

THE PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Grassroots Conservation in Action

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The
Prairie
Enthusiasts



Win Some, Lose Some

By Tom Mitchell

One spring day in 2014, TPE members Rob Baller and John Ochsner were taking a walk in Albany, Wis., when they found something both familiar and amazing in the St. Patrick Catholic Church Cemetery. The soft, white, flowering heads of the pussytoes seemed out of place in the closely cropped lawn of the graveyard.

Excited at the find, they searched for other prairie plants and found many.

How could this be? The cemetery had been regularly mowed since lawn mowers replaced grazing cows and scythes in the American obsession to have an orderly landscape. How could these plants have survived decades of being cut off so low to the ground that they never had a chance to produce a bud, a flower or a seed? What would happen if the mowing stopped? Would there be other survivors?

John approached the Rev. Michael Moon, pastor of St. Patrick's, to discuss options. "Father Mick," as John calls him, invited TPE's Prairie Bluff Chapter members to a meeting of the parish board of directors to talk. This meeting launched an experiment and partnership that both promoted and daunted the prairie movement.

At the meeting with TPE, the board of directors of St. Francis of Assisi – the governing body of the cemetery – gave permission for a two-year experiment. The groundskeepers of the cemetery would stop mowing the unused east portion of the cemetery. The Albany Village Board supported the project, stating there was no ordinance against native landscaping, and gave its consent for the vegetation – the prairie remnant – to be free to grow. The only request was for TPE to erect a fence around the small parcel and place a sign indicating why the patch was not trimmed.

The first growing season was a delight! We found small tufts of basal leaves and grasses, and by September, there were asters and goldenrods in flower.

By the second year, we found a hundred of the state-threatened Hill's thistle, along with shooting stars and lead plant. Eventually, we counted at least 40 native species including spring flora such as violets, blue-eyed grass, violet wood sorrel and yellow star grass. We were able to run fire through the small parcel twice, in 2015 and 2016, under the watchful eyes of the village fire department.



St. Patrick's Cemetery at the height of the 2-year experiment. (All photos by Rob Baller)

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Our Mission

The Prairie Enthusiasts seek to ensure the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna, and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration, and education. In doing so, we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.

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Thirty Years of Stories

Chris Kirkpatrick, Executive Director



In the summer of 1987, when The Prairie Enthusiasts was originally incorporated, there was no internet, cell phone or digital camera. People were still communicating via land line and post mail. From the beginning, we had our newsletter, *The Prairie Promoter*. This means of communication about prairie conservation and land management has been with TPE since its beginning. For nearly 30 years, this excellent publication has been edited and formatted by volunteers, and nearly all the content is member provided.

In our formative years, TPE was expanding from its original few chapters in southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois, into western Wisconsin and Minnesota. As we grew in size, so did our members and the amount of land we owned and managed. Over time, we began to use some of the new digital media to expand our reach and better communicate. This included using email and creating our first website. These tools transformed how we communicated with each other, conducted business and shared our successes with an ever-growing body of members.

This June marks my fifth anniversary as executive director for TPE and, during this time, we've continued to see our communications expand and diversify. In recent years, we've begun to print *The Prairie Promoter* in color, and we've launched an updated website. We have also embraced new communication tools including Facebook and eNews, which integrate digital media such as photos and videos. These tools give us even more ways to share our stories, just like we've been doing for 30 years.

As of today, we have more than 2,000 followers on Facebook and a growing number of email contacts at both the chapter and organizational levels.

We continue this growth by offering the eNews tools to our chapter leaders, and by encouraging all chapters to develop their own Facebook pages. We've seen these tools increase the content and visual appeal of information shared between the central office and local chapters. In the ever-increasing world of digital media, we must grow, expand and adapt these tools to our advantage. We now share stories about on-the-ground grassroots conservation with a local, regional and worldwide audience.

In the years to come, these tools can help us grow and expand by drawing more interested people into the organization. This happens most at the local chapter or site level. By increasing our external communications and improving our internal information sharing, the public learns about the work of TPE and we hope, involves them in local field trips, work parties and eventually, chapter leadership.

As we move forward, we will adapt and change, just like the prairies and savannas we care so much for. In sharing our stories, as we've done for 30 years, we will continue to inspire the next generation of Prairie Enthusiasts to carry on the legacy of fire-dependent communities.

President's Message

Scott Fulton, President



As I wrote in the last edition of *The Prairie Promoter*, the TPE Board and several of our committees have begun to work on specific ways the larger organization can better help each chapter grow and meet its own goals. We have selected several focus areas, including burn training, cultivating leadership, improving the effective-

ness of our staff in meeting chapter needs, providing better support and services for landowner members and enhancing the financial sustainability of the organization.

The last two focus areas have attracted the most immediate attention. Every chapter of TPE has many members who own property undergoing ecological restoration. These landowner members are often very passionate, experienced and knowledgeable about prairies and savannas and contribute a great deal to the organization. Many aren't very active as volunteers with their chapters, however, largely because they spend every spare minute working their own land. We are exploring what kinds of services TPE could provide to better meet the needs of these landowner members. An example is a high-quality resource directory on our website of the kinds of specialized services and practical information these landowners need. The Communications, Outreach and Education Committee has begun working on this project. A new ad hoc committee to address landowner services has been formed to consider other ideas.

The area of long-term financial sustainability, however, is perhaps the most important and challenging. All non-profit organizations face this issue to some extent, but TPE's chapter-based structure increases the complexity significantly. Our income sources are quite diverse, including memberships and donations (just under half of the total income), grants, USDA programs, land rental, events and sales. The central organization budget is about 45% of the \$518,000 TPE will spend on operations in 2017. The chapters spend the rest, mostly for protection and management (including chapter-based staff in some cases) of the properties for which they are responsible. Because of the diversity in size and focus, individual 2017 chapter budgets vary from \$1,000 to more than \$160,000.

We have begun to think about better ways to fairly and effectively allocate our financial resources across TPE, as well as to become more effective at growing our capacity over the long term. One immediate project, led by our treasurer, Alice Mirk, is to improve our collective understanding of how our finances work, and what services are being provided to chapters by the staff and larger organization. In addition, over the next year, we will be undertaking a process of examining our finances in much more depth, with the goal of developing better approaches for meeting the combined long-term financial needs of our chapters and the larger organization. We expect this to be a joint effort of the chapters, board and staff, culminating in a chapter/central leadership summit sometime in the first half of 2018.

I'm very interested to learn more of what you think about these issues. Please contact me with your ideas and concerns at president@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

Editor's Notes

Debra Noell



Opinions. Everyone has them. Since I became editor of *The Prairie Promoter* this year, I've found interesting and surprising differences in how we engage, restore and revere prairies. That's OK with me, and I hope it's OK with you.

In this edition of the *Promoter*, we hear numerous opinions. Our cover story, "Win

Some, Lose Some," we learn about two perspectives of a cemetery prairie restoration experiment. For we Prairie Enthusiasts, it's difficult to embrace, but it's also important for us to understand why some consider a prairie a masterpiece and others consider it obnoxious weeds.

In "How to Save a (Planet's) Life," we hear from Anna, a millennial who shares her opinion about why we don't have more young people involved in prairie restoration and other environmental causes. What I found most compelling about

Anna's piece is her request for us to help, to reach out, to mentor. Maybe you know someone ripe for teaching. Maybe you're a millennial with a different opinion.

In our member profile, we learn the "prairie story" of Kevin & Maria Spaight who opened their doors – and their minds – to a passionate stranger. It changed their opinion about their land, and it turned 200 acres of hunting grounds into a state natural area.

As you read this edition, honor the courage it takes for writers to take a stand and make their voices heard. I also encourage you to pay attention to your own views and opinions; if they bubble to the surface, and you want to write them down, you may have a blog for the TPE website or an article for the next *Promoter*.

Maybe you'll just learn something.

If interested in writing a guest blog for TPE, contact Jim Rogala jrogala58@gmail.com. And with a story idea for the *Promoter*, contact me directly at promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org or via your chapter editorial liaison listed on Page 2, bottom left, of this edition.

How to Save a [Planet's] Life

By Anna Cordray

Exhausted from working two jobs and attending college classes, I stand paralyzed in the aisle at Walmart, bombarded by the variety of supplies they want me to buy.

