

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 #102

May 2009

President's Corner

It's raining again as I write this, just as it has many times in the past few months. The prairie is as wet as I've ever seen it. But all the moisture has to be good for the plants and we're already seeing lots of things coming up in profusion. Of course, all the work that has been done, which you can read about below, has made a huge difference as well. Now that spring has returned, it's time for you to come out for a visit and thank yourself for all your contributions. We have a couple of field trips coming up, and I hope to see you out there.

Steve

Recent Accomplishments

Clearing, clearing, clearing! Since the last newsletter, we have been busy with a number of brush clearing projects. As reported last time, we worked in the West and East Savannas, and starting in January, we continued working to the east into the East Woodland. We cleared astounding amounts of honeysuckle, along with some buckthorn and other invasives; the brushpiles we made were simply enormous. And this work was coordinated with work done by the crew from the Forest Preserve—we started from the north side of the woodland and they started at the south until we met up. In addition, their crew removed a number of large black cherry trees, which were creating so much shade that there was no regeneration of the oaks. This joint project has transformed woodland, and now we're seeing lots of May Apples, Geranium, Jacob's Ladder and other savanna plants. Obviously, these were already in there, but with the additional sunlight, they seem to be thriving.

Much of this area had been previously cleared in 1999, and we have a set of photos taken by Mel Hoff at that time as documentation. Monica and I were able to find the locations of the photos and take a new set. There is remarkably little difference between the two sets of photos, but in between, the brush returned dramatically. We'll need to pay more attention, and suppress the resprouts before they get out of hand again.

Besides clearing in the woodland, we also cut brush at the north edge of the West Loop

Prairie, as well as in the center of the preserve, near the junction of the Truitt and Cross Trails. These areas were resprouts that needed to be kept back to prevent re-infestation.

Clearers included Malcolm Boyle (4), Steve Carrow, Bill Dawe (6), Laurie Dettmers, Jim Dohren, Patricia Ebelt (2), Linda Fisher (2), Tori Graham, Ben Hensey, Scott Hensey (18), Mark Hubble, Herman Jensen, Rob Kaiser, Roger Kotecki, Monica and Steve (18) Sentoff, Don Smith, Mark Starr and son Tim, Tracey Uhren (3), Dan Wilcox, plus Karen O'Brien (leader) and 13 Junior Zookeepers from the Cosley Zoo, as well as students from Wheaton-Warrenville South H.S., Benedictine University, Waubensee Valley H.S., and one all the way from Olivet-Nazarene in Bourbonnais. Obviously from this long list of names, we had lots of help and we got a tremendous amount done. Kudos to everyone!

Seeding. Lest you think that all we do is clearing, rest assured that we also found time to rake in the seed we collected in the fall. We had three seeding days, and the weather varied widely: one was wet; one was dry, but cold, with flurries; and one was simply gorgeous. But no matter what, we got the seed in. We planted varying amounts of about 15 species of prairie forbs and grasses, mostly into the two large restoration areas south of the parking lot.

Nancy Allured, Malcolm Boyle (2), Patricia Ebelt, Linda Fisher (2), Tori (2) and Gordon (son) Graham, Scott Hensey (3), Rob Kaiser (2), Monica and Steve (3) Sentoff, Tracey Uhren (3) and students from Wheaton-Warrenville South

HS, Benedictine University and 4 cub scouts with their parents contributed to this effort.

Trail Cleanup. On April 25, Linda Fisher, Charles Gasparon, Mark Hubble, Stephanie Gibas, Rob Kaiser, Hubert Morales, Monica and Steve Sentoff, Tracey Uhren and Linsey and Tim Yourmark, along with students from Benet Academy, Waubensee Valley and Wheaton-Warrenville H.S. cleared trash from along the Illinois Prairie Path, as well as along the boundary of the preserve with the parking lot of American Standard Circuits. We've done this project for a few years now, in conjunction with the Illinois Prairie Path clean-up day. Once again, we collected quite a bit, but each year we cover a bigger area, and the sections we've done don't get a lot of new trash.

