska which he highly recommends. As described by Jeff: tiny planes, tiny runways, Metal Creek, glacial quicksand, bearded billy, rams on ridge, Bullwinkle in camp, parka squirrels, bald eagles, golden eagles, beluga whales, sheet aurora, canned moose, smoked salmon, oysters, mountain passes, yellow aspens, hanging gardens, crow berries, cranberries, tracking bears.

The "most exotic" award goes to Diane Fram. She describes her experience. "I spent four delightful days hiking [in Colombia] along Caño Cristales also known as Liquid Rainbow or the river of 7 colors. The river is 100 km in length and its clear waters display *Macarenia Clavigera*, an aquatic plant that blooms in vivid shades of reds, blues, yellows, and greens growing on the rocky bed of the river. This plant is solely endemic to this river and can be seen June-September during the rainy season. The river flows into the Guayabero River (part of the Orinoco River Basin). Whilst canoeing on the Guayabero, I was enthralled by the variety of

fauna: 5 species of monkeys, macaws and different shore birds. The most fascinating for me was the hoatzin, which looks like the link between dinosaurs and birds.” For visuals check out this website: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/cano-cristales>.

THIS AND THAT

Correction: July 2018 Breeze - Barb Hill, not Diane Fram, staffed our display at the Schaumburg Library Environmental Fair in May.

Welcome to Nicole Pierson: Nicole is the new Manager of Volunteer Resources with the Forest Preserves of Cook County. She previously worked for the Student Conservation Association and the Shedd Aquarium. We look forward to working with Nicole.

Restoration Success?: In early August there was a possible cougar sighting by a subdivision across Route 59 from the Schaumburg Road Grassland!

Anniversary Time: On September 8th Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards marked its anniversaries – 29th for Poplar Creek Prairie Carl Hansen Woods and 9th for Schaumburg Road Grasslands. We celebrated at Buona Beef after the workday by consuming TWO cakes! Time flies when you are having fun.

CFC: In September we welcomed to a weekday workday Kevin Scheiwiller from Citizens for Conservation, who became their Restoration Program Manager earlier this year. He came with Randy Holtz from Spring Creek Stewards who often team with CFC. We were pleased to meet Kevin and show off our large prairie. We later noted an excellent educational resource on the CFC website – a local native plant database covering ferns, forbs, grasses and sedges, shrubs and trees, with multiple filters. While perhaps skewed to native plant gardeners, this resource is also useful for plant identification. See: <https://localnativeplants.citizensforconservation.org/>.

Arboretum Guy: The October issue of Morton Arboretum’s online *arbCONNECT*, shows Cliff Trahan wearing his signature hat and, not unsurprisingly, doing some arduous prairie task. The picture accompanies an article on volunteer experiences, where Cliff, an N-ACT (Natural Areas Conservation Training) Program participant, is interviewed about his involvement in restoration activities. See: <http://www.mortonarb.org/news-publication/arbconnect>. And, congratulations are also in order. Cliff is now the steward for the arboretum’s Heritage Trail volunteer group on Fridays.

Tough Job: Special thanks go to Merv Keeney for running our gas-powered auger during the September transplanting workday. We couldn’t resist the flats of now large plants that Agnes Wojnarski had propagated and were still available. Creating holes in the green fields wasn’t easy, as the grasses continually wound around the auger. Merv had to repeatedly stop and clean the drill, then pull the cord to restart the auger again. He must have eaten a whole box of Wheaties for breakfast!

TNC Connection: We enjoyed visiting with Karen Tharp, our former volunteer network liaison with The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter, who attended an October workday. We also enjoyed the cake that Karen brought to lunch. Karen recently assumed a new position with the national TNC organization. Congratulations! The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter has continually supported our work over time and we are immensely grateful for their interest and help.

Thankless Job: Our heroes – Dave Webb, Dick Jamison, John Navin and John Martin – who recently cleaned our rodent infested shed...a true, pre-Halloween horror story. The mice found ways to invade and take over many areas of the shed, including inside the metal cabinet! When the crew opened the large garage door on cleaning day several dozen critters crazily scurried around and away. Unlike other periodic shed cleanings, a shop vacuum, bleach and many garbage bags were needed. Now the challenge is to stop future mass invasions. Envision the situation, then thank these guys personally!

Wild Things 2019, February 23, 2019: Save the date for this always excellent, biennial conservation forum with numerous programs of interest to local restorationists. The 2019 venue at the Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont is moving closer to our homes. The organizers always seek helpers. And, if you have interests or expertise that you feel could make a contribution towards expanding this event, or if you just have questions about Wild Things, please contact them at wildthingscommunitychi@gmail.com.

WINTER WORKDAY HOTLINE

Sometimes inclement weather forces us to cancel a winter workday if there is a heavy snowfall and/or the parking lot needs to be plowed. If conditions seem uncertain, call the winter hotline after 8am on workdays starting Saturday, December 1. The number is 630-894-3499. This number will be posted on our website and our Facebook page.