

**PRAIRIE BREEZE NEWS**  
**Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – January 2020**

**THE FUTURE – Jenny Flexman**

My first six months as leader of the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards have been quite invigorating! I have been moved by the number of people who have stepped forward with great energy into Steward, Workday Leader, Burn Boss, Treasurer, Student Leader, Herbicider and other roles (hopefully we did a good job or recognizing them at the Holiday Party!). With more people stepping up we can distribute the workload better. And most importantly we can now focus on the future of this wonderful volunteer organization.

To help us focus on our future, and to help us increase our volunteer and leadership base, we now have a Field Organizer, Kathleen Mueller. Through a two-year collaboration between PCPS and Friends of the Forest Preserves, Friends hired Kathleen as a PCPS-dedicated part-time staff member. Kathleen has energetically jumped in feet first, building our outreach/recruitment efforts, working on transforming our social media outreach (look for us on Facebook and Instagram), working with the FPCC and local officials who we haven't previously collaborated with, and organizing events. A number of us had a chance to be involved in the hiring interview with Kathleen, and I am happy to say we have found that she has all the attributes we saw at that time, along with great organizational skills!

One of Kathleen's new initiatives is to organize monthly Events that coincide with our workdays. She will be publicizing these to draw in new volunteers, including through use of the Friends Meetup site. Most, or perhaps all, of these Events will be set up to include our regular volunteers. For instance we recently publicized and invited regular volunteers to a combined workday and winter wonderland walk, which sadly got cancelled due to minus 19 degree windchills. We will notify regular volunteers of these Events through monthly emails.

I would like to recognize all those who have provided their efforts and input into long committee meetings organizing for the future, including getting us on to, and learning to effectively use Google Drive/Sheets, planning for effectively incorporating Kathleen's efforts, working with Kathleen to fully dive into social media, working with Kathleen to organize monthly Events to attract new volunteers, planning on how to effectively welcome and incorporate new volunteers, planning for empowering new leaders, figuring out how to effectively coordinate new workday leaders into our scheduling and communications, and much more! Those committee members are: Rick, Diana, Jan, Aneta, Cliff, John M., John N., Dave W., Diane F., Dick, Jeff and Kathleen.

One final note... You may be surprised this winter to see me leading brushcutting workdays at PCP and Rick leading workdays at SRG. We have done this on purpose: the idea is to get us all thinking of our efforts as one big project that we are all pulling together on. Hopefully you will join us in that view!

**WHY I VOLUNTEER WITH PCPS – Aneta Tyminski**

[Note: In less than six months Aneta has taken the FPCC multiple classes, tests and shortly will have all her certifications to become an official workday leader. Talk about fast-tracking. What an achievement!]

As it is the Greeters' duty to introduce themselves to the new volunteers, they also ask how the volunteer found the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – my answer to this question on my first day

was “The Poplar Creek website of course!” A little dumbfounded we both were, as it didn’t answer the question, why did I come? The simple explanation that I give is that I needed to take a “field experience” course for graduate school. This course required 350 hours of unpaid experience in relation to my field of study – conservation biology. I think the deeper answer lies in...why here? I grew up in the big city. My family would take us to the local forest preserves on the weekends as it was one of the few *free* leisure outdoor activities we could do together. I guess you could say I literally was raised in the little fragmented forest that we have.

A few years ago, the *New York Times* noted that humans have become an indoor species. I have never related to this as well as when I was with the Texas Conservation Corps. We would have to spend weeks on end camping and working outdoors. It was the first time in my life I was able to track how long it would take for the rain to get to my work site without the use of technology, or watch my tent neighboring orb-weaver meticulously make the most perfect web. Seeing how interconnected and raw the entire system is just so incredibly mind blowing.

Little does Jenny or Rick know, I have already received credit for the field experience course, and yet I’m still here. Why? I think all the volunteers who have been here for six months, five years or even 30 years have not only grown overtime to understand and appreciate the unique ecology of the forest preserves, but also how they provide an escape when in need of solitude and self-reflection. As much as the ecosystem depends on us in restoration efforts, we need this system too, in ways that we have yet to understand. Jan asked me to write about my future goals. My naïve self would say “save the planet.” So far, I’ve learned that whatever I plan – usually the opposite happens. I guess the best answer I can provide is “forward.” I’ll continue contemplating this question and seeking answers, while cutting one buckthorn at a time.

