

Eyes on the Prized Plants

Mary Cannon

Plants of Concern Begins Fourth Year Monitoring Rare Plants

In the first three years of the Plants of Concern (POC) program, 153 volunteer monitors have worked with public and private landowners in six Northeast Illinois counties. One-hundred-thirteen sites have been visited, and 281 populations of 122 species have been monitored with POC's standardized region-wide data gathering protocols.

Plants of Concern is a program of Chicago Wilderness, coordinated through the Chicago Botanic Garden. It is affiliated with The Habitat Project and Audubon-Chicago Region and works closely with Forest Preserves and other landowners.

Volunteers new to Plants of Concern must attend one of three workshops offered in different parts of the area in early spring to be trained in the data gathering protocols of the program and to receive their monitoring assignments. Returning monitors are strongly encouraged to attend a workshop also, as a refresher and to catch up on new developments.

See page 4 for workshop details.



White lady's slipper, dog violet, and 120 other species continue to be monitored by POC volunteers, now in their fourth year of tracking rare plants.

Photos: Susanne Masi

They work in six NE Illinois counties, on more than 113 sites; and they collect data on 122 species. "They" are the 153 Plants of Concern (POC) monitors working in the Chicago Wilderness. (See sidebar.)

What do they do? They find plants—and count them—and measure them—and map their locations and then record all the data.

Why do they do it? Don Nelson and wife Espie "were always interested in nature." So, after retirement, they naturally got into volunteering. They started with Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and then added Schulenburg Prairie, became stewards for Lockport Prairie (Don) and Vermont Cemetery (Don & Espie), and added frog and plant monitoring. As to POC, Don says, "Working with Susanne [Masi] has been fun. You learn so much. Once you start to recognize a plant, you begin to 'own' it; and you become more interested in it and all the other living things around it."

The Habitat Project serves the Chicago Wilderness conservation community

Monitors

Volunteers and staff monitor plants and animals to document current distributions, abundance, and health—and to track trends in these numbers over time.

Stewards

Volunteers and staff remove invasive trees and brush, pull weeds, collect and plant native seeds, conduct controlled burns, and shepherd our most treasured natural areas back to good health.

Advocates

Volunteers and staff use data and field expertise to advocate for sound public policy to fund and facilitate habitat restoration and quality of life for plants and animals (including people).

The future of nature depends on the thousands of volunteers and staff who conduct the controlled burns, combat the invasive species, fend off the off-road-vehicles, monitor the plants and animals, and generally work for the wellness of wild animals and habitat. The Habitat Project is a network of thousands of volunteer and staff scientists, monitors, land managers and advocates who work side by side to assure the holistic and effective conservation of Chicago Wilderness—a regional nature reserve.

Monitoring Opportunities

Breeding Bird Census of the Bird Conservation Network

Lee Ramsey 847-501-4683

Bird Blitzes to cover grasslands, woodlands, shrublands, or wetlands

Karen Glennemeier 847-965-1150

Chicago Wilderness Calling Frog Survey

Rebecca Blazer 847-965-1150 ext.10

Butterfly Monitoring

Melanie Manner 847-464-4426

Plant Community Audits of woods, prairies, or wetlands

Karen Glennemeier 847-965-1150

Plants of Concern rare plant monitoring

Susanne Masi 847-835-8269



Contributing editors

Mary Cannon

Suzanne Checchia

Karen Glennemeier

Elizabeth Plonka

Layout and Design

Jenny Vogt

Additional Contributors

Gareth Blakesley

Judy Pollock

Lee Ramsey

We welcome to our newsletter team new writers, editors, stamp lickers, photographers, graphic artists, staplers, and anyone else who would enjoy getting involved. To learn more, contact Mary Cannon at 847-375-8301 or mjkcannon@hotmail.com

A Rousing Chorus of Frogs

By Elizabeth Plonka

The frog monitoring workshops were well attended this year, with a total of 250 prospective monitors in ten counties. This is the fifth year of the calling frog survey, with more than 100 frog monitors thus far. The data are contributing to our picture of regional frog populations and helping us to distinguish normal population fluctuations from dangerous declines.



Tree Frog

Many monitors attend the workshops year after year because, in the words of Mike Sinner, "It's a good refresher; to come here and get your appetite whetted again." Mike has been monitoring for five years and has noticed a "ripple effect" concerning frog monitoring. "You get more and more people aware this is going on." That is certainly the case this year. Since Channel 2's ten o'clock news covered the Lake County Frog Monitoring Workshop on February 3. They broadcast footage of a room-full of people intently learning frog calls in preparation for the beginning of the monitoring season in March.

