

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



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**Newsletter #98**

**January 2008**

**President's Corner**

*Our 25<sup>th</sup> year!* 2008 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first work day by the West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group. On March 26, 1983 Mel Hoff organized the first work day for our group. A hearty group of seven cleaned up trash from the MacQueen Woods. The mind boggles at the amount of gray dogwood we've cut, stacked and herbicided since then, as well as the sheer number of rake-ins of seed. This March 29<sup>th</sup> we'll commemorate our anniversary with a special work day. Mark your calendars now.

And, of course, we'll have a number of other work days and field trips before then. I hope to see you out at the prairie in the New Year.

*Steve*

**Annual Meeting**

Our 23<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting was held on September 8, after another fine potluck picnic at the Preserve.

Scott Hensey presented the Treasurer's Report, and I'm pleased to say that we're still doing fine financially, thanks to frugal spending and generous donors. We spent only \$330 in the preceding year, mostly for maintaining our equipment and sending out mail, and received \$567 in donations.

The next order of business was the nomination and election of officers. As previously reported, Kathy DiMonte has moved and resigned from the board, but the other officers agreed to serve again. So the slate of candidates was

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 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.

The report on the volunteer work for the year was a total of 1028 hours. The major categories of work included: clearing – 217 hrs., monitoring – 166, weeding – 141, and volunteering at Nachusa Grasslands – 166. Another excellent year. As usual, most of the work is continuing to push the invasives back. Our major clearing

effort was focused on the West End Prairie, where we had a series of clearing work days and great cooperation from the Forest Preserve District, who burned our brush piles several times to keep remove them. We've also been continuing our weed control projects, including our old standards of Knapweed, Garden Heliotrope and Reed-Canary Grass, and a new problem for us to tackle: Oriental Bittersweet.

Last year's monitoring included the birds and butterflies, as has been done for many years, as well as a number of plant species, including the Tube Beardtongue, Scurfy Pea, Lady's Slipper and Fringed Orchid.

As far as upcoming plans are concerned, it was reported that the coming year will be more of the same, mostly brush removal. In fact, as you read on, you'll see that we're already well underway on this.

The meeting concluded with the awarding of certificates of accomplishment to the volunteers crossing our award boundaries, and a tour of the West Loop Prairie. Considering that we had Herman Jensen to talk about the plants, Charles Gasparon to talk about the butterflies, Marilyn Bell to talk about the birds and Bob Claus to give prairie interpretation, there wasn't much I needed to do except try to keep the group moving.

**Recent Accomplishments**

Early fall is harvest season, and as usual we were out collecting seed on several work days. This year, Malcolm Boyle, Kristen Brunskill, Bill

Dawe, Patricia Ebelt (2), Charles Gasparon, Scott Hensey, Monica and Steve (3) Sentoff and two students earning service credit, along with a group of 10 DUUGooders (from the DuPage Unitarian Universalist Church) collected seed of mostly prairie plants for our restoration. Species included Pale Purple Coneflower, Illinois Bupleurum, Purple Joe-Pye Weed, Dropseed, Mountain Mint, Foxglove Beardtongue, Rattlesnake Master, Bottlebrush Grass, Woodland Brome, Tall Coreopsis and some Indian Grass.

Much of the rest of the fall has been on a project just to the east of the parking lot, around a group of cottonwoods, which we call the Old Road Marsh. This area had originally been cleared about seven years ago, but had gotten pretty overgrown again since then. It made it to the top of our priority list when I got a call from a scoutmaster who was looking for a project for a group of scouts. This seemed like a good fit for a lot of brush haulers, and was reasonably close to the parking lot. But once we got started we just kept working here, and we've cut, stacked, herbicided and seeded a large area with three of our regularly scheduled work days, as well as six mid-week work days. The December 1<sup>st</sup> work day was an especially large one, with 8 of our regular volunteers, 13 students (trying to get service credit before the end of the semester) and two scouts plus their leader. With all these people we basically had two work days going simultaneously, one for clearing and one for raking in seed. And to top it off, the Forest Preserve took advantage of the snow cover to burn off the *huge* piles we made. Total participation for this project, including both the scheduled and mid-week days was Malcolm Boyle (2), Bill Dawe (2), Jim Dohren (3), Patricia Ebelt, Linda Fisher (2), Scott Hensey (3), Herman Jensen, Rob Kaiser (3), Dave Regalado, Steve Sentoff (8), plus the 13 students, 9 scouts and leaders. What a difference we can make with all this power!

Also on October 13<sup>th</sup>, Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebelt, Scott Hensey, Karl, Maria (wife) and Steve (son) Knecht and Monica and Steve Sentoff worked at Nachusa on an assortment of tasks. First we collected a mixture of seed from Doug's Knob including Leadplant, Dropseed, Purple Prairie Clover, Purple Coneflower, Wild Quinine, Little Bluestem and probably a few I've forgotten. Then we processed it by rubbing it through a piece of hardware cloth. Next we drove over to Kittentail Knob, where we raked most of it in (and broadcast the rest), and also cut and herbicided some brush, mostly olive, with a bit of honeysuckle and cherry regrowth as well. In addition, we had lunch at Kittentail Knob and a side trip to Potawatamie Ridge to see the rock outcroppings. Although the weather was a bit cloudier than anticipated, it was fine day. The unit is really looking good.

