

Executive Committee

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H. H. Jensen, *Vice Pres.*
R. S. Hensey, *Sec./Treas.*
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President's Corner

Once again, the seasons have changed, and winter is upon us. This is the quiet time for the animals and plants of the prairie, but not for the stewards. We've already had a number of projects going on, as you'll read below, and have plenty more planned ahead of us. Take a look at the enclosed schedule of events for 2006, pick a field trip or work day, and come on out with us to see the preserve in its winter pallet of browns, grays and whites.

Steve

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting was held on September 10 following our typical pot-luck picnic. The weather cooperated nicely and once again the Forest Preserve District (FPD) provided us with a canopy for shade.

Scott Hensey gave the Treasurer's report, and I'm pleased to say that we're doing fine financially. We're quite frugal and had no major equipment expenses, so we only spent a bit over \$300, largely for postage costs, and we received donations in excess of that. Thanks to all of you donors!

Next was the election of officers. Barbara Johnson withdrew her nomination, due to other time commitments, but Malcolm Boyle agreed to be nominated to serve on the executive board. Thus the nominees were: Steve Sentoff – President; Herman Jensen – Vice President; Scott Hensey – Secretary/Treasurer; with Malcolm Boyle, Bill Dawe, Herb Demmel and JoAnn Monge as at-large board members. The slate was elected by acclamation. For those of you who haven't met our newest board member, his biography follows below.

In the President's Comments, Steve reported that we've had another good year of accomplishment. We contributed 934 volunteer hours from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005, spread throughout the year. Clearing brush is still our largest single activity at about 160 hours. We had two main clearing projects for the year: one north of the Prairie Path, and the other at the junction of the main trail with the cross trail. In both of these cases, the Forest Preserve District burned the brush piles we generated, and also cut additional brush in the areas. Other major activities included monitoring (155 hours), seeding (134 hours), work at Nachusa Grasslands (126 hours), seed collection (110 hours) and weeding (105 hours). As you can see you've all been hard at work, and deserve a hearty well-done!

Other news of interest in the last year is that preliminary results are in from an insect study being

done by Ron Panzer, from Northeastern Illinois University, with FPD funding. They report 349 species, 95 of which are uncommon or rare remnant-dependent species. About half a dozen are known from fewer than five sites in northeastern Illinois and are rare throughout Illinois, and two are known from fewer than 6 sites in the whole state. The study says "West Chicago Prairie clearly ranks among the richest silt loam prairies in the region". The study continues through 2005 and underscores the importance of protecting remnants – it's often just a matter of looking to find new things.

In other news, there were no burns at the preserve in the last year, largely to ensure that the insect inventory would have the best chance to find as many species as possible.

Our upcoming plans include the usual seed collection and sowing, as well as brush clearing. It looks like we'll concentrate on some areas on the east half that seem to be getting brushy once again. Other concerns include Reed Canary Grass and White Sweet Clover, which are invasive weeds that are going to need special attention.

After his remarks, Steve handed out the certificates to those members who earned awards this year for their contributions, as was reported in the last newsletter. In summary, the work is making a difference, and you're protecting an amazing resource. Thanks and congratulations.

Meet the WCPSPG: Malcolm Boyle

Malcolm Boyle grew up in Florida enjoying the outdoors: camping and spending time at the beaches. After college, he moved to Colorado to see the West. While in the Denver area, he fell in love with the mountains and the outdoors, spending his spare time skiing (cross country and alpine) in the winter and hiking through the mountains in the summer. He still makes pilgrimages to the mountains in the winter for a week of skiing and during the summer for a week of hiking up 14ers (14,000 foot mountains).



About 18 years ago, Malcolm moved to the Chicago area, presently residing in Winfield. He is a Senior Engineer with the Waste Management and Research Center, a Division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. He works with manufacturing facilities to reduce the impact their processes have on the environment (pollution prevention, waste reduction, and waste management). Malcolm and his wife, Patricia Ebelt, joined the stewardship group in 2000 and have been volunteering regularly ever since. They enjoy the sense of accomplishment each time they go to the prairie and see how far the restoration work has progressed.

Recent Work Projects

Due to the drought this year, there wasn't a lot of seed production on the prairie, and we only had two seed collection work days. We still managed to collect varying quantities of 20 species of native plants, but this is far below what we've collected in past years. The seed collectors included Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebelt, Tim Everding, Linda Fisher, Jacqui Gleason, Scott Hensey, Mary Jo Long, Bob Kusiolek, Monica and Steve (2) Sentoff and Dan Wilcox.

On October 15, Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebelt, Scott Hensey and Monica and Steve Sentoff worked on the Kittentail Knob unit at Nachusa Grasslands on what could only be described as a perfect fall day, with not a single cloud in the sky. We cut and herbicided resprouts of cherry, olive and honeysuckle in a couple of areas of the unit. It's looking pretty good after all the work that's been done, both by us and the Nachusa crew.

We're well into our clearing season now, and this year we started with a major project. Roz Iasillo from Robert Morris College was looking for a project for her environmental studies class of 30 students, and we found one – an area near the West Loop Prairie that hadn't had any clearing for the last 10 years. With all this muscle, we managed to clear an amazing amount of brush. In addition, we've had two other clearing work days on the east side of the prairie – one in the Three Oak Savanna and one in the Lone Oak Savanna. All told, our recent brush clearing crew included Malcolm Boyle (3); Patsy (2) and Steve (2) Carrow; Jill Dearmer; Herb Demmel; Kathy DiMonte; Patricia Ebelt (3); Linda Fisher; Jacqui Gleason; Brian

Jenkins; Scott Hensey (3); Herman Jensen (2); Rob Kaiser; Karl (2) Knecht and his son, Stephen; Glenn, Shamili, Tarika and Kiran Sandiford; Steve Sentoff (3); and Don Smith. In addition, we had help from six Wheaton-Warrenville South H.S. students, two Monrovia Community College students and 12 Girl Scouts. Quite the list – keep up the good work!