"We can track the frog populations along with the culture of conservation that goes with volunteer monitoring."

Tom Peterson, who monitors with his wife Susan, found "a lot of people who were ready for spring" at the workshop in Kane County. He looks forward to seeing again the Cope's Grey Tree Frog he hears—and sees on his site—a species most of us would be lucky to even hear. The workshops review all of the species found in the region and remind monitors about species of special concern that are especially rare or, like the Cope's Grey Tree Frog, being closely studied.

As the word spreads, we find whole families getting involved in frog monitoring. Debbie Smith of McHenry County has been monitoring with her family for four years. She and her husband, Paul, and their sons, Jay and Graham, continue to enjoy frog monitoring even after getting a little lost in the dark the first year. The workshops provide an opportunity for them to find out if anyone has heard any interesting frogs and for the boys to tell their "Mom and Dad got lost while frog monitoring" story.

Henrietta Saunders also monitors with her two boys, Charlie and Richard Day. Her sons are interested in habitat restoration, and she first noticed frogs when a crow flying overhead dropped a half a frog in front of her. Now Henrietta, Charlie, and Richard monitor areas of their neighborhood in northern Cook County. They find, "frog monitoring is empowering. It makes us feel more connected to things that are happening in the world."

As more people become aware of monitoring and forge their own deeper connection to nature we can track the frog populations along with the culture of conservation that goes with volunteer monitoring. Diane Aoki, a frog monitor in Cook County for five years, sees a lot of hope at every workshop. "Every year it seems like more people show up to these monitoring workshops—frog monitoring, butterfly monitoring, plants, dragonflies, all these different things happening. I think it's really neat to see people adapting their lifestyle to do monitoring. You go out and learn about these things. You see them. You experience them, and you're collecting data. Isn't that cool?"

And then there are the “aha” moments. “The neatest,” says Don, “have happened when we were just walking. One day we found prairie-fringed orchids where no one knew they existed; and another time we found 200 buffalo clover where Swink had only listed four. Every time you find something unexpected, it’s wonderful.”

Finding the “unexpected” can also call for some preparation. Kathy Garness says she always wears long-sleeves and long-pants and even carries surgical gloves because “the plant you are monitoring could be buried under poison ivy.” Nonetheless, Kathy, who’s been a POC volunteer since summer, 2001, is now monitoring three species, and agrees it’s fun. “You meet great people; you learn new things; you help biodiversity; you get some exercise; and you get to see purple-fringed orchids.” Kathy also volunteers for the Woods Audit and the state’s Oak Tatter Survey.

Long-time Lake County volunteer Joan Palincsar started locating plants several years ago when she helped a student with a project on dog violets. “By the time POC started asking for data, Brian Miller, one of my stewardship volunteers, and I began yearly surveys of six patches of dog violets.” Soon Susanne was sending lists of other plants, and now “it has become an exciting detective hunt to locate and report on them,” she says.

Obviously, POC has many enthusiastic volunteers but also has many sites that still need monitors. “Don’t be intimidated by the idea,” says Don Nelson. “Many populations are already known. Someone points out the plant, and you count. Or you hold the tape measure. Or you put little flags at each site. It becomes a whole, wonderful world that, little-by-little, opens up to you. But, it only opens up if you’re here. What we need is more eyes!”

So, if you can volunteer, go to the monitoring workshops, and join the people with their eyes on the prize plants.

Plants of Concern Monitoring Workshops:

(required for new monitors, recommended for returning monitors)

Lake County
Saturday, April 17—9am–2:30pm
Reed Turner Woodland, Long Grove IL

McHenry County
Sunday, May 2—9am–2:30pm
Wiedrich Barn, Glacial Park, Ringwood IL

*Note that **DuPage County’s** workshop was scheduled prior to the likely circulation date of the *Habitat Herald* Saturday, April 3.

To register for a workshop, new and returning monitors should contact: Lailah Reich, POC Intern, Chicago Botanic Garden Ireich@chicagobotanic.org 847-835-6856.

Map and directions will be provided after sign-up in advance of the workshops. Bring a lunch. Morning refreshments will be served.

Illustration by: Kathy Garness Photo reference courtesy of: Michael J. Cruetz, Jim Fowler, Lorne Heshka & Claude Poirier.