Prairie Burns

On March 19, the Forest Preserve District burned the section of the preserve north of the Prairie Path, and two days later, burned the whole section west of the power lines. The north unit was last burned in spring 2001, and even though it was fairly wet, it burned pretty well. The west unit was last burned in fall 2003, and it had built up quite a fuel load, so it burned very well. A lot of the gray dogwood was scorched right to the ground, and won't be shading out other plants for a few years. Clearly the combination of brush cutting and prescribed fires over the years has made a difference to the way the fire carries across the preserve—exactly as we planned. Many thanks to the FPD crews.

A Birder's Diary

by Marilyn Bell

March 17, 2009 These March days back on the Prairie have been warm and beautiful, with signs of spring. Three WILSON'S SNIPE fly silently overhead but give away their identity by their very long bill and pointy wings. I'm startled by an AMERICAN WOODCOCK as it flushes near my feet. It's surprised too and hurries to a more private spot. A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER sings his spring song, looking for that special lady. A few KILLDEER are on the ground and overhead, calling their name over and over. A pair of RED-TAILED HAWKS lift off from the West Woodland and a TURKEY VULTURE tilts unsteadily in the blue sky. Yep, the signs of spring surround me and I'm lovin' it. And on Heron Pond, a pair of HOODED MERGANSERS watch me warily and a coyote melts into the woods. Oops! What's it doing in a bird column?

April 3, 2009 Water seems everywhere and MALLARD pairs take every opportunity to swim in the fluddles! Moving quickly up the trunks of trees, the shape of the little BROWN CREEPER reminds me of a computer mouse, painted brown and decorated with white spots. If you like AMERICAN ROBINS, this is the place to be. Large areas of the Prairie experienced a

controlled burn and many robins are on the ground enjoying toasted worms – you think?

April 16, 2009 Bird song assails me at the parking lot today, dominated by the beautiful double notes of NORTHERN CARDINALS. On a dead tree, two NORTHERN FLICKERS chase each other, calling, "Flicker, flicker, flicker," displaying their startlingly golden underwings. It's hard to tell if it's combat or love! A couple of EUROPEAN STARLINGS watch and I'm hoping they don't have eyes on the same nest cavity. Just as energetic, but less than one-fourth their size, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLETS flit about, but their mind is on insects! A noisy BROWN THRASHER hides all but its song. And just listen. Two EASTERN SCREECH OWLS are calling back and forth across the east end of the Prairie, over and over, seemingly endlessly. Always beautifully blue against the brown landscape, a pair of EASTERN BLUEBIRDS give hope for this year's batch of little ones. Now here is dedicated motherhood: On Heron Pond sits a CANADA GOOSE but on a totally submerged nest! The water has risen over her nest—but she's still keeping those eggs warm! And here's a GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, a pretty, tiny little bird, just as flitty as its cousin above. There's no flitting for me, though, with all these birds to watch.

May 2, 2009 There's another fluddle-lover this week. A NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH, a warbler, walks along a fluddle's edge, its tail bobbing up and down, making it easy to find. And here's another tail-bobber, a PALM WARBLER. Seldom still, it is up in a tree, then down in the dried grasses, finding delicacies. The "Sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet" of the just-returned YELLOW WARBLER is a welcome sound, as is the sight of a beautifully regal WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, sporting its black and white cap. Wait! That can't be a song sparrow, it has a yellow eyebrow. It's a SAVANNAH SPARROW, an infrequent visitor to the Prairie these days, always welcome. What's going on here? Two TREE SPARROWS, their iridescent blue backs bright in the sun are picking up white feathers, a lining for their nest. The whinney-call of a SORA RAIL greets me at Heron Pond and in McQueen Woods my pishing brings a COOPER'S HAWK flying directly at me. I duck, it veers and gives a few irritated "Kek"s. It flies a short distance and I'm distracted by the sight of an EASTERN SCREECH OWL perched against a tree trunk. Are they nesting in the same area? Will the owl become dinner? Sometimes I'm glad I just don't know the answer.