Brightly colored packaging and floral-scented soaps overwhelm my senses as I struggle to make a choice. Do I buy the eco-friendly paper towel roll made out of recycled products for \$5? Or do I settle for the cheap roll made out of unknown substances for only 99 cents? As an independent, twenty-something college millennial, money is a precious and carefully managed resource. When it comes down to it, I'm not going to spend an extra \$4 on paper towels when I could spend it on food or books. I'm not alone. Most millennials want to care for the environment, but lack the knowledge, motivation and resources to do it effectively.

For example, 18-year-old millennial Abby Heskett confided to me: "I don't litter, and I recycle sometimes, but other than that, I don't really know what else I can do." Inadequate understanding of how to take care of the earth (or at least where to start) has somewhat paralyzed the millennial generation. Even less of a known issue is the topic of prairie restoration—especially for individuals who don't live in or near a prairie, like me.

While most young adults are aware the environment is in dire need, something as foreign as a prairie and the threat to its existence is largely unknown. "Why should I care if it doesn't directly affect me?" seems to be a common attitude today, and my peers are not immune. What many don't understand is that regardless of where you live, taking care of the environment impacts everyone. Words such as "biodiversity" and "invasive species" have no meaning to people who have never heard these terms. Added to this ignorance is a genuine question that many millennials ask: "What environmental issues are going on around me, and can I do anything to help?"

Most people don't intentionally neglect the earth, but as a result of ignorance, some don't know what to do. My assumptions were further supported by the response of another fellow millennial Jess Corbett:

"We [millennials] have a lot of good ideas about the environment, but there is not much information on how to put those ideas into practice. There are issues such as the need to clean out all the trash and plastic that has accumulated in the ocean, but the task seems so overwhelming and unattainable that people just give up."

There needs to be a more intentional effort to educate the young adults of the millennial generation on how to take effective steps toward becoming environmentally friendly. Inheriting oceans filled with trash is alarming and disturbing. Most young people want to take responsibility and action to clean them and to prevent any more garbage from entering the sea, but we have no idea where to start. We need mentoring and wisdom from what previous generations have learned.

Explain and show us the importance of what it means to recycle. Define the impact of garlic mustard and buckthorn on a prairie. How do prairies and their health impact the earth, the oceans, the weather? Raise awareness to the needs of the climate and how (even in our own small ways) we can make a difference and an impact. While there may be many articles out there about these topics, they aren't reaching the millennial generation. This is largely due to the fact that, unless the information is conveyed in short, easily accessible and eye-catching ways, it will most likely be overlooked.

Yes, it's true; most of us have short attention spans.

To bring awareness to the environment through social media would be a practical and effective way to influence the young people of today. Place educated, informed and legitimate information about how people can do their part to conserve the planet on commonly visited internet sites, such as

Instagram and Snapchat. This is where most millennials get their information. A focus on presentation and design is huge while conveying the facts. My generation is very attuned to appearance.

While it may seem shallow, millennials on social media tend to ignore long, boring articles on Facebook about biodiversity,

especially when it's competing against the colorful, short advertisement about the latest trend. Explain and break down ways to take care of the environment step by step.

Consider writing an article titled "Eight Ways to Save the Planet," and briefly list specific ways people can take action. Create an Instagram account dedicated to enlightening people about the earth. Post pictures of prairie life captioned with short explanations about what is being shown and why it is important. This is much more likely to be noticed and read by millennials scrolling through their feed than an article on Facebook (a less frequented social media site) or Google.

This would greatly impact not only how millennials view taking care of the world, but also how they respond to it.

Most millennials want to care for the environment, but lack the knowledge, motivation and resources to do it effectively.



Anna (now 21, shown at right many years ago with her uncle, David Cordray), is studying communications at Indiana University Southeast, and grew up in St. Louis. (Photos by Debra Noell)



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Bottom line, I want to help, but I tend to get overwhelmed. I don't have money to donate to organizations; I don't have time to volunteer every weekend to clean up parks that will only get trashed the next day, and I don't have the knowledge to restore a prairie. I realize I'm not expected to single-handedly save the world, but this all-or-nothing mindset is common among most of my peers. We have no idea where to start, so we just give up.

Help us focus on things we can directly impact, like what

plants to put in our landscaping and how that choice actually makes a difference to the environment. Even to know the science behind recycling, eating non-GMO foods and using chemical-free cleaners may fan a flame of action that could spread throughout my generation. Knowing I could trade a couple hours of sleep on a Saturday morning to directly help species facing extinction would motivate me to get out of bed and take action.

But first, I need to know where to start.

Is Perpetuity Forever?

By David Cordray

It's November, and I'm taking a break by a small wetland pool, secluded in an area of willows with a small silver maple tree. The water is clear and occasionally, I catch movements of green frog tadpoles in the depths. The shoreline is crowded with rushes, sedges, grasses and forbs highlighted in browns, yellows, golds and reds by the fall sun. It's beautiful, and it's all a restoration.

Twelve years ago, it was just a wet, rutted farm field that produced little corn. Today, with shovel, native seed, persistent weeding, and nature's grace, it's a place of natural beauty. A place to search one's mind; a place to reflect.

Several maple leaves land on the water's surface, spin, and head off in different directions like ships without rudders. The movement of the leaves symbolizes my thoughts on the future of ecological restoration. Where is this all heading? Who will care for my land after I'm not able? Will there be younger generations that will pick up where we left off? Will our society of tomorrow be a better land steward than our society of today?

As a landowner engaged in ecological restoration, I know I'm not alone in my uncertainty of the future. I see it, feel it, hear it in conversations with peers, phrases like "maybe my son will help out someday" or "hopefully the next owner will carry on." Sometimes, bone tired after laboring all day and emboldened by a beer, we take it on directly. We talk about foundations, conservation easements, endowments, land trusts, property taxes and family heirs' priorities. The words flow randomly, without focus or conclusion, tentatively seducing us to believe the solution will come sometime in the distant future.

How do we ensure a positive future for ecological restoration and all the lands under ecological restoration today? I believe that answer includes expanding our base of support, and building an industry around ecological restoration.

Given the small amount of land mass under restoration, the economic scale needed for success is not large. We already have many of the pieces of the "base," such as landowners with ecologically valuable land, conservation groups, land trusts, successful examples of foundations and conservation easements, and a fledgling collection of restoration practitioner contractors. What is missing is large-scale public outreach, marketing, funding sources, and an industry model that facilitates a successful working relationship among all pieces of the base.

The author, restoring savanna with a chainsaw.
(Photo by Debra Noell)



Landowners with ecologically rich land should not have to face the financial burden of protecting and maintaining the land alone. Young people schooled in natural resources need to see economically viable futures in the field of ecological restoration. We need outreach to the public so that they can find their "home" in ecological restoration. Not everyone needs to wield a chainsaw or identify plants in Latin, but we need to enable some to find and exercise their piece of the ecological restoration industry - to find their own ecological restoration identity.

With a successful public outreach, land trusts and conservation groups would have support from a broad set of professionals. This would enable more economic, and volunteer, resources to be available for both land protection and land management. Working with land trusts, landowners will have a straight-forward path within their economic reach to protect and maintain their land into perpetuity. With funding for grants and endowments from a larger public base, people can work in the field of ecological restoration with a sense of financial security.

I focus back on the leaves on the water's surface. There are many more now, bunched together in tight clusters. Do they represent a broader and cohesive set of tomorrow's land stewards no longer steering without a rudder? Or are they a logjam of passionate but weary individuals, unable to find next steps?

Don't be silly, I think as I return to work; they're just leaves.

This article first appeared in David Cordray's blog "Ecologically Speaking," published Nov. 19, 2016.

www.environmentalreturn.com/blog

Control without Chemicals

By Jim Rogala

There were two articles in the April 2017 *Prairie Promoter* about herbicide use. They provided good advice on choosing herbicides and getting the most out of the herbicides you apply. But what about controlling invasive species without herbicides? While some species are difficult, if not impossible, to control without herbicides, there are methods to control some species without chemicals.

I contributed TPE blog posts (www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/blog) on three such methods, and will provide the highlights here. I'll also mention a couple other herbicide-free options. Keep in mind that sometimes these methods are more labor intensive, but they might be worth it in the effort to reduce the amount of herbicides applied in our natural landscapes.