### **BUMBLE BEE, DRAGONFLY & DAMSELFLY MONITORING – Cliff Trahan**

The monitoring season was a bit short because of the weather (once again) and taking a vacation during the monitoring period, which I will not do again. With bees, windy days and cloud cover pose restrictions.

Via *BeeSpotter* website I made 29 observations. Ironically, the most observed bee species, *Bombus auricomus*, is also the least common one. An entomologist at the U of IL in Urbana was quite pleased by the number of sightings of this bumble bee (BB) species. Once again there was no sighting of the Rusty Patched BB (*Bombus affinis*). I will continue my search for this gem of BB.

I missed the annual meeting of the IL Butterfly Monitoring Network, but I did attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the Illinois Odonata Survey in October of 2019. The highlight of the meeting was Marla Garrison’s scientific talk on dragonfly ontogeny. The scope of her knowledge blew me away. Doug Taron of the IBMN was there to answer questions about the PollardBase system used by monitors of butterflies and dragonflies/damselflies. I learned some short cuts and gave my opinion on possible improvements. I did learn there has been a 31% decline in butterfly observations per hour and a 57% decline in dragonfly observations per hour. Overall there was a decline of 1.07 butterflies per hour.

There has been an upturn in the number of DF/Damselflies around Lake Leaky and the cattail marsh since LL stopped draining and the cattails were underwater. The dragonfly highlights were the Carolina Saddlebag sighting – it is not a common species at the Carl Hansen site. I saw several Wandering gliders again this season. I came across five crayfish by the cattail marsh edge on the prairie side and lots of burrow entrances plus lots of severed heads.

This season I saw huge numbers of Least Skippers by the wet prairie near LL. The vegetation is very low and it is wet there. While seed collecting with students we saw about 30 Monarchs circling overhead and then flying off. It is the first time I saw this species clustered together in big numbers. But the highlight of the season was the spotting of the American snout butterfly by the eastern slope of the nature preserve. The species is a yearly migrant from the south whose population density vary year to year. In the north, it uses the hackberry tree as a host.

### **EXCITING DISCOVERIES – Jenny Flexman**

The remnant in the far northern part of the Eastern Woods (Schaumburg Road Grasslands), where some of us spent a couple of weekday workdays clearing out buckthorn two years ago, continues to surprise me. I picked a half gallon of Cinna there on October 13, as well as Common boneset (the good one), and found some plants I had not seen there before: Monkey flower, figwort, swamp milkweed, and *Carex lupulina*. We have not planted there! It will be interesting to see what happens when we get our first ever burn through the area this year.

Our SRG site walk late this fall was punctuated by the sighting of a pair of pileated woodpeckers in the Eastern Woods. One individual had been seen in June. Seeing a pair is a great sign, as these birds mate for life and use their large, mature woodland territories year-round. Also this fall I heard two Barred Owls hooting simultaneously in the Eastern Woods of SRG. A Pair? These cavity nesting owls also require large areas of mature woodlands for habitat.

### **WINNING STATS – Diana Granitto**

Break out the champagne for another championship season in seed collecting! Our fall 2019 harvest yielded:

- An overall crop second only to our 2012 record total.
- Enough seed for a new planting goal of 25 acres, up from 20 planted last year.
- A record-breaking haul of woodland seed, beating last year's total by 33%.

To process these quantities, on November 16 we returned to the Forest Preserve District's Northwest Resource Management facility in Elk Grove Village. Thanks to Kris DaPra, John McCabe and the NWRM team. And thanks to Dick Jamieson for lending us his garage once again, where we mixed and weighed the seed on November 20 for the final tally. Cheers!