May 9, 2009 It's Spring Bird Count day and there's just three of us to count all those birds! The beautiful tones of a WOOD THRUSH starts my day off well, while a HOUSE WREN's bold, bubbly song treats us all and INDIGO BUNTINGS' persistent singing fills the air. The beauty of some birds could blow us away, but today it's

the wind doing that. Even RED-TAILED and COOPER'S HAWKS find it hard to soar and COMMON GRACKLES, flying against the wind, seem to lose ground. Initially, most birds seem to lay low, but then a BALTIMORE ORIOLE passes by carrying nesting material and two BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS busily continue nest-building in a sheltered area, ignoring us, intent on getting their job done. A TREE SWALLOW tries to run off a RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD and, in the process reveals its nest cavity, probably sporting those white feathers! There's a brief skirmish between an EASTERN KINGBIRD and two AMERICAN GOLDFINCHes, but they should know better. After all it's a Tyrannus tyrannus! And what a treat. Three male ORCHARD ORIOLEs, in brick-red and black plumage forage low, easily seen, unconscious of their beauty. What is that larger bird lighting overhead? It's a YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO thinking it's hidden from view behind a few leaves, but we're enjoying the sight of this unusual and seldom-seen bird. High in the oaks of the East Woodland the flaming throat of a BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER is hard to hide, as are the clucks, whistles and calls of a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT emanating from a thicket. But the prize of the day are two RED-HEADED WOODPECKERS! Will they find just the right cavity and return to the Prairie to breed after so many years? That question will be answered before long and hopefully add to our next count.

Ice-walled Lake Plains

The West Chicago Prairie is in a glacial outwash plain, just west of the West Chicago Moraine. This moraine formed at the end of the last ice age ten to twelve thousand years ago, as the ice was melting as fast as it was advancing, thus depositing its load of sand and gravel. One of the interesting, and little-known, geologic forms here are Ice-walled Lake Plains. When the advance stagnates, and permafrost is still present, lakes can form in pockets dammed by the ice. Once formed, these lakes collect sediment and can become home to plants and animals, insulated from the cold of the ice by the

layer of debris. The lakes can persist for hundreds of years and form distinctive bands in the soil. Geologists have identified a number of Ice-walled Lake Plains at the Preserve. You can see a map of these areas on our web site at www.wcpsg.org/IceWalledLakePlains.jpg. Once all the ice melted, the collected sediments formed all the higher-elevation areas on the preserve, and the pancake-shaped deposits clearly show up in the topography.

Registration

It's time to renew our membership records, and there's a registration form included with this newsletter. [For those of you getting the newsletter electronically, the registration form is on the More Information page of our web site, or directly at www.wcpsg.org/registration.pdf.] Our by-laws state that anyone can be a member just by registering, so it's an easy and painless process. No dues are required for membership, but all members are encouraged to donate time, money, skills and/or equipment to further the purposes of the stewardship group. If our records show that you've participated in some activity in the last year, you will automatically be continued as a member. If your phone number or address, or any of the other information has changed, please fill out the registration form. We don't have an on-line registration mechanism, but if you send the same information in an e-mail to info@wcp.org, we can take care of it that way. This helps us keep our records up-to-date. And don't forget to tell us if you'd like to switch to electronic delivery from the newsletter, if you're still getting paper mail.

Wanted: Slide Scanner

The Stewardship Group has an archive of a few hundred slide photographs, which would be much more useful if we could get them scanned into digital files. If anyone has a slide scanner that we could borrow (or even better, would like to volunteer to scan the slides for us), please give me a call or e-mail me at shsentoff@comcast.net. Thanks.





Schedule of Upcoming Events

Except as noted below, all events start from the WCP parking lot located on the east side of Industrial Drive between Western and Downs.

Sunday	June 7	8:00 - 11:00	Field Trip <i>Summer resident birds, plus good displays of Spiderwort, Spiked Lobelia, White Wild Indigo, Wild Roses, Marsh Phlox and others.</i>
Saturday	July 18	8:00 - 11:00	Restoration Work Day <i>Removal of Sweet Clover.</i>
Saturday	July 25	8:00 - 11:00	Restoration Work Day <i>Removal of Sweet Clover. Also a good time to visit, with many species in bloom.</i>
Saturday	August 8	8:00 - 11:00	Field Trip <i>Good displays of Prairie Dock, False Dragonhead, Nodding Onion, Tall Coreopsis, Prairie Sunflower, Blazing Star and others.</i>
Saturday	August 29	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Restoration Work Day <i>General seed collection, mostly forbs.</i>
Saturday	September 12	12:00 noon - 3:00	Annual Meeting and Picnic <i>Join us for a potluck picnic, followed by our annual meeting and a field trip.</i>

Other workdays may be scheduled, depending on the field conditions. Reservations are not required unless you are coming with a group of 10 or more. Special field trips can be arranged for groups.