Girdling offers an effective method to kill some tree species. While some folks "girdle" with cuts and apply herbicide to the "cuts," herbicide is not needed for some species if girdling is done in a manner that removes the bark without damaging the layers inside the bark. This is best done in spring when the layers to be removed easily separate from the inner layers. For additional details behind the science of girdling, visit the blog post, but for this article, I'll simply explain it as starving the tree by interrupting the flow of nutrients from the leaves to the roots.



Bill Kiser girdling a birch.
(Photo by Jim Rogala)

I use girdling as my go-to method for killing aspen clones. Clonal species form what look like many plants when in fact it's a single plant with many stems. As with other control methods on any clonal species, it's critical to treat all stems of a

clone. The method works best on aspen clones where stems are at least an inch or two in circumference, although it can be used in combination with double cutting smaller stems (see below). I use it on a number of other species, including birch, but it doesn't work on all species, such as box elder and black locust.

Double cutting is another method that starves clonal species. Rather than disrupting the flow of nutrients, which was done with girdling, in this method we take advantage of periods when most of the tree's energy is above ground.

In summer, most of the trees' energy stores have translocated out of the roots. Cutting at this time leaves the tree with little reserves in the roots. These remaining reserves are used to send up new sprouts, again putting a large portion of the energy stores in the above-ground structure. Another cut results in even lower energy reserves in the clone, and many times, a die off.

There are a few species, such as red cedar, which can be killed simply by cutting once, but most trees send up

new sprouts when the trunk is severed. Trees typically store energy in great quantities in the roots during the winter, so obviously this is the worst time to cut a tree if you want to kill it without herbicides. Not only is there a lot of stored energy in the roots, but winter cutting stimulates vigorous re-sprouting. Where you had 10s or 100s of stems in the clone before cutting, you now may have 100s or 1,000s of stems!

Double cutting is best if the cuts are done between about July 1 and August 1, but effectiveness varies by the growth in a given year. A third cut can sometimes be used, and the cutting can resume in following years as needed. As with girdling, there are some species that respond vigorously to double cutting, such as black locust.

Cutting below the root crown, mowing and pulling are some herbicide-free methods to manage biennials.

Mowing is favored for large infestations because of the daunting task of addressing individual plants in a sea of thousands. But the timing must be right. Also, repeated mowing of high-quality prairies should be avoided.

Pulling is feasible on small infestations and can be done by hand or with specialized tools. One concern with this method, especially for plants with larger roots, is soil disturbance, which not only affects soil erosion and properties of the soil, but also increases the chances of additional plant invasions in the disturbed soil. For some biennials, such as sweet clover, pulling works if conditions are right. However, there are some species where pulling is not that effective, and in those cases, root severing is a better method.

Root severing manages the invasive by cutting the roots below the soil surface. While a common shovel works to some degree, a modified shovel is much more effective. TPE's Prairie Bluff Chapter developed such a tool years ago with a specialized shovel called the **Parsnip Predator** (available for purchase at the TPE Webstore)

Although the tool is named for the biennial wild parsnip, it works well on a variety of biennials such as burdock, sweet clover and biennial thistles.

There are some advantages to root severing compared to other mechanical methods. As opposed to mowing, for example, root severing allows the surrounding vegetation to stay intact. Not only does it leave desirable species unharmed, it provides shading to the potential re-sprouting biennial. It can also be executed under most soil moisture conditions, while pulling works best in moist soils.

As with girdling, root severing takes advantage of the biennial's anatomy and physiology by exploiting the inability of many biennials to re-sprout if cut at some depth below



The Parsnip Predator in action.
(Photo by Jim Rogala)

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ground level. These plants typically have taproots with all the adventitious buds (the source of re-sprouting) near the soil surface, thus allowing all the buds to be removed with below-ground cutting. Although called “biennials,” many of these plants can live more than two years; they live until they flower. But without re-sprouts, they die.

Even though the repeated thrusting of the shovel is hard on the body, I find it less abusive than the constant bending over to pull biennials. And when it comes to parsnip, I like

the idea of being protected from grabbing a plant filled with harmful juices!

I invite anyone with experiences, questions or comments related to girdling, double cutting or severing roots of biennials to comment on existing blog posts at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/blog. Or, if you have a non-herbicide control method you’re willing to share, consider writing a guest blog for TPE’s website. If you’re interested, contact me directly via jrogala58@gmail.com

Make New Friends, but Keep the Old

By Marci Hess and MJ Hatfield

Each year, we look forward to seeing familiar insects. We take comfort in knowing they are around. It’s similar to the excitement and delight when the first plants of spring pop up, and then it’s exciting again when they bloom. As spring progresses into summer, and summer into fall, different plants are blooming. This is much the same with insects. While some are generalists, others specialize on particular plants, timing their lifecycle to match the plants’.

Sometimes, it’s as simple as seeing the same insects every year on some of the same plants in some of the same places. This recognition piques our desire to learn more, and year after year, we add whatever small bit known about them to our knowledge base. When we learn about and ponder the essential services they perform for other living entities, the comfort of seeing “old friends” turns into the awe of realizing their importance.

Some favorites are flies in the Syrphidae family, commonly referred to as flower flies because of their bright colors. Stephen Marshall calls these the “butterflies of the fly world.” Syrphids mimic bees and wasps, and are a favorite of

insect photographers. The adults are important pollinators and many of their larvae, although not well studied, are predators of aphids.

While it’s delightful seeing these familiar insects, finding a new insect is equally as exciting. It’s like the great drive in a golf game or an ace in tennis...it’s what keeps one coming back.

We’re keenly aware of the diminishing state of our insect populations. These losses are felt up the food chain. While much attention has been paid to the appealing insects, such as butterflies and lightning bugs, we virtually ignore the rest. Some species’ numbers are in sharp decline. Although we humans may not be feeling the effects of these losses, our birds and small mammals are. Insects provide the protein required for the growth of babies.

Blister beetle adults (*Epicauta pennsylvanica*) are notorious pollinators, preferring goldenrods and asters but are known to eat plants in other families. If handled, they will “bleed” a liquid from their joints that will cause skin to blister, hence the name. The larvae of this genus eat grasshopper eggs.



Black Blister Beetle (*Epicauta pennsylvanica*). (Photo by Marci Hess)

This compact, brightly colored earth-boring dung beetle brings a smile when it shows up at the black lights during a nighttime photo session. They are nocturnal feeders and spend most of their time in their burrows, which they provision with all types of organic matter. Hard to believe this dirt-free insect is a great soil builder!



Bolbocerosoma bruneri. (Photo by Marci Hess)



Syrphid larva eating aphids. (Photo by MJ Hatfield)



Traverse flower fly (*Eristalis transversa*). (Photo by Marci Hess)



Eupeodes subgenus *Metasyrphus americanus/pomus* group. (Photo by Marci Hess)

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Goldenrod Crab Spider (*Misumena vatia*).
(Photo by Marci Hess)

This beautiful crab spider is eating a long-tailed dance fly (*Rhamphomyia longicauda*) – both of which I look forward to seeing; both are predators of other insects. The crab spiders usually are camouflaged with like-colored flowers. This genus of dance flies is known for its swarming on hilltops in dance-like motions, giving them their common name. Note the legs of the dance flies; what evolutionary purpose are these, I wonder?



A close-up photo of the dance fly
(Photo by MJ Hatfield)

The carpet of wild geraniums in the woods bring the Geranium andrena (*Andrena geranii*), which curl around the centers of the flower. Andrena, also called mining bees, nest



Geranium andrena (*Andrena geranii*). (Photo by MJ Hatfield)

in the ground and are common in gardens.

While we tend to mostly identify insects by their adult form, there are some that are fun to ID by their eggs. The color and pattern of the Giant Eucosma (*Eucosma giganteana*) eggs are striking. Next time you're walking your prairie, check out a cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*) to see if you can find these eggs.



A close up of the string of Giant Eucosma (*Eucosma giganteana*) eggs.
(Photo by MJ Hatfield)



A wider view of the string of Giant Eucosma eggs, which shows the color contrast.
(Photo by MJ Hatfield)

Sometimes, it's the larva we find ourselves discovering each year. If you have starry campion (*Silene stellata*) you might find this orange caterpillar curled around and eating one of the fruits. The resulting moth is a campion coronet (*Hadena ectypa*).



