

Executive Committee

S. H. Sentoff, President
R. S. Hensey, Vice Pres.
M. F. Boyle, Sec./Treas.
W. C. Dawe
J. S. Dohren
H. H. Jensen
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Newsletter #107

Winter 2011

President's Corner

We had a lovely, warm fall terminated with a wallop as temperatures plummeted with the arrival of December. As you'll see we took advantage of the weather and got lots of seed collected and have already done lots of clearing. Of course, we won't run out of brush to push back anytime soon, so bundle up, come on out and join us for an upcoming work day. I hope to see you all soon at the Prairie.

Steve

Annual Meeting

Our 26th annual meeting was held on September 18. Once again, we started with a great potluck picnic at the Preserve. It was unusually cool for so early in the fall, and coffee and cocoa would have been better beverages than the soda and iced tea that we brought.

Scott Hensey presented the Treasurer's Report, and we continue to do fine fiscally. We spent only \$622 in the preceding year, much of it for maintaining our equipment and sending out mail. Thanks to our generous donors, we received \$395. Although we spent more than we took in, we still have a healthy balance for future operations. The work we can do is much more limited by the volunteer-hours than by money.

The next order of business was the nomination and election of officers. All of the existing officers agreed to run again. So the candidates were

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

The entire slate was approved by acclamation.

Next was the report on the volunteer work for the year: a total of 1547 hours, including 44 hours at Nachusa Grasslands. This was a fairly substantial increase over the last couple of years. Of those, 1473.5 were from our regular volunteers, and the remainder from outside groups and students. Some of the increase over

past years was due to a promotion from Disney Company, "Give a Day - Get a Day", where people who volunteered got a voucher for a free day at Walt Disney World. This brought a number of families out to the preserve who had never seen it before. Although we may not see these people return much, we got quite a bit of work done, and they learned a lot about the prairie and why it was important to protect it. The largest categories of work included clearing - 398.5 hrs., monitoring - 250, and seeding - 260. Another excellent year. As usual, most of the work is continuing to push the invasives back. Our major clearing was in the Railroad Savanna, and the prairie area south of it. The FPD burned off all of our absolutely enormous brush piles and also removed some incredibly huge buckthorns that could only be effectively handled with chainsaws. We continued our assault on the Oriental Bittersweet, and did our usual management of Knapweed, Garden Heliotrope, Dame's Rocket, etc. We weren't able to herbicide much of the Reed-Canary Grass, but the FPD did a good job on that. The clearing work we've been doing is helping by providing better access to the RCG patches.

Our regular field trips are not getting much attendance, but we ran a few specially scheduled ones that worked out much better: for the Cosley Junior Zookeepers, who helped so much with the RR Savanna clearing; for a class from COD; and three trips in association with the West Chicago City Museum's exhibit called "A Prairie Primer." In appreciation, the museum gave us a print they had made for the exhibit, which was a 10-foot wide panorama from digital photos I had taken. It was on display at the annual meeting.

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. We'll also want to collect as much seed as possible, especially savanna species, so that we can reseed areas that have been cleared.

We handed out certificates to volunteers that earned them this year and then concluded the meeting. In view of the weather, we decided to forgo our usual tour of the Prairie, and go home and warm up. I've decided that we'll move the Annual Meeting up a few weeks this year - let's hope that we'll have better weather next time.

Recent Accomplishments

Seed Collection. We collected varying amounts of 23 species of plants, including a good harvest of savanna species, which we want to improve the areas that we cleared last winter, and a couple species that we haven't seen in collectible quantities in a while. There were eight different seed collecting work days, and the collectors included Nancy Allured, Roxanna Baker, Malcolm Boyle (6), Andrew, Taisa and Irena (daughter) Browar, Bob, Tammy and Adam (son) Camp, Chris Chereck, Ally and Tammy Dent, Jim Dohren, Jenny Dorman, Patricia Ebel (2), Matt Gebis (3), Hannah Geoffrey, Scott Hensey (7), Mary Grace Hibionada, Dan Hill, Mark Hubble, Rob Kaiser (2), Roger Kotecki, Katie Marten, Hannah Orland, Kristina Pineda, Primo and Joshua (son) Razalan, Jerry Rotz, Jeffrey and Jacob Schmitz, Andrew Swartz, Monica (3) and Steve (7) Sentoff and Leslie Toledo. We need lots of hands for seed collecting, and we sure got them this year. Super job!

Clearing. Once we passed the seed collecting season, we shifted to brush clearing. We cut resprouts in two smaller areas, but then started on a major project near the entrance. Just north of the parking lot, the area had gotten very brushy, with a combination of buckthorn, gray dogwood, grapevine, blackberry, honeysuckle and others. Not a very welcoming sight to visitors to our prairie. We've now cut that whole area, leaving a barrier along the preserve boundary, partly to protect against anyone driving into the preserve, and also as habitat for some of the birds. Some of this was mowed with our walk-behind mowers, but most was so thick that it had to be cut with the brush saws. This area was previously seeded into prairie, so we expect that we should see lots of things coming up, now that they aren't suppressed by the brush. The FPD will certainly have burned off the five huge brush piles by the spring, if they haven't already done so by the time you get this newsletter. Much of this clearing was done by the Wednesday "Old Retirees Crew" of Malcolm Boyle, Jim Dohren,

Scott Hensey and Steve Sentoff, but many others helped on other work days including: Chris Chereck, Jeff Dahlstrom, Patricia Ebel, Linda Fisher, Matt Gebis (2), Paul Heidebrecht (2), Rob Kaiser (3), Roger Kotecki, Monica Sentoff, Nick Thapa and Ricky Zepeda. Special thanks to Bill Dawe, who helped with the mowing, and towing the mowers to the site on the days we used them.

