

Executive Committee

S. H. Sentoff, President
H. H. Jensen, Vice Pres.
R. S. Hensey, Sec./Treas.
M. F. Boyle
W. C. Dawe
J. S. Dohren
J. M. Monge



3N771 Woodland Ave.
West Chicago, IL 60185
630-293-1627
<http://www.wcpsg.org>

Newsletter #101

January 2009

President's Corner

As I'm writing this, the calendar says it's the first day of winter, although December has already given us plenty of cold and snow. But that hasn't stopped us from getting lots of work done, thanks to all your contributions, which you can read about below. Luckily the weather for Annual Bird Count was reasonable and not the sub-zero temperatures we had the next morning. We have a full plan for upcoming events (see the enclosed 2009 Schedule), and an ambitious clearing plan, so check the schedule, dress for the weather and come on out and work off some of those holiday calories. I hope to see you soon.

Steve

Annual Meeting

Our 24th annual meeting was held on September 6, after another great potluck picnic at the Preserve.

Scott Hensey presented the Treasurer's Report, and we continue to do fine fiscally. We spent \$746 in the preceding year, much of it for maintaining our equipment and sending out mail, but this year we also spent a bit more to get some signs and materials for our 25th anniversary celebration. Thanks to our generous donors, we received \$665. We still have a healthy balance for future operations.

The next order of business was the nomination and election of officers. All the current officers agreed to run again, so the candidates were

President	Steve Sentoff
Vice President	Herman Jensen
Sec./Treasurer	Scott Hensey
Board Members	Malcolm Boyle, Bill Dawe, Jim Dohren, JoAnn Monge

The entire slate was approved by acclamation.

Next was the report on the volunteer work for the year was a total of 1016.5 hours. The largest categories of work included: clearing - 282.5 hrs., monitoring - 145.5, and volunteering at Nachusa Grasslands - 133. Another excellent year. As usual, most of the work is continuing to push the invasives back. We did major clearing and mowing in the West Loop, the West Savanna, and south of the Old Road Pothole.

We also continued our assault on the Oriental Bittersweet, and did our usual management of Knapweed, Garden Heliotrope, Dame's Rocket, etc. Then last May we worked on a coordinated effort with the Forest Preserve District to herbicide the Reed-Canary Grass—we hit the small, dispersed pockets and they concentrated on the large scale areas, mostly in the savannas and the southeastern section of the preserve.

I also reported that the Forest Preserve District did a prescribed burn of most of the east half of the preserve, including the savannas, on April 3.

As far as upcoming plans are concerned, it was reported that the coming year will be more of the same, mostly brush removal: cutting, stacking and herbiciding. There's more to clear in the savannas (read below to learn about what we've been doing about this since the Annual Meeting), and regrowth that needs to be cut again in "Gentian Alley", along the trail from the West Loop to the Prairie Path. Last year's prescribed burn will likely have stimulated the growth of Sweet Clover, and so we'll have plenty of it to remove in the coming year.

We handed out certificates to volunteers that reached 10, 25 or any multiple of 50 hours this year. Thanks to Kathy Garness, we upgraded the certificates with a new graphic: a gorgeous painting of White Lady's Slipper. We then concluded the meeting with a tour of the West Loop.

Recent Accomplishments

Fall is always harvest season, and this year we picked a variety of seeds as usual. We collected differing amounts of about 15 species to use in our restoration. Participants included Malcolm Boyle, Kristen Brunskill, Bill Dawe, Steve Carrow, Jim Dohren, Linda Fisher, Scott Hensey (2), Rob Kaiser, and Steve Sentoff (4) and Terry Strohm and her friend Candace. Most notable was the 9/14 work day—it had rained about 8” in the previous two days, and was still raining. I've never seen the prairie so wet, and there were crayfish everywhere. It took me nearly two weeks to get the seed dry in my garage.