This orange caterpillar curled up in the starry campion bud will become a campion coronet moth. (Photos by MJ Hatfield)



Similar to seeing the gorgeous native plants emerge, we relish the sighting of familiar insects and are grateful for their continued existence. Do you have certain insects you look for every year? What plants are they visiting?

A Population Study of the Lesser Purple Fringed Orchid

By Scott Weber

When I discovered the lesser purple fringed orchid (*Platanthera psycodes*) on our farm near Baraboo in 1989, I was elated, to say the least. My wife Muffy Barrett and I unknowingly bought our own orchid preserve when we took title to the land.

We have found 10 species on our farm so far, and the purple fringed orchids are the largest and most conspicuous of the lot. The orchid flora of Wisconsin has its share of tiny miniatures (“little green jobs” as we call them), so I was glad to find one of our showiest species a short walk from our house. This species was recorded at TPE’s Mounds View Grassland 12 years ago but hasn’t been seen again, and Empire-Sauk Chapter director Rich Henderson nudged me to publish some of the data I have on our own population.

I surveyed prairie white fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) populations at a variety of sites in southern Wisconsin from 2000 to 2011. I used portable GPS devices to mark the plants so as not to attract attention to their whereabouts. In 2006, I began a similar study with our purple fringed orchids and recorded all the sightings on our farm through 2016. Although the habitat of these two orchid species is somewhat different, their population biology, life history and growth habits are quite similar. Both species move around a lot and are dependent on recruitment of new seedlings to maintain their populations. If there is a nearby seed source, both species may colonize adjacent habitat as long as the land is managed for their survival.

The purple fringed orchid has a greater tolerance of different soil types and shade, so it can be found throughout Wisconsin. The less-tolerant prairie white fringed orchid is mostly confined to the southeastern counties. I would classify the purple fringed as uncommon but not rare.

GPS data has its limitations. Most commercial, hand-held navigation devices may err by more than 30 feet, so they’re not perfect, especially over several years with more than one instrument. Even when accounting for GPS error, however, I have very few records that match up (this is also true with prairie white fringed orchid). I also photograph many of the orchids and flag or cage some individuals to protect the seed pods from deer.

The other methods of marking plants support the conclusion of the GPS data: the orchids are short-lived. Of the 154 flowering individuals I have marked from 2006 to 2016, there are only 13 potential GPS matches and only two pair of exact matches, for a possible total of 15. Seven possible matches were one year apart, seven had a two-year difference, and one had a four-year difference. Caged individuals never lasted more than four years. I have 139 records for individuals that were counted once and failed to bloom again and are presumed dead. A study of western prairie white fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*) in North Dakota showed similar results — plants have a half-life of one to three years (Willson and Akyuz, 2008).

Population size is greatly influenced by the weather and rainfall. The lowest count was zero for the drought year of 2012; the highest count was 38 in 2011. They are mostly confined to

the wetter sites along our stream corridor, but expand their populations into adjacent upland habitat in years of ample rainfall, then disappear from those sites in dry years. They are found in full sun as well as shaded wet woods. Sometimes, I can barely get to them without getting sucked into a muck hole; other times, they are growing right in the middle of mowed trails, firebreaks or along the gas pipeline right-of-way.

In 2015, we discovered a new population of several individuals blooming in a prairie planting about a quarter mile from the nearest recorded population, but in 2016, we found no flowering plants at that site. The greatest separation between populations is about .53 miles. The plants seem to respond well to fire and/or mowing, but neither is essential for their life cycle. Some of our best hot spots have never been burned or mowed due to a high water table and deep muck soils that will swallow up the tractor and mower. Our wetlands are fed by numerous springs and by a stream that runs all year.

I have sowed many seed lots in vitro in my laboratory. Like the prairie white fringed orchid, purple fringed seeds have extended dormancy and long shelf life. One winter of cold treatment resulted in a very low germination rate; a few seeds continued to germinate each year for at least five years and probably many more. Variable seed dormancy is a good adaptation for mitigating the risk short-lived species face dealing with an unpredictable environment and extreme weather events. How long the seeds remain viable in the seed bank is unknown. Development of seedlings from seed to bloom may take longer than the plant lives as a mature adult, so patience is required when sowing seed in new areas.

Based on my studies of *Platanthera* and related orchids with similar root and shoot characteristics, both the prairie white fringed and purple fringed orchids may take three or four years to reach maturity with no competition. The flowering shoot and its attached root die after flowering and seed set. Normally in a good year, the plant will produce a new shoot and root, sometimes several new ones in a very good year. Any problem such as drought, flood, predation or disease may result in no new offshoots and the death of the plant. Even a heavy set of seed can sap the plant of energy and reduce its longevity.

Some major causes of seedling mortality in order of importance are:



Lesser Purple Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) with hummingbird clearingwing moth (*Hemaris thysbe*). (Photo by Scott Weber)

Continued on next page

pathogenic fungi, extreme weather events, slug damage, inbreeding depression, and assorted other pests and diseases. Deer will eat mature plants, so we cage individuals that will set the most seed.

The production of viable seed with the purple fringed orchid requires the presence of its pollinator, the day flying hummingbird clearwing moth (*Hemaris thysbe*). There usually aren't enough orchids in one place to draw the pollinators by themselves, so the presence of other flowering species such as blazing stars (*Liatris spp.*) and bergamot (*Monarda fistulas*) are needed for good pollination. I had zero germination success until the year I recorded the moth on the orchid. The moth is not a dedicated pollinator, but, like the orchid itself, an opportunist. I think the moth was primarily interested in the nearby patch of blazing star but visited the orchids as a side trip.

Lack of suitable fungi does not appear to be a limiting factor; fungal spores are abundant in our climate, and based on our own orchid flora studies, many species like to colonize very poor soil low in organic matter following major soil disturbance. Nodding ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes cernua*) and Loesel's twayblade (*Liparis loeselii*) have both appeared in pots of other plants in our greenhouse, and tuberclad orchid (*Platanthera flava*) colonized a bulldozer scrape on subsoil beside our driveway. Even prairie white fringed orchid has colonized bulldozer scrapes in former cropland from nearby seed sources,

and, likewise the lesser purple fringed orchid will colonize old fields taken out of row crops.

Most native orchids are sensitive to high inorganic nitrogen levels, so cropland might need to lie fallow for a year or two (nitrates leach quickly from most soils), and they may be affected by runoff from adjacent farmland. They are much better adapted to low nitrogen than most weed species. Many orchids dislike competition and take advantage of disturbance, whether major or minor, to get a foothold, produce seed and move on.

With good rainfall this spring, we should have a good chance of finding more orchids this summer. The best time to look is from mid-July to the first week in August. The orchids are very dependent on good seed set and recruitment of new seedlings, so protecting the plants from deer is a very good idea. Mounds View Grassland should be large enough to harbor enough individuals to prevent inbreeding depression, but the more individuals, the better the odds for a sustainable, vigorous population.

Reference Cited

Willson, Gary D. and Akyuz, F. A. 2008. *Survival of the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid at Pipestone National Monument*. 21st North American Prairie Conference Abstracts, 56.

Win Some, Lose Some *continued from page 1*

Rob and John created a colorful poster for the Albany Library to depict some of the native plants that were reappearing after at least 75 years of mowing. John led seed-collecting trips to the prairie with students from nearby Albany Schools. He also offered a tour of the prairie for St. Patrick's 50th anniversary, and he showed the parishioners a "state record" red oak tree behind the church.

John and Father Mick walked the prairie each week to see what was new, what was flowering, what was just coming up, what was going to seed. Last fall, a few uncommon white lettuce plants appeared and flowered.

But the experiment wasn't universally accepted. A neighbor complained to the village board about the "weeds" in the cemetery. And when a parishioner died, the heavy equipment used to open the grave crossed the nascent prairie, leaving deep, wide, muddy ruts.

So it ended.



The experiment lasted for two years, but there was a storm brewing.