And we can't forget the stalwart week day volunteer crew, who continue to handle an assortment of smaller jobs, wherever and whenever needed: Bill Dawe (9), Herb Demmel (2), Jim Dohren (7) and Steve Sentoff (10).

Burn Plans

As reported above, there were no burns in the 2004-2005 season, due to the insect study. This season, the east half of the preserve, including the unit north of the Prairie Path, is on the burn list, if conditions are right. However, the drought that we are still in may preclude having the burn. There's concern that the prairie is so dry that we could actually have a peat fire, where the organic material in the soil itself catches fire. This would be a serious problem for our wetlands and sedge meadows. So we have yet another reason to wish for some significant moisture in the coming months.

A Birder's Diary

by Marilyn Bell.

August 22

A green fly-catcher? Totally, truly green! A plaintive "Pee-ee" tells me it's a YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER, its odd color confirmed later in a bird book. Four more sound out from the West and South Savannas, but hiding well. Only one shows me its more normal yellow belly. INDIGO BUNTING families lie low, but keep up a chorus of "Spit" in the bushes around me, the apparent iridescent blue daddy popping up occasionally like a look-out. GRAY CATBIRDS add to the surround-sound with gentle "Mew"s and a brave juvenile or two sit on a bare branch observing me in their new world. A young AMERICAN KESTREL, its plumage pale-colored, starts-up, dives, swoops up and dives again, hoping to catch one of the small birds harassing him. He chases them, then they him, delighting me with a continual show of flight agility. Three young lemon-yellow ORCHARD ORIOLES feast on purple plums, while blue grapes entice other fruit eaters, and, in this colorful world, I pop a blackberry or two myself!

August 31

Rain this month has brought a surprising burst of growth to the Prairie's plants and it's dotted with yellow at last. Of course some of the dots have feathers, as AMERICAN GOLDFINCHes fly their roller-coaster flight here and there, asking their endless questions - "Who-ee?" Peering into the darkness of the understory, I'm surprised by three OVENBIRDS! One's white-ringed eyes look back at me unperturbed, as it rustles among the leaves. Fall migration is here, confirmed by the sight of a

TENNESSEE WARBLER, also low, looking for an insect meal.

September 21

Oooh, lovely. An eye-level, beautiful CAPE MAY WARBLER, oblivious of my joy, squishes and sips white berries, even seeming to hang on some, wings fluttering. Mm-m mmm, tasty, I think I hear him say. And just look at that AMERICAN REDSTART twisting and turning along tree branches, fanning her tail with each turn, as if to say, See my beautiful mostly yellow and black (Well, O.K., Yellowstart) dress! A "plink" water-dripping sound comes from the bushes in front, then behind, then beside me. SWAINSON'S THRUSHes arrived during the night and are here in large numbers. Knowing their curious nature, I gently teeth-whistle and soon a spotted neck stretches out from behind the leaves and a buffy-ringed eye seeks the source of sound. My chuckle is inner.

September 30

Pshaw! I thought the wind was afternoon only, but no, it's here and now. Birds are hunkered down in somewhat sheltered areas. Well, except for that TURKEY VULTURE overhead, riding the thermals and enjoying the glide. There's a BROWN THRASHER doing a kind of ostrich play. With his head tucked behind leaves, he fails to note that his spotted breast, russet-rimmed by a wing with a white wing bar is easily observed; as is the "Smack" he sends my way. Silly bird. Other birds forage low, rising occasionally like the delightful, emerging fall fragrances that surround me.

October 14

Flit, flit - flick, flick. What else would it be but a kinglet, a RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET concentrating on berries, undistracted by my closeness. Except, oops, he's flashing that ruby crown! Guess he notices me after all. Or is it the GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET discovering the berry bush that irritates him? Lovely, little low-level birds, easy to spot, comfortable to view.

November 11

Now that's my kind of welcome! Six male EASTERN BLUEBIRDS greet me as I pull on my boots. One is even perched on the "No Parking" sign. Spots of beautiful color against the brown prairie. And, speaking of spots, there's a lovely fall bird with a spot on its breast, an AMERICAN TREE SPARROW, the first of the season! It seems to be traveling alone, odd for such a social bird, but then - so am I!

November 28

No birds at all, I'm thinking, when from the puddly mud floor of Heron Pond, DARK-EYED JUNCOS pop up, their charcoal and white plumage easily recognized. Further on, only a few EASTERN BLUEBIRDS and WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS add to my list. And I must go. I look once more at the Prairie, shorn of its adornments - and its birds(!) - barren and seemingly lifeless. But I know better. As the wind-blown tree branches wave goodbye, the confidence that beautiful life will spring once again

from the now-resting Prairie gives me comfort and I close the door on another 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.

This year there will be a herbicide clinic on Saturday, January 28, from 8:15 to 4:00 at the Brookfield Zoo. There will be a training session from 8:15 to 12:00 followed by a testing session from 1:00 to 4:00. Licensing comes at two levels: Applicators, who have passed 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. You'll definitely need some study if you intend to take the Applicator's test, 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.

You must register with Karen Tharp of The Nature Conservancy at 866-876-5463 by Friday, January 13th, 2006 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 materials. I'll be at the session, since this is the year I have to re-test to maintain my license, so I hope to see many of you there.

Bird Monitoring Assistant Wanted

Love to bird? Join Marilyn Bell, our local birder and the author of this newsletter's birding column, in a bird monitoring walk or two and see if you'd like to share some of this responsibility. Phone Marilyn at 630-821-7918.





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