White lady's slipper.

Visions of Butterflies

By Mary Cannon

Dark clouds sweep across the sky as cold winds carry the scent of rain: a typical March morning in the Chicago Wilderness region. But inside Elgin’s new Gail Borden Library, spring is in the air. It’s the Indoor Workshop for Butterfly Monitors, and nearly ninety people—young and old, male and female, beginners and seasoned veterans—have come to remember last season and prepare for the coming one.



session, called Beyond the Beginner’s Checklist, or Doug’s, called E-butterflies: Data for the Electronic Age. Most opt for butterfly slides, and Mel doesn’t disappoint. She covers almost 40 types of butterflies, giving identification tips for all monitors, whether trying to develop new skills or to refine old ones. And the room is filled with color and life.

By the time it’s over, one veteran, leaning on a cane, says to another, “Every year I come to this because it reminds me spring is really coming.” Whatever the weather, participants in this workshop leave with visions of butterflies dancing in their heads.

“And the room is filled with color and life.”

Doug Taron and Mel Manner start the session with a report on last year’s activities: 109 sites monitored; 740 census routes run; 89 species recorded; and 4,700 census routes now recorded in the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network (IBMN) data base, one of the largest world-wide. After rewarding some of the people responsible for such success (with copies of Ken Kauffman’s *Butterflies of North America*), they move on to the keynote address.

And now we are all taken along on Doug’s trip to visit butterfly farms in Costa Rica. These pictures remind us of sunny, blue skies, lush vegetation, and, of course, butterflies—whether egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, or adult. They also remind us of why we are here: to help sustain these beautiful insects—for them and for ourselves.

So, having spent the morning wishing we could have “carried Doug’s suitcase,” after lunch, we can spend our time in Mel’s

Photos: Pipevine Swallowtails by Lori M. Wilson, courtesy of U.S.G.S. American Copper by Paul Opler, courtesy of U.S.G.S.

Additional Butterfly Monitoring Workshops:

Monday, May 3—7-9pm McHenry Community College, McHenry, IL with Mel Manner.

Saturday, May 8—11am-1pm IL Beach State Park, Lake County, with Melissa Pierson.

Saturday, May 15—10am-noon Fermilab, DuPage County, with Tom Peterson.

Saturday, May 22—2:30-4:30pm Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin, with Mel Manner, for intermediate monitors – *Beyond the Beginner’s Checklist*

Please register by contacting Mel Manner at manner@foxvalley.net or 847-464-4426.

A New Resource



Hello – I’m Rebecca Blazer, the new Field Representative for the Habitat Project and Audubon-Chicago Region. I’ve already met many of our monitors, stewards, and activists, and I’m hoping to meet many more this year. It’s my job (and my great pleasure!) to support everyone in our hard work for conservation. I hope to smooth the path and help folks do good work by providing resources, contacts, ideas, and energy to our volunteer network. Please give me a call or send me a note if you have any needs or thoughts you’d like to share. I’m thrilled to be supporting the important role that volunteers and our data play in helping our natural areas thrive.

Results from the 2002-03 Chicago Wilderness Woods Audit

Over the past two summers, 140 of us collected detailed vegetation data in 238 randomly-located plots in the wooded lands of eight Chicago Wilderness counties.

We identified wildflowers and grasses, counted shrub and sapling stems, and measured all of the trees within a circle 25 meters across. The result is a comprehensive assessment of the current condition of our upland forests, woodlands, and savannas.

What is the quality of our woods? One way to answer this is to look at the Floristic Quality Index (FQI) within the 1/4 m² quadrats we used to quantify the herbaceous plants and seedlings. The FQI combines a measure of the fidelity of each

species to high quality habitat (its coefficient of conservatism, or its C-value) and the number of species in the quadrat. When we graded each of the 238 plots according to its FQI, we found that most of our woods are in poor or fair shape, with few good or very good quality plots (see Figure 1).

Another measure of quality is the extent of invasives coverage. Based on our data, we calculated a whopping total of 18,763,866 stems of buckthorn in the woods represented by this study! This means 558 stems per acre, not including all of the sprigs under one meter tall. Keep sharpening those loppers.

We can stratify the data based on the type of woods represented by each plot – if a plot contained large, historic bur oak trees, we labeled it a ‘bur oak plot,’ and similarly for other canopy tree species. This stratification helps us to identify which types of woods are in better and worse shape, and can help us prioritize the allocation of management resources. Generally speaking, red oak plots seemed in better shape than bur and white oak plots.