Father Mick came to the March 2017 meeting of the Prairie Bluff Chapter and explained why he wasn't renewing the agreement to manage for prairie. He cited village opposition, parish indifference and the practical need to drive across this parcel to open new gravesites. The chapter thanked Father Mick for the opportunity to demonstrate the resilience of native ecosystems.

We hope the plants will be there next time the mowing stops.

This was not Prairie Bluff Chapter's only experience with cemetery prairies. For years, we have helped to manage Green's Prairie Cemetery, an acre of deep-soil prairie in northwest Green County where we have twice had to defend our "no-mow" land management. The Town of York, owner of the cemetery, has resolutely backed our efforts to manage the graveyard with carefully executed, annual prescribed fire.

"The protection and management of pioneer cemetery prairies is a daunting challenge," began a 2004 paper presented by scientists from the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission at the 19th North American Prairie Conference in Madison, Wis. "As the public has become accustomed to highly manicured grass in their lawns and neighborhood parks ... prairie cemeteries with grasses three- to-six-feet tall, are often thought to be abandoned or unkept, even though the cemeteries retain their original vegetation."

It's not widely known or appreciated that these early- to mid-19th century cemeteries with native grasses and flowers were the prevalent landscape when early Americans were laid to rest. They wouldn't have known any other scenery than the colorful spring violets, tall summer composites, warm season

Continued on next page

The Prairie Promoter



Fourth graders from Albany School collect seed at the cemetery.

grasses, and autumn gentians and asters that reappeared every year.

Then, the first lawn mower was invented in 1830 in England, and reel-type push mowers gradually came into use in the mid-1800s. After World War II, power mowers came onto the market, especially after 1960, and today the lawn-care industry is a \$78 billion enterprise. It's amazing any unmowed prairie cemeteries and railroad byways remain today.

In southern Wisconsin, you can find some remnant (spiderwort!) prairie in front of Scotch Hill Cemetery; on Atkinson Bluff above Avon Cemetery; Otter Creek Cemetery (east of Newville) in Rock County, and Luther Park Cemetery near Muskego in Waukesha County.

Farther away, Rochester Cemetery in Cedar County, Iowa, is called "a cherished botanical marvel," by some folks, while others have sued for the right to mow around their family's headstones. Kessler Railroad prairie in Rock County has 100 native plant species on a 13-acre state natural area. Another railroad corridor in Lafayette County, also a state natural area, has 150 species on 18 acres at Ipswich Prairie.

Illinois, nicknamed the Prairie State, lists 29 pioneer cemetery prairies on its inventory of state natural areas. Despite their small sizes, a half-acre to almost 10 acres, these cemeteries have amazing diversity with an average of 114 species. Much of the credit for finding these remnants in Illinois and Indiana belongs to Dr. Robert Betz (1923-2007), a conservation hero who was a professor of botany at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago.

"He could often be seen crawling around the back lots of mowed cemeteries where he coined the phrase 'Bonsai Prairie Plants,'" wrote Fran Harty in a tribute to Betz in the *Natural Areas Journal* shortly after his death. "Bob taught many of us how to identify these bonsai prairie plants even if they were mowed to within an inch of the soil surface ... and Bob is credited with finding scores of these pioneer cemeteries,

many of which are now protected."

In his autobiography, *The Prairie of the Illinois Country*, published after his death, Betz recalled that in his lifetime, he visited 824 cemeteries in Illinois, finding in 44 of them sufficient signs of native plant life to warrant further investigation.

"Since a lone bearded man poking around in these small isolated cemeteries could arouse suspicions, I occasionally carried an insect net. A bearded man prowling around an old cemetery carrying an insect net was apparently a harmless butterfly collector," he wrote. "I found that most of the 44 cemetery remnants were being mowed and appeared to be like ordinary lawns. However, closer inspection of each of these 'lawns' showed a 'carpet' of small, stunted prairie plants that had survived years of mowing. I dubbed them 'bonsai plants.' The thought occurred to me that if mowing of the cemeteries was discontinued and coupled with frequent burns, these surviving plants might reassert themselves and return to their normal condition, prairie."

He was right. So too, patches along some railroad tracks still have their native vegetation. Both cemetery and railroad prairies became sites of interest and concern for prairie enthusiasts who came after Betz. But these aren't the only surprises out there.

Thirty years ago, Steve Hubner was out hunting coyotes in Lafayette County when he saw a compass plant growing in a clump of multiflora rose. Well ... he wondered? He asked the landowner for permission to fence off a small portion of the big pasture, and the result is today's Dower Prairie, a high quality natural area with a remarkable number of conservative plants including the endangered prairie bush clover. All thanks to Hubner, another man like Betz with vision.

So we still look in out-of-way places like cemeteries for native vegetation that perhaps someday could be managed as natural areas. In the

meantime, we try to preserve local genotypes by collecting some of the seeds of these vanishing bush clovers and white lettuces, and giving them new life in our plantings.

“As the public has become accustomed to highly manicured grass in their lawns and neighborhood parks ... prairie cemeteries with grasses three- to six-foot tall, are often thought to be abandoned or unkept, even though the cemeteries retain their original vegetation.”



St. Patrick's Cemetery today, after the experiment.

A Stranger's Knock, A Prairie Saved

By Kevin Spaight

My wife Maria and I had just purchased 200 acres in Crawford County as a place to hunt, and we were beginning the daunting task of removing old buildings and making the tired house livable. One afternoon there was a tap on the door, and when I answered it, there was a gentleman on the porch I'd never seen before. He introduced himself as Jim Sime. He explained he was a member of TPE and that he would like to talk about our property.

From that day in the early 1990s, Jim had a profound influence on us.

I already knew we had some prairie and savanna remnants, but Jim talked about their quality and how they should be restored and preserved. I gave him permission to conduct an inventory, and soon enough, several people showed up and walked our land. I was astounded at the results. We had numerous important prairie plants and insects. Shortly thereafter, we became TPE members.

We gave TPE permission to conduct several burns on our property in concert with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Then, Maria and I went after invasives with a vengeance.

Long story short, we worked with TPE, TNC, and some Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) staff to provide access for Regal Fritillary butterfly monitoring, plant surveys, and seed collecting. I also spoke with several neighbors to call attention to this great place.

We decided to preserve our land into perpetuity, and we sold half of the farm to TNC in the late 1990s. After an auction and a land swap with some neighbors, TNC acquired several hundred more acres around our farm. We sold the rest of the property to the DNR in 2010, and it's now become the Hogback Prairie State Natural Area.

Gary Eldred (a TPE member for 30 years) also visited, sharing his enthusiasm and wisdom, but it was Jim who helped us see what we had. Now that we are retired, we are hoping to relocate from SE Wisconsin and find another property in the Driftless Region where we can practice land stewardship again. We also hope to volunteer on TPE properties and projects now that we have the time.

And to think, it all began with a knock on our door by a dedicated member of this great organization.



Jim Sime (left) and Kevin and Maria Spaight (right)

CHAPTER NEWS

Chippewa Savannas

Joe Maurer

Choo Choo through the Chippewa & other spring events

In early May, our chapter led a nearly full mini train car through Tiffany Bottoms State Natural Area in Durand, Wis. The trip was guided by an ornithologist and botanist. We found flora and fauna through extensive prairie and mixed hardwood forest along the lower Chippewa River.

On May 3, Kathy Stahl participated in the Dunn County Environmental Field Days at the Menomonie Environmental Center. She and other federal, state and local officials taught Boyceville and Colfax 5th Graders about native plants and non-native invasive plants. A similar program was presented at Elk Mound Middle School on May 5th. Our chapter joined with the NRCS, Wisconsin DNR, Dunn County Land & Water Conservation Division, and Red Cedar Monitoring Group staffs to provide two days of environmental, hands-on learning for Dunn County students. Also in May, Mark Leach led a two-part "vision quest" meeting to assist the chapter in developing plans for the future.

On June 3, acclaimed Wild Food Author and expert Sam Thayer gave a four-hour, energetic presentation near the Colfax Municipal Building, on edible plants found in prairies, and another talk at Dobb's Landing, one of our work sites. Many attendees of the workshop had never seen Dobb's Landing and were greeted by blooming spring flowers and insects. Sam urged participants to consider the concept of "prescribed grazing" of non-threatened species. The following day a work party continued at Dobb's Landing to remove brush and non-native species.

