

*Executive Committee*

*S. H. Sentoff, President  
H. H. Jensen, Vice Pres.  
R. S. Hensey, Sec./Treas.  
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W. C. Dawe  
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**Newsletter #103**

**September 2009**

**President's Corner**

This has been a simply spectacular season at the Preserve! Between the rains, the burn in the spring and the clearing we did last winter, the blooms in the prairie and savannas have been fantastic. Displays of Geranium, May Apple, Golden Alexanders and Phlox have been eye-popping, and now the Prairie Dock and all those other yellows are making a great show. I hope you've been able to visit. If not, you'll have another chance after the Annual Meeting (see below). See you soon.

*Steve*

**Annual Meeting**

This year our annual meeting will be held on Saturday, September 12 at the parking lot at the preserve. The meeting will start with a Potluck Picnic at 12:00 noon. Family members and friends are welcome. Bring a hot or cold dish, salad or dessert with a serving utensil, and your own plate and silverware. Cold drinks will be provided. There are a number of picnic tables there, but bring a lawn chair if you can.

Starting at about 1:00 p.m., we will hold a brief business meeting in which we will elect members of the Executive Committee, present awards for last year and briefly outline the plans for next year. We're proposing to rearrange the officers a bit, and so this year the nominations are: President, Steve Sentoff; Vice President, Scott Hensey; Secretary/Treasurer, Malcolm Boyle; and general board members, Bill Dawe, Jim Dohren, Herman Jensen and JoAnn Monge.

After the business meeting, we'll take a tour of the Preserve. Many of you have put a lot of time into helping the preserve without an opportunity to stop and admire your work. Also a number of you have generously donated money to keep us going and may not have visited in quite a while. We think this would be a great time for you to come out for a visit. Even if you don't feel up to a hike in the preserve, you can see quite a bit just from the parking lot. We encourage all of you to come on out and see it.

**Awards**

Prairie Steward Awards are given for accumulating 10, 25 and 50 hours, and for every

additional 50 hours of volunteer work for the Stewardship Group. These awards are for total career hours through the end of June, 2009. This year's recipients by category are

10 hours	Kristen Brunskill, Tori Graham
100 hours	Rob Kaiser
350 hours	Malcolm Boyle
400 hours	Jim Dohren
750 hours	Monica Sentoff
800 hours	Bill Dawe
1600 hours	Marilyn Bell, Scott Hensey
3100 hours	Steve Sentoff

This is an impressive list, and as always, there are many active volunteers who just happen to be between awards.

This year we'll also give out a New Bird on the Prairie Award to Marilyn Bell, who spotted a Merlin last November.

Award certificates will be presented at the Annual Meeting. Please come to acknowledge these contributions and to take your well-earned bows.

**Weed Control**

As most of you know by now, summer is the season of weed control for us. Normally, we would start with work on Reed-Canary Grass, but this year the preserve was so wet that we really couldn't work on this.

So first on our list was the Dame's Rocket. This pretty, but invasive, plant has established itself along the Prairie Path and in the southeast corner of the preserve and will keep spreading

unless we keep it in check. It pulls easily, though, so it's not too hard to control.

Next was control of a big patch of Goutweed in the MacQueen Woods. We've known about this for a while, but it was lower priority. This year, however, we decided we needed to get to work on it. The only way to get rid of this is by spraying it, but since it was a complete monoculture, we didn't have to worry much about what else we might spray. It turns out that the patch was so large that we only got about half of it. Hopefully, each year we'll get to this until we've gotten rid of it entirely.

We've been working on Garden Heliotrope for at least the last 20 years, and this year was no different. It seems to be under control, but nevertheless, there's always some of this really persistent weed around. Because of its persistence, we actually tagged a number of plants this year to determine how effective the herbicide is on them. Next June we'll check on these.

Our new nemesis, Oriental Bittersweet, was again on our list, and we now know of 20 locations on the prairie. Each of these was checked and herbicided this year. Although it will take a while to eradicate this invader, it's clear that our past work is having good effect.

Most recently, we had several work days to remove White Sweet Clover from the West Loop Prairie. These were our scheduled work days, so we had good participation, and made a great difference in getting this plant (and more importantly, its seed) out. We made quite "compost pile" of the removed material.