Quality measures ranked slightly higher for red oak plots (see Figure 2), although the Mean C and FQI for red oak plots fell only into the “fair” quality grade. Red oaks are present in greater numbers in the smaller size classes within red oak plots, compared to small bur oaks in bur oak plots

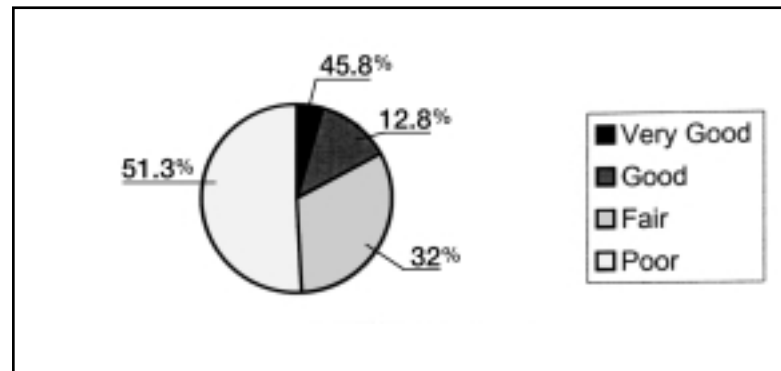


Figure 1. Most of the plots had poor or fair quality FQIs.

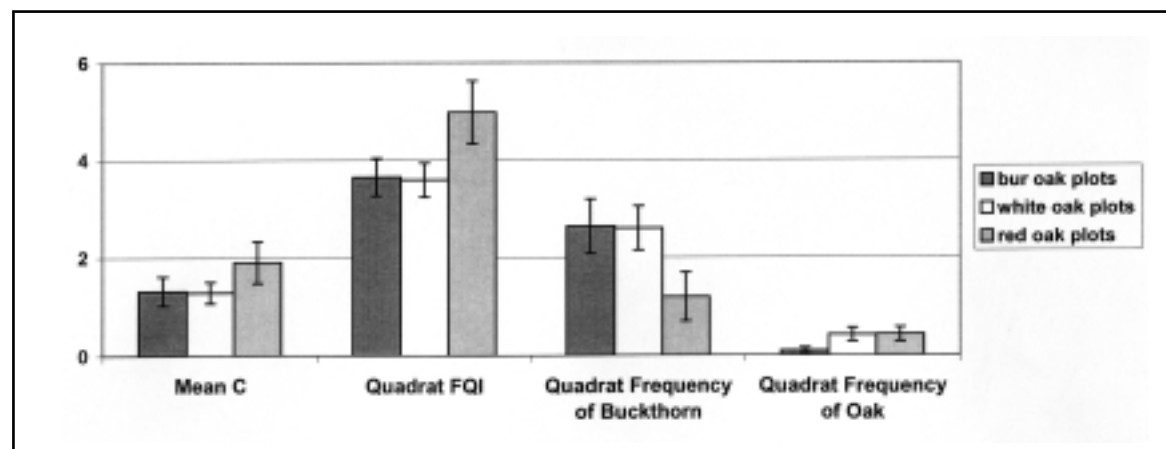


Figure 2. Red oak plots generally were in better shape than bur and white oak plots, but all three types had low quality herbaceous vegetation overall. ‘Quadrat Frequency’ refers to the number of quadrats, out of nine, that contained the particular species or plant group.

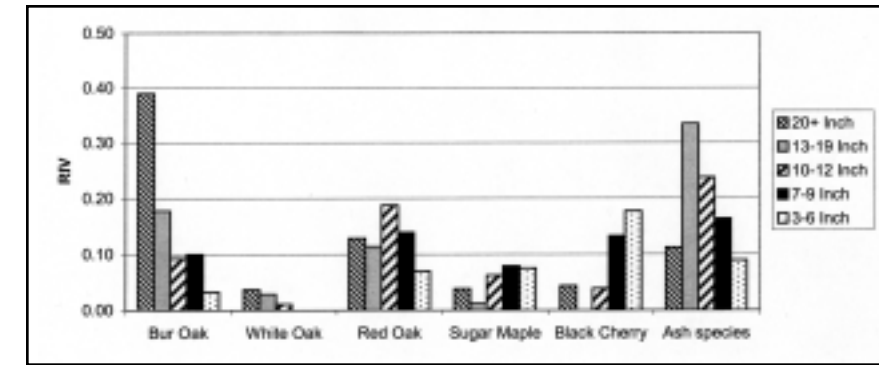


Figure 3. Bur oak plots: Most of the older, larger trees were bur oaks, but the younger, smaller trees were mostly cherries and ashes.

and small white oaks in white oak plots (see Figures 3-5). Black cherry appears to be the most significant invasive tree in the smaller size classes.