On June 5, Dr. Mark Leach and Bill Hogseth were first-day presenters for the Master Naturalist Volunteer training program at the Beaver Creek Nature Preserve. Mark also led the participants on a field trip to identify prairie and savanna plants, and various ecosystems. This was part of a week-long training for participants working to become Master Naturalist Volunteers. And on June 23, Jack Phillips, author of "The Bur Oak Manifesto" gave a presentation on native oaks at Simply Dunn shop in Menomonie.



Savanna paintings by Joe Maurer created for the chapter's "Native Oaks" event with Jack Phillips, and for the "Wild Food" event with Sam Thayer. The titles are "Oak Savanna Dream" (top) and "Rusty Patch Bumble Bee advises Prairie Turnip" (bottom).

At the annual potluck meeting this spring, our chapter welcomed new officers: Chair Joe Maurer, Vice-Chair Amy Delyea-Petska; Secretary Annemarie McClellan, and Treasurer Kathy Ruggles. The chapter honors and wishes to thank the service of former officers: Chair Stahl; Vice Chair Ruggles; Secretary Mame Gail, and Treasurer Pam Mahler. Stahl is our new land manager for Dobb's Landing in Colfax.

Coulee Region

Jim Rogala

Trempealeau County launches its own Bluff Prairie Project

Several TPE members have contributed to the Buffalo County Bluff Prairie project, a partnership among local, state and federal government agencies, landowners and non-profit organizations aimed at informing landowners about hill prairies and their management. (To learn more about the project, see the Coulee Region Chapter News in the March 2016 *Prairie Promoter*.)

Many of us have talked about moving that model to other counties, and now it's happening. Trempealeau County kicked off its project this summer. It's modeled very much like the Buffalo County project, with many of the same resource specialists participating and similar use of events to promote hill prairie restoration.

Kirstie Heidenreich of the Trempealeau County Department of Land Management has volunteered to lead the new effort. The Trempealeau County's Environment and Land Use Committee has had recent discussions about the value of bluff prairies in Trempealeau County and has been vocal in promoting its support for county land conservation staff to work with landowners on these projects.

Representatives from the WI DNR will also be engaged in the project. We hope to continue to schedule events, perhaps co-sponsoring activities with the Buffalo County project.

Even before this summer's kickoff, there was a restoration project funded through the TPE Hill Prairie Initiative at a Trempealeau County site. This initiative used funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program" to hire contractors to work on private lands. USFWS Private Lands Biologist Bill Kiser has done a great job of hooking up prairie remnant landowners with our initiative. The work is primarily tree and brush removal. In the case of the Trempealeau County site, a massive clearing of cedars opened up the remnants, which had been at risk of invasion.

In the long-term, TPE plans to take a higher profile in these county projects by bringing on a staff person through grants to facilitate the project. TPE Executive Director Chris Kirkpatrick will continue to look for these grant opportunities. In the meantime, resource agency staff and volunteers like those from TPE hope to continue to work on the existing county projects and look to expand into other counties when possible.

Scott Fulton

Hauser Road Prairie events

Much of the Empire-Sauk Chapter's focus this spring has been on the Hauser Road Prairie preserve, just north of Waunakee, Wis. Diane Hills, our former chapter volunteer coordinator, was hired in March as a consulting organizer to help us put on a major "Family Prairie Day" community outreach event in Waunakee on May 20, as well as a special fundraising event on June 4.

The 45-acre Hauser Road Prairie is the largest remaining remnant of the original 100-square-mile Empire Prairie, which stretched in a continuous arc just inside the glaciated region from Waunakee to Columbus. The spectacular hilltop preserve is close to downtown Madison, and has a clear view of the Capitol dome. So far, 148 native plant species have been found on the site, including great displays of shooting star, pasque flower, violets, prairie smoke, purple prairie clover, and various goldenrods, asters and gentians. A viable population of the state-threatened Hill's thistle is present, along with other uncommon species such as valerian, smooth white lettuce and heart-leaved golden Alexander.

The Wisconsin DNR first identified the site as a natural area of importance more than 30 years ago, and worked for some time with the landowners and TPE volunteers on protection and management. When the landowners decided to sell the property, TPE acquired it in 2014. Three quarters of the purchase price came from grants by the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and the Dane County Conservation Fund, and TPE took out a loan from The Conservation Fund to cover the rest.

Under the leadership of site steward Randy Hoffman, the chapter has been building a strong volunteer community around the site. This includes a group of students from Waunakee High School, facilitated by biology teacher Todd Schuka. This year, the chapter decided to put a major effort into expanding community awareness of and involvement with this local treasure. Many important contacts were made with the town government, schools, library, other conservation groups and businesses, some of which contributed in-kind sponsorship. A wonderful article about prairies was published in the local paper.

Unfortunately, the event itself on May 20 was a bit of a washout – taking place during one of the biggest downpours of the season. Nonetheless, the overall effort was well worth it, and the chapter is looking forward to building on the relationships we have begun to form through this project.

The fundraiser on June 4 featured great weather (see photo) and was a real success. The event was held on the preserve, and included a field trip, an auction and music provided by Scott Weber and Kurt Meine. More than 30 people attended, and between the event and this spring's outreach project, \$27,675 was donated, leaving about \$20,500 remaining on the loan.

Our sincerest thanks to all who contributed both their time and dollars to this effort. If you would like to help, please donate online or send a check to the TPE office, designating the gift to "Hauser Road."



Hauser Road Prairie fundraising event. (Photo by Scott Fulton)

Minnesota Driftless

George Howe

Chapter expands prescribed burns program

Our chapter greatly expanded prescribed fire work this spring. Eight burns were planned on more than 300 acres; all of this, and more, was completed by the end of April.

Chapter members and volunteers had a chance to try new burn equipment purchased in late winter, and they also were able to hone their planning, organizational and implementation skills on a wide variety of properties and conditions.

The chapter now has four experienced burn leaders, who can plan and complete even challenging burns. They are George Howe, Kevin O'Brien, Stephen Winter and Scott Leddy. In addition, more than a dozen other volunteers contributed to this spring's burn successes.

The prescribed burns included 12 acres of public land owned by Winona County - the Apple Blossom Overlook Park just north of La Crescent. MND volunteers partnered again with Winona County staff and the La Crescent Fire Department to lead this burn. Also noteworthy was the chapter's 200-plus-acre prairie and woodland burn at the Zephyr Land Cooperative in Wisconsin Valley, where 15 volunteers organized into four different teams to successfully manage a large burn.

Chapter burn leaders and volunteers met in early May to assess the spring burn season and identify ways to improve efficacy. It was agreed the chapter needs to identify area mowing contractors or volunteers willing and able to mow burn breaks, as this was a limiting factor to completing even more burns this spring. Members also agreed that some on-site digital weather instruments, and possibly more radios, were needed.

Colorful blossoms welcome hikers

Scott Leddy led an early May hike at Mound Prairie State Natural Area near Houston. More than 15 people showed up for a fun day of walking among colorful spring flowers, including hairy puccoon, wood betony, bird's-foot violet and hundreds of shooting stars!



Photos by George Howe from burn training and successful burns by Minnesota Drifless Chapter

Cool down at our annual meeting!

The chapter's annual meeting will be Aug. 12 at the Zephyr Coop Land Community House. There will be a meeting, pot-luck meal, hike and swimming in the spring-fed earthen pool. We hope to see you there.

Northwest Illinois

Rickie Rachuy

It was great to see so many of you at the TPE conference in March and the get-together June 25 at Hanley Savanna.

The weather this spring made us wonder what season we were in. As a rule, native plants are much later to stir than the European weeds we all have to contend with, and this year was no exception.

Ed Strenski, our land manager, and his crew weeded our established prairies during May & June, and I spent most of my time on my knees in the West garden. Barbara Siekowski collected seeds from the early bloomers—pussytoes, wood betony and woodland phlox. We have 46 acres of restorations to seed this fall, so your help is needed when we start the formal picking. The seed-picking schedule can be found on our chapter website www.nipes.org

The new East garden finally received its first plants and seeds this spring, despite delays due to cold & rain. Barbara rescued a handful of blue-eyed grass, purple milkweed and Lady's Tresses' orchid plants from certain roadside annihilation, and together we found them a home in the West garden. Lady's Tresses is the same orchid we collected seed from last fall, so if that comes to naught, the plants might be our back-up.