Since then it's been almost all cutting, stacking and herbiciding brush. The savannas were last cleared in 1999, and in ten years the brush, mostly honeysuckle, has come back with a vengeance. We need to remove this, partly because of its invasive character, but also because we need to be able to manage the Oriental Bittersweet and Reed-Canary Grass in that area. We started at the west end of the savannas, and so far we've worked through both the West and East Savannas, and have started into the East Woodland, making some gigantic brushpiles, since the honeysuckle doesn't stack very compactly. The Forest Preserve District has already begun to burn off the piles, and the change to the savannas is remarkable. This work has been a combination of both scheduled work days and week-day work days. Participants for this effort included Malcolm Boyle (3), Steve Carrow, Bill Dawe (9), Jim Dohren (2), Patricia Ebelt, Linda Fisher, Scott Hensey (10), Rob Kaiser (3), Roger Kotecki and Steve Sentoff (13) plus 7 students from Wheaton-Warrenville South, 10 students plus their instructor (Carl Anderson) from Waubensee, and three Webelos plus two dads from Pack 101—a superlative effort!

With all that clearing, we had plenty of places to put seed in, and on 10/14, Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebelt, Scott Hensey, Tory Graham, Rob Kaiser, Roger Kotecki, Steve Sentoff and Dan Wilcox raked seed into the East and West Savannas. The species included Purple Joe-Pye Weed, Wingstem, Pale Indian Plantain, and a mix of savanna grasses, mostly Bottlebrush Grass.

A Birder's Diary

by Marilyn Bell

September 11, 2008 Is it “deja vu all over again” today? I remember when spring always brought red-headed woodpeckers here and I'm thinking I hear one today! Hurrying to follow a woodpecker with white on the wings as it flies from tree to tree, I stop when it does and, it is! It's a young RED-HEADED WOODPECKER! Be still my heart. Turning toward Heron Pond, I hear the rattle call of a BELTED KINGFISHER! Can it be? I catch just a glimpse of a large head and blue

body as it flies off. It's been years since I've seen one here. It's like a walk down memory's lane, except it's now. And, to top it off, this nearly-fall-day brings REDSTARTS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, MAGNOLIA, BLACK-THROAT GREEN, BAYBREASTED, BLACK-POLL and YELLOW WARBLERS stopping by on their journey south. Better than the best icing on the cake.

October 16, 2008 I'm wearing gloves today. Autumn chill is in the air – and flocks of birds too! AMERICAN GOLDFINCHes, with their roller coaster flight, rise from sun flowers and golden rod in undulating flocks. Looks like fun. Do LINCOLN SPARROWS ever flock? The one just in front of me is alone and wary. WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS are here and there in small, social flocks and – great! Are five AMERICAN CROWs a flock? No matter, it's just always good to see more than one, as they struggle to come back after the West Nile Virus wipeout. Just one BROWN CREEPER creeps up, up, up a trunk, finding goodies under its bark. And, yes! It's an ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER. One is O.K. with me, when it's one I've been looking for!

October 31, 2008 It's a CEDAR WAXWING day! Flocks appear in every section of the Prairie, gregarious creatures. RUSTY BLACKBIRDS gather here and there, their unmusical “song” drawing attention. Oh, there's a RED-TAILED HAWK on the power tower! There's been none for weeks now and the Wednesday crew even found a hawk skull; probably it's missing mate. And here comes another! A new mate? She lands near him on the crossbar, confirming their bond. He's happy again and so am I. Hear that? It's the bounce call of an EASTERN SCREECH OWL, mate hunting too. AMERICAN ROBINS are everywhere, loving the warm day, moving on. DARK-EYED JUNCOS flash their black and white tails as they cross the path, down from the colder north until spring. Each species seeks their own level of comfort.

November 14, 2008 Oh yeah, I mutter to myself, No-vember means no-birds! A lone MALLARD, my first bird, flies across when I'm halfway over the Prairie! There a lone, and probably lonesome, NORTHERN FLICKER views the prairie expanse from his tree top. Birds are here after all! The recently cleared section by the West Woodland sports EASTERN BLUEBIRDS, DARK-EYED JUNCOS and AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS. These ground feeders are loving the scalped earth and the brush pile left by the Stewardship crew. But where's the newly bonded RED-TAILED HAWKS? Don't tell me she said, Let's go to my place! At least he's no longer alone.

November 28, 2008 A couple of bouncing BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES respond to my whistling and come to munch the dried seed heads nearby. One takes flight briefly and...Oh NO! From out of nowhere zooms a MERLIN, our

smallest falcon, talons quickly encasing the little one and flying off. Did I contribute to that? I guess I contributed to the Merlin's dinner, but also to the bird's demise! Sadly, it's the food chain at work - but why take that friendly little guy? A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER and a WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH in the East Woodland seem to whisper their calls. Are there more predators around? Even a NORTHERN CARDINAL flies out of the woods with nary a song. It's so quiet. It's few birds (fewer after that Merlin!). It's fall.