Our intrepid weeders included: Ryan Campbell (from Fermilab Natural Areas), Jim Dohren (4), Patricia Ebelt, Linda Fisher, Charles Gasparon, Scott Hensey (11), Rob Kaiser (2), Roger Kotecki (2), and Monica and Steve (11) Sentoff, Don Smith (2), Ryan Townsend and Kent and Grant Weber. Thanks for all this great work!

## **West Chicago Bloomingfest**

West Chicago has its Bloomingfest celebration each spring and this year we decided to participate. Malcolm Boyle, Steve Carrow, Bill Dawe, Linda Fisher, Scott Hensey and Monica and Steve Sentoff staffed the booth. The turnout seemed pretty good and we talked to a number of people who seemed to be good prospects. Welcome again to those of you that signed up at the event, and we hope to see you out at the preserve soon.

## **A Birder's Diary**

by Marilyn Bell

June 9, 2009 A BELL'S VIREO! That's what that strange, harsh song is. What a superb surprise. In fact, there seems to be two pair on the Prairie. Will there be little ones? A flushed WOOD THRUSH returns to the same spot and

sings at me. Could there be a nest nearby? A NORTHERN FLICKER sticks her head out of a nest cavity at eye level, inviting me to leave. Two CEDAR WAXWINGS work together on a nest in an oak tree, intent only on their task. A YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, on a branch close to the ground and wary, carries food to an unseen recipient. Summer residents have settled in to the business of family and I'm an intruder.

June 15, 2009 I'm looking for nests today, which proves to be a bit daunting. The monotonous song of a RED-EYED VIREO reaches my ears—the first of this season and I'm glad they're back. Their numbers seem reduced this year, at least on the Prairie. But there's no shortage of the apparently bright blue INDIGO BUNTING. Singing all day, his song seems to emanate from bush, tree or wire every 100 feet! A strange shape, somewhat like a grey, furry mammal in a tree, turns out to be a GREAT-BLUE HERON, scrunched down to rest, appropriately enough, by Heron Pond. Four soft-looking, curious BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES appear to be young ones. They seem to respond to some quiet call and just disappear! A BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO flies gracefully into the Prairie's center, then back and forth to a bush, giving a hint of nest location. A lovely song fills the air, "like a robin with voice lessons," and a binocular search of leaves reveals a ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK, searching for bugs but pausing to explode with song every couple of minutes. Now if I could just find their nests...

June 23, 2009 Five pairs of YELLOW-BREASTED CHATS? It certainly seems so. Quite a bonanza! A beautiful BROWN THRASHER pops into view and tallies a possible three thrasher pairs and, after fledging one young, the EASTERN KINGBIRDS seem to be nesting again, confirmed by an adult's black and white head showing over the edge of their nest. Seems like a good year bird-wise. I spend several minutes looking for the nest of a WOOD THRUSH, who hangs around a specific spot each visit, but remains invisible to me, and I fail again. Only two young BARN SWALLOWS with their parents? Not a great year for them, I'm thinking. Oh look at that! Two ORCHARD ORIOLE males duke it out, but it's hard to make their beautiful songs sound angry. And songs there are, all around. Lovely.

July 3, 2009 It's seriously overcast today and the birds are annoyingly quiet. There must be some good eating in the east end of the Prairie, though. Six ORCHARD ORIOLES and two CEDAR WAXWINGS are all somewhat together foraging down in the wild flowers and grasses. A mother is feeding two fledgling orioles there who are perched impatiently on a small bush. The Prairie is lush with growth, a benefit in many ways. I'm about to pronounce Heron Pond empty, when a female HOODED MERGANSER flies in, hinting at hidden young ones. What is that on the dead

sumac? Can it be a NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD? Omigoodness it is! And it's one of the huge surprises that help make birding a joy!

July 9, 2009 Whoa! There's nine NORTHERN FLICKERS, mostly young, on that snag. Can it be one family? One's being fed by mom. On Heron Pond, as I stay still, a mother WOOD DUCK glides out of the cattails, one tiny fledging glued to her side. ONE, only one!? Her watchful eye sees me, she makes a peep sound and baby wood duck disappears under her wing, while she vanishes again into the reeds. It's certainly baby time. A young EASTERN KINGBIRD cries over and over for food, until a parent obliges it. Every BROWN THRASHER I see perches quietly. A Brown Thrasher perching quietly!?!? There must be babies near and every parent is busy.