As of this writing, about 20 other species are growing there. We added 12 New Jersey tea plants to the 10 already there, a dozen sweet fern and 16 blue-eyed grass plants. Royal catchfly seed went directly into a garden bed after 60 days of cold-stratification in damp sand in the 'fridge. I love the bright red star-shaped flowers.

My proudest achievement was coaxing three seedlings from a handful of seed that came from the only sky-blue sage plant in the Hanley Savanna display garden. To be precise, there were 37 seeds and only three sprouted—just .08% germination—but it only takes one plant to produce more seed. I love the color blue, so to me it was worth the effort.

Jim Rachuy's newest project is a rain garden positioned on the south side of the old hog house to catch the water runoff. The building has been spiffed up to hold equipment and serve as a second garden shed. I hope your prairie garden flourishes!



West seed garden and sky-blue sage seedling (Photos by Rickie Rachuy)

Prairie Bluff

David Cordray

Rain-hearty hikers explore Muralt Bluff

Between the driving rain and the steamy breath I've trapped inside my rain hood, I can't quite make out what I'm looking at.

A large swath of red lines the entire lower third of the bluff. Another swath of powdery-blue covers the middle of the steep slope. Occasional patches of white are interspersed throughout. I think I hear a voice say "red, white and blue," but my hearing is compromised by the amplified patter of rain drops against my rain hood. Eager to confirm my suspicions, and a few long strides later, there is no longer any doubt.

Before me stands the largest colony of prairie smoke I have ever seen (red). Patches of pussytoe, rock cress and rock sandwort are scattered about (white), and above all the prairie smoke is a tremendous display of bird's-foot violet (blue).

On a very rainy May 20th, Tom Mitchell led 12 wind- and rain-battered enthusiasts, as part of an event organized by Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP), on a hike of Muralt Bluff prairie few will ever experience. Armored with raingear and umbrellas, we took advantage of a unique opportunity to experience the prairie "in the wet!"

The steep slopes were more of a challenge to navigate, and plant identification proved more difficult due to some closed flowers - including blue-eyed grass. But in general, the 13 of us got along just fine in the rain.

Mitchell and John Ochsner, who was instrumental in protecting Muralt Bluff, started us off with a series of waterproof Green County, Wis., maps showing the geology and natural history of the area. Following this, Mitchell, who is site manager of Muralt Bluff State Natural Area, led us down a dark, tree-lined access path. I could only imagine what others were thinking: "This doesn't look like prairie" and "Why am I out here in the rain?" That all changed when we reached the opening, exposing the north face of the bluff where the patriotic display of red, white and blue flowers greeted us.



Tom Mitchell educates BMAP guests on a rainy day hike at Muralt Bluff (Photo by Debra Noell)

Tom explained how TPE's Prairie Bluff chapter holds weekly work parties where they have been steadily hand-removing invasive brush and invasive species such as sweet clover. They use fire to control clonal woody species such as gray dogwood, but limit fire to small patches to keep from over-stimulating the tall, warm-season prairie grasses. Over the last two years, the Prairie Bluff chapter has invested more than 2,000 hours of on-the-ground management, and their efforts were clearly evident!

As we zig-zagged up the steep slope, placing our feet both for traction and to reduce flower trampling, we were greeted to many more plant species, including fringed puccoon, kit-tentails, small skullcap, blue-eyed grass, flowering spurge and yellow star grass. Once on top, Tom showed us large patches of wood betony, needle grass, prairie dropseed, prairie violet, shooting stars, sky-blue aster, rough blazing star, bastard toadflax, Hill's thistle, silky aster and many others. From here we wandered over to Iltis Savanna to learn about the chapter's savanna restoration efforts.

At this point, with rain and cold finding its way into our inner core, the group decided to limit our tour to the "pasture-degraded" North Muralt (strange to think of what we've just seen as degraded) and save the higher-quality South Muralt for a more traditional sunny-day tour.

I watch the line of raincoats and umbrellas carefully navigate the slippery downslope path back to the parking lot. The scene reminds me of a funeral procession. While the symbolism may hold true for the majority of Wisconsin's prairie landscapes, it's not true for Muralt Bluff. We had all just spent time in an ancient relic landscape, experiencing our natural history. A landscape and natural history nearly lost if not for groups like the Prairie Bluff chapter and Tom Mitchell working to preserve it for future generations!

For more information on Muralt Bluff, visit the TPE website. More information on BMAP can be found on their website www.bluemounds.org.

Prairie Sands

Ray Goehring

A Day in Marquette County

The Prairie Sands Chapter celebrated "A Day in Marquette County" June 4th with guided tours through two of the county's most important natural areas, which are being restored by the TPE chapter and other conservation groups.

In the morning, chapter members led a group of approximately 18 people through Page Creek Marsh. Some of the group listened as chapter land steward, Laurel Bennett, gave the land use history.

The history of Page Creek began in 1849 when the land was purchased by Robert Page from the Fox and Wisconsin River Improvement Company, and ran through 1986 when it was purchased by current owner, The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Laurel described the restoration work done since then, ending with the last five years when members of the Prairie Sands Chapter began helping with some of the restoration and maintenance work.

Meanwhile, Dan Sonnenberg led another group on a butterfly walk. At noon, most of the group met at nearby John Muir Park for lunch and to read the historical information on the park kiosks.



Dan Sonnenberg leading butterfly group at Page Creek Marsh. (Photo by Ray Goehring)

After lunch, Prairie Sands chapter member Charles Church led a group up Observatory Hill, stopping at various places along the way to talk about the land ownership history, as well as the geological and botanical history. This was a place where John Muir hiked as a young boy and saw for himself the effects of glacial movement in the cracks and scrapings along the large granite boulders of the area. At the same time, Dan and Tim Fenske from North American Butterfly Association continued to identify butterflies for the group. Here are their totals:

- Black Swallowtail 5
- Giant Swallowtail 17
- Eastern Tiger Swallowtail 19
- Clouded Sulphur 1
- American Copper 17
- Eastern Tailed-Blue 2
- 'Spring' Spring Azure 3
- Pearl Crescent 12
- Question Mark 1
- American Lady 1
- Red Admiral 2
- Common Buckeye 1
- Red-spotted Purple 19
- Little Wood-Satyr 46
- Monarch 4
- Silver-spotted Skipper 16
- Northern Cloudywing 22
- Juvenal's Duskywing 3
- Indian Skipper 4
- Hobomok Skipper 25

St. Croix Valley

Evanne Hunt

Chapter receives grant

The chapter was awarded a \$1,000 grant from Tropical Wings on May 12. Tropical Wings is a local volunteer group concerned with the welfare of Neotropical migratory birds shared between the St. Croix Valley and Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. The grant is to preserve and restore bird habitat, which is right up our alley! The chapter plans to use the funds to purchase herbicide and tools to control invasives and other unwanted vegetation on our oak savanna and prairie project sites.

Prairie Day 2017

Prairie Day is August 19. Once again, we'll gather at Willow River State Park near Hudson, Wis. There will be a presentation on buckthorn management, tours of the park's prairies, and exhibits from agencies and vendors. Dr. Stanley Temple returns with a talk on "Monarch Butterflies, Private Land and Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic."

Chapter receives DNR Recognition Award

The chapter received the 2016 West Central District Special Recognition Award from Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Management program. This award is given as a result of the great partnership with the DNR within the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area over the past 21 years. Only four of these awards, one per district, are given out statewide each year. The award was given to chapter chair Evanne Hunt at the DNR Wildlife Management Statewide meeting June 13.

Kids on the prairie

The chapter has increased our outreach to local schools this year. First, chapter volunteers burned the one-acre prairie planting at River Crest Elementary School south of Hudson. The kids came out to watch and ask questions. We hope they will be part of our future burn crews at TPE!

Immediately after the River Crest fire, chapter volunteers moved on to burn three units at Camp St. Croix, a day camp for area kids ages 4 to 15. Campers watched and five camp staff members joined us, broadening their prescribed burn experience.