A Birder's Diary

By Marilyn Bell

September 6, 2010. Signs of migration are here today. EASTERN TOWHEES are moving around now, away from their breeding territories, preparing to leave. No singing, just "Che-wink." A young WARBLING VIREO struggles to sing the song he's scarcely learned. Large flocks of AMERICAN ROBINS and RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS grab a bite while passing through. There's a flock of 84 COMMON GRACKLES, their purple heads iridescent in the sunlight! By the Prairie Path, fifty EUROPEAN STARLINGS decorate an electrical tower, while CEDAR WAXWING family flocks calmly sit and watch the action. Are three RUBY THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS a flock? They're neat to see, though, and they'll leave soon too. Migrating warblers, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, MAGNOLIA, MOURNING and OVENBIRD, waste no time as they snatch insects to fatten up for the trip. A lone HERMIT THRUSH searches leaf piles in MacQueen Woods for a tidbit. But listen. It's a RED BREASTED NUTHATCH! He's come to stay the winter, and an emphatic "smack" tells us a HAIRY WOODPECKER never plans to leave. It's comforting to know the Prairie won't be birdless.

September 25, 2010. What a beautiful day to walk the Prairie. Ninety (!) AMERICAN GOLDFINCHes, young and old, are enjoying it too, as they engage in their roller-coaster flight. WOOD DUCKS hear my approach to Heron Pond, trying to hide in the cattails, making them hard to count, but I do see eight! A LINCOLN SPARROW definitely sees me. Agitated, his head feathers are standing straight up. How strange these six juvenile NORTHERN CARDINALS appear. Just molting to adult plumage, the males are red-spotted, appearing a bit diseased, while the females are simply soft cocoa colored. No worries little birds, you'll soon be beautiful. What is that flock overhead? Wow, it's 30 BLUE JAYS! I don't think I've ever seen that big a flock of jays before. Near my feet, one friendly little DOWNY WOODPECKER, nowhere near a tree, enjoys a meal from a plant gall - an unexpected place. The familiar and the unexpected, that's the joy of the Prairie.

October 9, 2010. It's definitely sparrow season and the Entrance Trail becomes "Sparrow Spa." I'm hardly out of my car when several beautiful FOX SPARROWS hop onto the gravel.

Soon they're joined by six elegant WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS, their black and white striped caps a standout against their velvety gray breast. Down the path a flock of 18 WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS search for breakfast and a lone SWAMP SPARROW and a SAVANNAH SPARROW dares to join them. What a great time to study sparrows throughout the Prairie! But there's warblers too, and YELLOW-RUMPED and BLACKPOLL are added to my list. Nine MALLARDS have replaced the Wood Ducks on Heron Pond. Who knows what that SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, searching with sharp eyes, will displace!

November 20, 2010. Strange how bare trees reveal nests never suspected in thick leaves. A "hanging sock" nest of a Baltimore Oriole is in the open now, over the Entrance Trail. The sparrows now arriving will stay the winter, TREE SPARROWS and DARK-EYED JUNCOS. Yes, juncos are sparrows too. Here's a treat! Thirty-two RUSTY BLACKBIRDS noisily perch above the big marsh. So much easier to ID in the fall/winter, with their obvious rustiness. Easy is welcome today.

December 18, 2010. Is this a good omen or not? An adult COOPER'S HAWK is perched and eyeing us as we begin the Christmas Bird Count on this very cold, but sunny morning. Male Cardinals are numerous and that seems appropriate, their deep red plumage bright against the white snow. Males choose to flock together in winter, though a pair or two do appear. A large flock of HOUSE FINCHes fly up, then descend again on bare trees near us, hard to ID against the bright sunlight, but eventually showing that those males too sport some red. Here and there BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES pop up and chatter happily, giving us the perfect mix for a Christmas card scene. But the prize of the day appears as we come near to finishing our loop. It's an AMERICAN KESTREL, a small falcon not seen on the Prairie in far too long. It's a perfect ending to an average bird count, and a fitting farewell to the snow-covered Prairie until spring.

Herbiciding Licenses

As you know, removing invasive species is one of our highest priority activities, and we can't succeed at this without selective herbiciding. To do this, we need qualified herbicides, who have the required license from the state. Unfortunately, you may also know that Illinois budget problems have forced the annual herbiciding workshop to move from the week-end to a week day, making it harder for many of you to take the test and keep your licenses current. If you can fit the testing into your schedule, please consider getting your license. It's rather a nuisance, but it will be a big help. For more information on the process, give me a call at 630-293-1627.

FPD Activities

I've already mentioned a number of activities of the Forest Preserve District above, but another task they take on is the monitoring for deer impact on the preserve, and the culling of them as needed. This year the plan was to shoot nine deer on the preserve, and has already been completed. This number is lower than it has been in some recent years, so let's hope that the work has been keeping the deer numbers more under control.

Wild Things Conference

Save Saturday, March 5 for the next Wild Things conference. This event is organized every other year, and brings experts and volunteers together to share their knowledge and experience on how to manage natural areas in the Chicagoland region. You can get more information from The Habitat Project at <http://www.habitatproject.org/WildThings2011/index.html>. Registration is now open and you can handle that online at the URL above. There's a 30% discount if you register by January 30. I'll be going, and we've arranged carpools in the past. Contact me if you're interested in sharing a ride.



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



Winter Rules

The preserve is open every day from dawn to dusk, but the parking lot is closed from December through February, except when we open it for scheduled work days. If you want to visit in winter, the best access is from the end of MacQueen Dr. Don't park on Industrial Dr.; you may get a ticket.