### **USDA PLANTS DATABASE – Kirk Garanfio**

(28 September 2019) Another useful botanical website is the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Plants Database (<http://plants.usda.gov/java/>). It allows a search using either the scientific name or the common name of a species. Subordinate taxa (varieties and subspecies) associated with a species are often identified, something not always shown in various field guides. Especially useful are its maps which show species distributions by county for the entire country. If, for example, you find a specimen in Cook County and the distribution map only shows it in southern Illinois, then you may have made an exciting find; try entering *Tripsacum dactyloides*.

Also, useful is a list of synonyms for a species. Through the years botanists have often renamed species; this list helps to sort out the confusion that renaming causes; *Cimicifuga*

*racemosa* comes to mind as this species has been renamed *Actaea racemosa* L. var. *racemosa*, and it is present within the Carl R. Hansen Woods!

This site also provides images as well as links to other botanical reference materials.

## **THIS AND THAT**

Promises Fulfilled. Congratulations to Anna and Dylen who are members of the first Harper Promise group at Harper College. They volunteered with PCPS during high school as part of the community service requirement. And now they both came back to volunteer this fall to meet their Harper Promise volunteer hour commitments as college students.

Admiring the View. Retired volunteer Bob Kalicki still gets out to Poplar Creek Prairie periodically to walk. He commented after an early fall visit, "I was out in the prairie last week and was the only one there. I just stood and took in the scope of the work that has been done over the years. The wind whistled in my ears and the insects were buzzing. It felt wonderful."

Extra Helpers. Thanks to the 4288th Prairie Wolves, BPSA scout troop who helped pick seed in October and Steinmetz High School (Chicago) students who participated in one of our first brushcutting workdays of the season. Students from Conant, Fremd, Hoffman Estates and Schaumburg high schools volunteered at our sites this fall. They learned about our sites and restoration work, while helping us collect and process seed.

Holiday High Jinx. We always seem to have an excellent array of appetizers, salads, casseroles, soups and desserts at our holiday party. This year our gathering on December 7 was no exception. For example, Dave Webb's vegan macaroni and "cheese" was fantastic. Nick Hall-Skank made his mom's corn pudding recipe which vanished in a flash. Diane Fram's bread pudding melted in your mouth. Those who attended liked the earlier date and earlier arrival hour this year. There was lots of good conversation and acknowledgements of those who have stepped up and assumed more responsibilities during the year. Rick McAndless seemed to have the magic touch when selecting his grab bag gift since others decided that they wanted Rick's selections, so he had to return to the gift box at least three times!

At Our Service. Yes, the pizza parlor believed that Cliff Trahan wasn't making a crank call, when he asked if it could deliver a pizza and some mostaccioli to the side of the road. The Rambos of the Brambles (Cliff and Tom Kastner) were working close to Shoe Factory Rd and got hungry before they had finished their planned activities. Cheers to Rosati's Pizza in Streamwood for making the food drop to a rather roughly dressed field worker who flagged down the delivery car. Perhaps some of its employees have enjoyed our sites during work breaks (Rosati's located at Route 59 and Schaumburg Rd.), so the call didn't seem so outlandish. In any case, we appreciate their support.

Gone, But Not Forgotten. Former volunteer Steve Kaiser, who now lives in Wausau, WI, found time to attend a workday during a brief holiday trip to visit Illinois friends. While we hate to see volunteers move away, we are also thrilled that interest and ties to our group/sites bring former volunteers back. Steve's desire to participate in outdoor volunteering continues as co-coordinator of the Central Moraines Chapter (Marathon County) Ice Age Trail Alliance. Check out [www.iceagetrail.org](http://www.iceagetrail.org) to see some beautiful visuals and learn more about this wonderful national trail system in our neighboring state.

Tom-Toms in the Woodlands. Did we break some kind of record? At our January 5 regular workday, which had no special groups in attendance we had five “Toms” show up: Borchard, Duddy, Kastner, Peters and Rafacz!

And Finally... A big congratulation to Nick Hall-Skank who completed all his requirements and submitted all paperwork to become an FPCC workday leader before returning to classes at University of Montana in January. What an accomplishment. By the time he returns from Missoula, Nick will be official!