Scientists don’t know what constitutes “sufficient” oak reproduction. Because oaks tend to reproduce episodically, it’s difficult to predict what the demographics should look like at any given time. But our data suggest that there have not been

replacement levels of oak reproduction during the last fifty years at most locations.

Where do we go from here? These data allow us to quantify exactly how our woods are in trouble and the extent of the damage. Stewards and land managers can use these data to help prioritize management activities. Chicago Wilderness is using the data to demonstrate the nature of the problem to

federal agencies and foundations so that we may obtain more resources for solving the problem. In five, or perhaps ten, years, we’ll repeat the Woods Audit. We hope to see improvements in these measures of quality that will tell us we’re on our way to regaining the character and diversity of our wooded lands.

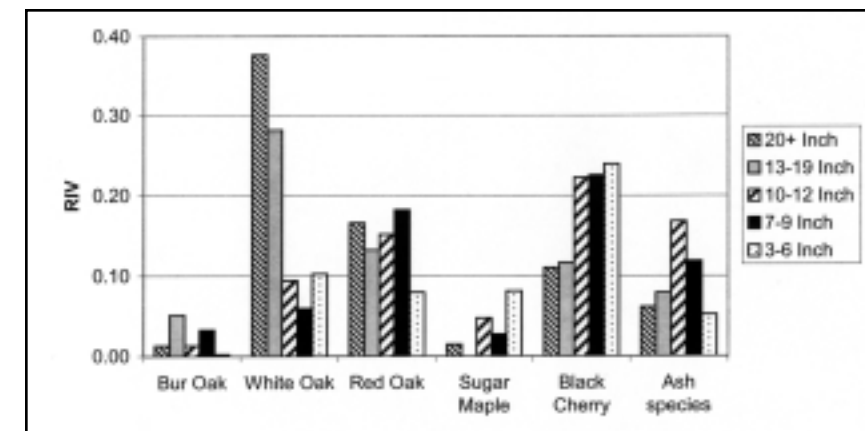


Figure 4. White oak plots: Cherries and red oaks are more common in the younger strata than are the historic white oak trees.

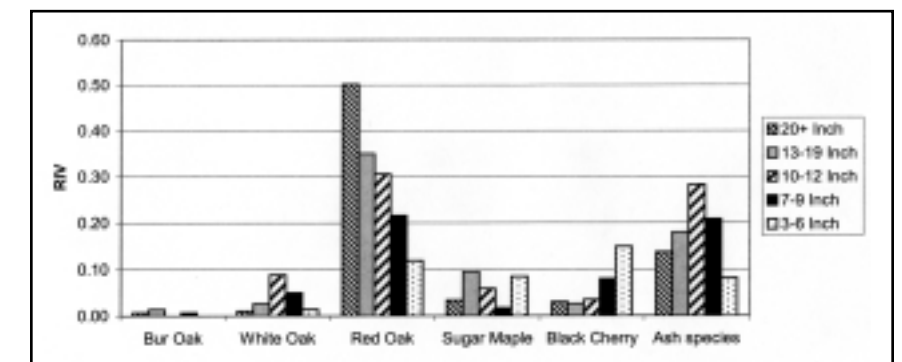


Figure 5. Red oak plots: Young red oaks are relatively common, but cherries and ashes are more dominant than they used to be.

Get Outdoors and Learn Some Plants

When we asked our plant monitors what they most wanted to see in 2004, lots of people said they wanted more opportunities to get outdoors with experts and learn plant identification. In response, some of our most experienced plant identifiers have volunteered to lead plant walks this season. How many new plants will you have under your belt by the end of summer?

Mentored walks for learning plant identification:

All dates rain or shine.

Sunday, April 18—1pm

Eggers Woods in SE Chicago, led by **Marianne Hahn** (708-799-0249 or Mariahahn@aol.com). Contact Marianne for directions if you've not been to Eggers Woods before, it can be tricky to find.

Friday, April 23—6pm

Morton Arboretum in Lisle, led by **Ed Max** (630-209-3005 or hortusl@aol.com). Please RSVP for parking instructions (due to construction).