December 20, 2008 It's cold and paths are covered with inches of snow, but it's Christmas Count Day and there's no choice but to trudge the Prairie. Steve Sentoff and I do just that, while others opt for cozy beds. We're thinking the birds opted out as well, since we end up with only 15 species! It was a race to see whether the highest number of chilly birds would be AMERICAN ROBINS, MOURNING DOVES or DARK-EYED JUNCOS, but the juncos sprinted ahead with 22! Ah, but the surprise finish, just before we turned off the Prairie Path to our cars, was twenty-three cold, fluffed-out, snow-eating CEDAR WAXWINGS! Yay - the winners! Not a very spectacular day to end 2008 Prairie birding with, but, like the Cubs, there's always next year...

Herbiciding Workshop

One of our most critical tasks is the control of invasive non-native plants. Often the only available mechanism is the spot application of herbicides to prevent their spread, and so we need volunteers who are licensed herbicides.

Again this year there will be a herbicide clinic on Saturday, January 17, from 8:00 to 4:00 at the Brookfield Zoo. There will be a training session from 8:30 to 12:00 (lunch on your own) followed by a testing session from 1:00 to 4:00. Licensing comes at two levels: Applicators, who must pass two tests and can work on their own, and Operators, who only have to pass one test, but then must work under the direction of an Applicator. Most people can pass the Operator test just by attending the training session, though a little study ahead of time helps. An Operator's license is all you need to work at the prairie, since the Forest Preserve provides the Applicator to sponsor you. If you want an

Applicator's license, you'll definitely need some study, since much of the material for it is not covered in the training.

The stewardship group has several copies of the training material (for both tests), which we can lend out, or you can get copies for a nominal charge from the University of Illinois. Call 1-800-644-2123 to order the materials. For the Operator's test, you want General Standards Training Manual; for the Applicator's test, you also want the Rights-of-Way Training Manual. There are also Workbooks associated with each manual, if you want, but these aren't necessary.

You must register with Karen Tharp of The Nature Conservancy at 866-876-5463 or ktharp@tnc.org by Monday, January 9th, 2009 to attend this clinic. The Department of Agriculture will run the session only if there are at least 50 attendees, so it's important for us to get a good showing. Contact me if you need other information, or if you would like to borrow the training material.

Photo Gallery On-line

Hopefully you all know that we have a web site for our stewardship group, www.wcpsg.org. I've recently upgraded the site by adding a gallery of photos from recent work days. Take a look when you're on-line sometime.

Newsletter by E-mail

Also, while you're visiting the web site, you can see that I also publish the newsletters electronically. Electronic subscribers get an e-mail whenever there's a new newsletter on the site, and can read it from there. You'll need to be able to view the file in PDF format. If you're reading this on paper and you'd rather save the paper (and the postage for delivery), you can e-mail me at shsentoff@comcast.net to change to electronic delivery. As a bonus, you get the newsletter a couple days earlier, and sometimes even a photo in color.

Winter Rules

Don't forget that, except for scheduled work days, the parking lot is closed from December through February. If you want to visit at other times, the best access is from the end of MacQueen Dr. Don't park on Industrial Dr.; you may get a ticket.



*The West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group is
an affiliate of The Conservation Foundation*



west
chicago
prairie
stewardship group
3N771 Woodland Ave.
West Chicago, IL 60185

Wild Things Conference

The next Wild Things Conference will be this February 7th at UIC downtown. This conference is sponsored every other year by Chicago Wilderness. It's always been a great opportunity to learn more about restoration techniques and meet other volunteers. It covers a whole range of topics from habitat management, botany, and zoology to advocacy, education, art, culture, history and backyard and neighborhood ecology.

By registering by January 24, you can get in for the early registration fee of \$27. Registration and conference information can be found on the Habitat Project web site at <http://www.habitatproject.org/>. For questions, contact <mailto:Chicagowildthings@yahoo.com> or tel. 847-328-3910 ext. 21.

I'm going; I hope to see some of you there.