## Nature Preserve Buffer Status

As you all know, about 130 acres of the West Chicago Prairie has been designated as the Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve, giving it the highest level of protection for natural areas by the state of Illinois. Now, most of the rest of the preserve (all but the utility easements) is going to get state protection, as a Nature Preserve Buffer. This recognizes that this area provides a critical area of protection for the Nature Preserve itself. So far the Forest Preserve Commissioners and the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission have approved this, and we're just waiting for a few *i*'s to be dotted and *t*'s to be crossed to have this in hand.

## A Birder's Diary

by Marilyn Bell

November 5, 2007 Windy day today -- with a chill! Good thing I brought my gloves. Leaf birds are at it again, sailing upwards, soaring sideways, fooling me. Clouds of migrating birds fly here and there, most too high to ID. MacQueen Woods seems full with many CEDAR WAXWINGS, PURPLE FINCHes, HOUSE SPARROWs, DARK-EYED JUNCOs and -- omigoodness -- those are PINE SISKINS(!), feeding on berries and seeds out of the wind. Overhead a RED-TAILED HAWK tucks his wings and works to soar, screeching from time to time, probably young. The birds are hunkered down and I only hear the sharp *tup!* of the FOX SPARROW, until one responds to my whistling, beautiful rust and gray bird, complementing the gold and russet of autumn. Enjoying the shelter of Heron Pond bushes, two AMERICAN GOLDFINCHes sit so still at the end of a dried stalk I think they're seed pods! "It's an ill wind that blows no good" works for me today.

November 28, 2007 Prairie trees look black against the gray sky, as with graceful ease a RED-TAILED HAWK rises from the ground and gently flaps to a high leafless branch where his mate awaits. Warm browns and white, they make a cozy silhouette on this bleak November afternoon, with scarcely a finger of sky between them. Not many birds this time of year, I think, though high up near the top of a tree a lone EASTERN BLUEBIRD contemplates the landscape. My list is mighty short and I'm wondering if birds are hiding somewhere. As if to answer my question, a NORTHERN SHRIKE comes into view. He's looking, too -- it's high in a tree surveying the landscape -- but for dinner or a snack. A BLACKCAPPED CHICKADEE suddenly sings and I'm hoping it's not the shrike's looked-for treat, soon to be impaled on a thorn, as shrikes do for later eating. Time to be quiet little singer, so you'll sing again!

December 15, 2007 It's Christmas Bird Count day and the group noisily crunches through crusty snow, hoping for some special birds. And

we're off to a great start, as a RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, food-searching the top of a bare tree, attracts us! From his perch, where first sighted, a COOPER'S HAWK take flight right toward us, giving great looks. The Caw! Caw! of some AMERICAN CROWS carries across the snow and delights some of us who know about their West Nile-caused reduction. Brilliantly red against the white snow, little flocks of male NORTHERN CARDINALS make a Christmas scene, their territorial instincts set aside until breeding time. And there's a RED-TAILED HAWK, sailing low and close, eyes hunting, ignoring our happy eyes. AMERICAN ROBINS fly in little flocks back and forth, confusing our count, happy to stay all winter and exchange their worm diet for berries. Oh, and there's another colorful bird, a PURPLE FINCH and his mate choose to sit still for our grateful, admiring looks. A weak "Canada, Canada" or "Peabody, Peabody" alerts us to the presence of WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS. But, no sound comes from the 42(!) CEDAR WAXWINGS sitting quietly in the treetops, looking like so many pine cones, wondering why we're so active. Though we would have wished for more birds, it's been a good day -- and a good year overall, I think, inwardly saying my farewell to the Prairie until spring beckons once more.

### **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 19, 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 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. 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.

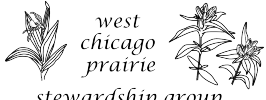
You must register with Karen Tharp of The Nature Conservancy at 866-876-5463 or [ktharp@tnc.org](mailto:ktharp@tnc.org) by Monday, January 7th, 2008 to attend this clinic. The Department of Agriculture will run the session only if there are at least 50 attendees, so it's important for us to get a good showing. Contact me if you need other information, or if you would like to borrow the training material.

### **Plants of the Chicago Region**

A limited re-printing of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Swink and Wilhelm's *Plants of the Chicago Region* has been run off, and I've heard that the Morton Arboretum shop has some copies. If you're looking for this book, which we consider the "bible" of plants for this area, you may want to try them.



*25 Years of  
Habitat Restoration  
at the  
West Chicago Prairie  
1983 - 2008*



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