Elementary school students watch and learn about prairie burns. (Photo by Evanne Hunt)



Mike Miller led a group of eager fourth and fifth grade kids from River Falls Montessori Elementary on a tour of the oak savanna at Foster Cemetery for their field day. (Photo by Mitchel Burow)

In late April, Ginny Gaynor and Joe Beattie helped kids make milkweed seed bombs at an Earth Day event at Camp St. Croix, and on May 6, LaVonne Middleton and Pat Ryan educated youngsters at the “Wings of Spring” migratory bird celebration hosted by the St. Croix Bird Club. It’s so satisfying to help kids understand the connection between milkweed and pollinators.



Kids get hands-on at Earth Day, making seed bombs that teach about pollinators. (Photos by Evanne Hunt)

TPE cleans up the Kinnickinnic

Chapter volunteers Mike Perry, Wayne Huhnke, Alex Bouthilet, Mike Miller, Jim Beix and Evanne Hunt pulled five bags of garlic mustard from along the banks of the Kinnickinnic River.

The Kinnickinnic River Land Trust sponsors “Clean up the Kinni” each year. Hundreds of volunteers show up to pick up trash. Since the Kinni runs along a portion of the Foster Oak Savanna, we typically participate.

To our satisfaction, we found very little trash, one medium-sized patch of garlic mustard, and we watched two ospreys soar over Lake Louise.



St. Croix Valley Chapter volunteers (L to R) Mike Perry, Wayne Huhnke, Alex Bouthilet, Mike Miller and Jim Beix picked up trash on the Kinnickinnic River, but it also celebrated the beauty of the area. (Photo by Evanne Hunt, who also helped with cleanup.)

Southwest Wisconsin

Rose Sime

After cancelling our work party on May 20, we dodged the rain on May 21, getting to Eldred Prairie for a crown vetch kill, just after a light rain. We quit about an hour before another light rain hit. Six of us donned backpack sprayers with our blue-Transline and sprayed the crown vetch. A visit to the site a week later showed we’d killed this year’s crop.



George Riggan from the Southwest Chapter spraying crown vetch. (Photo by Rose Sime)

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The following people have joined TPE between March 1 and June 1, 2017.

Joseph & Betsy Bacon
(Spring Valley, WI)
Don Bennett (Centreville, VA)
Susan Bicknell (Bismarck, ND)
Tom & Patti Cameron
(Waunakee, WI)
Jeffrey & Jeanne Christie
(Gays Mills, WI)
John & Margarete Cooke
(Galena, IL)

Janet Denman (Endwell, NY)
Peter Duerkop (La Crosse, WI)
Land Spirit Design Landscaping
(Winona, MN)
Mame Gale (Menomonie, WI)
Jeffrey Garves (Sparta, WI)
Kathryn Hayley (Lincolnshire, IL)
Rob Helm (Middleton, WI)
Nicola Incontrera (Tampa, FL)

Beverly Jackson (Apalachin, NY)
John & Karen Jaeschke (Verona,
WI)
Curt Kramer (Prairie DuChien, WI)
Bradley LaBadie (River Falls, WI)
Annemarie McClellan
(Menomonie, WI)
Prairie Romary (Viroqua, WI)
Heidi & Nathan Reinhardt
(New Richmond, WI)

Eric Roe (Reston, VA)
Karyn Schmitz (Winneconne, WI)
Missy Sparrow-Lien (Hudson, WI)
Juniper Sundance (Avoca, WI)
Addeline Theis (Shakopee, MN)
Maureen Van Dinter (Waunakee,
WI)
Ellen Zweibel (Madison, WI)

THANK YOU DONORS

We thank the following who donated to TPE between March 1 and June 1, 2017.
These gifts are beyond membership dues and are truly generous and appreciated.

\$1000 or more

Anonymous
David & Sarah Aslakson
(To Prairie Bluff Chapter)
Kathie & Tom Brock
(For Hauser Road Prairie)
Bruce Duemler
(To Prairie Bluff Chapter)
Ronald & Sheila Endres
(For Hauser Road Prairie)
Jerry Martin
(For Hauser Road Prairie)
Richard Oberle
James & Rumi O'Brien
(Compass Club & Empire-Sauk
Chapter)
Jeff & Debbie Ralston
Ted Ross & Kathie Ayres
Ken Wade & Pat Trochlell
(To Empire-Sauk Chapter)
Scott Weber & Muffy Barrett
(To Empire-Sauk Chapter)
Tropical Wings Inc
(To St. Croix Valley Chapter)

\$500 - \$999

Douglas & Carol Hancock
(To Northwest Illinois Chapter)
Evanne Hunt
Jackie & Wayne Pauly
(For Hauser Road Prairie)
Kristin Westad

\$100 - \$499

Vance Baker
Melanie Bidlack
(In Memory of Keith Roe)
Michael & Janet Brandt
Thomas Holm
(To Many Rivers Chapter)
Kim Karcher & Sandra DeMars
Fran Peterson
Glenn Teschendorf & Mary Anne
Derheimer
(In Honor of Rich Henderson)
Nancy Winter
YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities

The following donations were made
to Northwest Illinois Chapter:

Roger Coulthard
Thomas Cunningham & Susan
Lipnick
John & Kay Day
Judy Decker
Mauricio Diaz
Randy & Sylvia Downing
Andrew Gulya
Dick & Joan Harmet
Jan Lavacek & Carole Sullivan
Richard Luthin
Loretta Mattas
David Orr
Gregg & Emily Painter
Russ & Meribeth Pomaro
Trish Quintenz & Rip Yasinski

William & Judith Reid
Paul & Linda Rode
Galena Territory Association
M. Dian Strenski

Under \$100

Michele Cahill
Community Shares of Minnesota
Jerry Dahlen
Jack & Carolyn Daniel
John & Karin Exo
(To Empire-Sauk Chapter)
Dennis Harris
M. J. Hatfield
John & Karen Jaeschke
(For Hauser Road Prairie)
Lawrence Sheaffer
(In Memory of Dot Wade)
Scott Simon
(On Behalf of Eric Roe)
Mark Sturnick
Richard & Elizabeth Westfall

The following donations were made
in Memory of Keith Roe:

Don Bennett
Janet Denman
Colleen Galvin
Nicola Incontrera
Beverly Jackson

Irving & Myra Memis
Karyn Schmitz

The following donations were made
in Memory of Hugh Illtis:

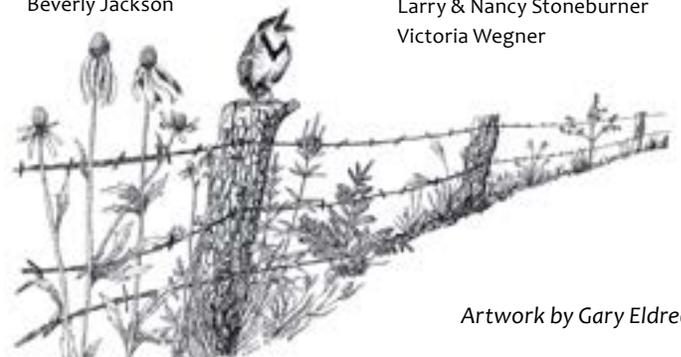
Richard & Doris Dubielzig
Frank Illtis
Jane Elizabeth Nee
John Ochsner
Eunice Roe

The following donations were made
to Northwest Illinois Chapter:

John Arndt & Barbara Wiesen
Richard Benning
Sharon & Kevin Cahill
Mary Dodd-Lieberman
Bonnie Garrity
Vito Ippolito
Michele Lubcke
Mike & Cindi Martinovic
Donald Mason & Crystal Boden-
Mason
Deb Pausz
Mary Pergander
Frances Rivoire
John & Barb Rutherford
Paul & Carol Soderholm
Larry & Nancy Stoneburner
Victoria Wegner

Legacy Giving

Please consider The Prairie Enthusiasts in your will or estate plans. If you've already done so, please let us know, so we can personally thank you for ensuring the perpetuation & recovery of prairies and savannas. For more information please contact Chris Kirkpatrick, Executive Director at 608-638-1873 or executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org.



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Questions? E-mail Joe Rising (Communications Coordinator) at TPE@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org
or call us at 608-638-1873.

Thank you!

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The Prairie Enthusiasts Membership Levels:

- | | |
|--|--|
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