July 29, 2009 What a perfect day and the trails are freshly mowed! What could be better? A YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT pauses in a bush, a caterpillar in its mouth. Is this a second brood? Further down the trail a young chat forgets caution and flies close to ogle me—and I him. Fun. Three GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHERS perch high on leafless branches. Is one a newbie? They all look alike. There's no doubting that the ORCHARD ORIOLE straining from a branch to satisfy its curiosity is young. The newest generation is becoming independent. And what's this? It's a Hummingbird Clearwing Moth, enjoying Monarda (Bee-Balm) nectar. I know, it's not a bird, but its name and appearance makes it fit this column, a colorful, fuzzy little hummer.

August 14, 2009 Hey, I'm surrounded! At least a dozen young HOUSE WRENS and two adults are scolding me from low bushes on both sides of the trail. Am I supposed to be frightened at these perky little guys? Here's another noisy group. Bigger in body and louder, a flock of adult and young COMMON GRACKLES forage in wet bushes, the young distinguished by their brown bodies. Young BROWN THRASHERS are here and there, their curious, yellow eyes on me and there's two young CEDAR WAXWINGS, one pushing close to its parent, the first young ones I've seen this year. Mom and dad INDIGO BUNTINGS are watchful of me, but there's nary a young one to be seen, only many “chip, chips” coming from low on the ground. It won't be long before they're hopping into sight and then, oh dear, flying south.



## Nachusa

On June 27, Katie and Scott Hensey, and Monica and Steve Sentoff spent a great day at Nachusa Grasslands. We worked at our Kittentail Knob unit, with Kevin Kaltenbach, another one of the stewards at Nachusa. Mostly we scouted for weeds, spading some Wild Parsnip and cutting and herbiciding some Autumn Olive. Later we helped Kevin re-set a footbridge that had been washed downstream by the recent rains.

The brush in the unit is starting to get a bit larger now, and we should have a clearing day at Nachusa sometime over the winter. If you're interested in joining us, let me know, and I'll include you in the scheduling.

September 19<sup>th</sup> is the date for Nachusa's Autumn on the Prairie celebration. Everyone is welcome; see their website for more details ([www.nachusagrasslands.org](http://www.nachusagrasslands.org)).

## Weeding Spades

This year, we had a new tool for weeding thanks to help from our good neighbor, Rich Moberg. Rich lives at the end of MacQueen Drive, and so we see him frequently. Based on a design from the folks at Nachusa Grasslands, we wanted a tool to help cut sweet clover and parsnip. We bought the spades and Rich used his cutting torch to cut the blades down to the shape we wanted. So far, they've been working out well, though perhaps we need sturdier spades to start with.

## Donor Appreciation

As you know, we're a pretty frugal organization, but we do need some money to keep our equipment in working order, and handle the mail and some other miscellaneous items. Luckily we have members who donate enough to cover our expenses. Many of these are members who are too far away or who aren't up to the physical rigors of field work. I'd like to recognize the contribution of the following donors: Nancy Allured, Burt and Dorothy Andrews, Ruthanne Baird, Sally Baumgartner, Alan and Sandy Bemis, Bob Claus, Herb Demmel, Jean Hoff, Joe Houle, Roger Kotecki and Pat Rouille. I hope I didn't miss anyone. The Prairie thanks all of you.



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



### 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.

Saturday	September 12	12:00 noon - 3:00 p.m.	<b>Annual Meeting and Picnic</b> <i>Join us for a potluck picnic, followed by our annual meeting and a field trip.</i>
Sunday	September 20	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>General seed collection, mostly forbs.</i>
Saturday	September 26	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>Collection of grasses and forbs, also a good visit.</i>
Saturday	October 10	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>Clearing invading brush and/or raking in seed.</i>
Saturday	October 24	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>Clearing invading brush and/or raking in seed.</i>
Saturday	November 7	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>Clearing invading brush and/or raking in seed.</i>
Saturday	December 5	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	<b>Restoration Work Day</b> <i>Clearing invading brush and/or raking in seed.</i>
Saturday	December 19	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	<b>Field Trip - Meet at MacQueen Entrance</b> <i>Winter resident birds. Annual DuPage Christmas count.</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.