Saturday, April 24—5-7pm

Pilcher Park Nature Center in Joliet, led by **Rich Hyerczyk** (773-586-8508 or rhyerczyk@yahoo.com). Preceded by a "Reservation Only Wildflower Hike" sponsored by Joliet Park District and led by Rich (charge is \$15; followed by wine and cheese). Call 815-741-7277 to RSVP for the early hike – no fee or RSVP needed for 5:00 walk.

Saturday, May 1—1pm

Nelson Lake Marsh in Kane County, led by **Karen Hardy** (630-357-0687 or khardy@kraft.com). This walk especially for beginners.

Saturday, May 22—10am-noon

Richardson Wildlife Sanctuary in Dune Acres, near Chesterton, IN, led by **Elma Thiele** (219-787-8983 or rwsa@myvine.com). Call or email for directions. Be ready for stairs & hills.

Saturday, June 5—10am-noon

Coulter Sand Prairie in Indiana, led by **Barbara Plampin** (219-787-9438). From I-80, take exit 17, then Dunes Hwy(US 12) east, then R. on County Line Rd, and R. on 5th Ave, park anywhere along 5th Ave. Trailhead is on other (east) side of County Line Rd on 5th Ave.

Saturday, June 12—2-5pm

Hobart Prairie Grove in Hobart, IN, led by **Sandy O'Brien** (219-942-2956 or ecorealm@msn.com). Be prepared for a 2+ mile hike.

Saturday, June 26—9-11am

Poplar Creek in Hoffman Estates (especially the Shoe Factory Nature Preserve gravel hill prairie remnant), led by **Diana Granitto** (847-991-2073 or dgranitto@msn.com).

Wednesday, July 7—6:30pm

Ted Stone FP in Hodgkins, 67th and La Grange Road (1st light north of I-55), led by **Barbara Birmingham** (708-386-0579 or barbbirm@aol.com).

Thursday, July 8—6:30pm

Moraine Hills State Park, 914 S. River Road, McHenry, IL, led by **Greg Rajskey** (815-337-0043 or pineheart@netsource1.net). Use the main entrance (east side of River Road) and follow the roadway all the way to the end. The last parking area is called Northern Woods; park at the far end of the lot.

Saturday, July 10—9am

West DuPage Woods (Elsens' Hill Area) in Winfield, led by **Elizabeth Plonka** (773-529-0023).

Tuesday, July 13—6:30pm

Miami Woods in Morton Grove, led by **Kent and Jerry Fuller** (847-729-4642 or kjfullergv@comcast.net). Meet in main parking lot on the east side of Caldwell, 2 blks north of Oakton.

Saturday, Aug 7—9am

107th St and LaGrange in Palos, led by **Juli Janisch** (630-724-1319 or jjanisch@v3consultants.com). We'll focus on learning weedy species (an unfortunate necessity for us plant monitors), followed by a walk in a nice, wet woodland across the street.

Plant identification walks continued on page 9.

Illustration by Kathy Garnes



Plant identification walks continued from page 8.

Saturday, August 14—9am

Corner of Kress and Downs in West Chicago, DuPage County, led by **Paul Bollinger** (630-990-1385 or pbollinger@bollingerlach.com). Park on Kress. If time permits, we can also go to nearby West Chicago Prairie.

Sunday, Sept 12—2:30pm

Spring Bluff Forest Preserve in Winthrop Harbor, IL, led by **Ken Klick** (847-968-3284 or kklick@co.lake.il.us). Meet at the North Point Marina parking lot.

Also a special class that will introduce you to many of the **spring wildflowers** found in our local Forest Preserves along the North Branch of the Chicago River. The course consists of two evening lectures and three field trips to different Forest Preserves. Students are expected to enroll for the entire class, including both evening lectures and field trips. The class may be used to satisfy one of the continuing education requirements for Master Stewards. Enrollment is limited so please respond promptly if you are interested (Jane Balaban, 847-679-4289 or balx2@comcast.net). Instructors: **John and Jane Balaban**, plus several **North Branch stewards**.

Evening lectures:

Thursday, April 22—7-9pm

North Park Village, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Chicago

Thursday, May 6—7-9pm

North Park Village, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Chicago

Field trips:

Saturday, April 24—10-noon

Bunker Hill FP in Chicago

Saturday, May 15—10-noon

Harms Woods in Glenview

Saturday, May 29—10-noon

Miami Woods in Morton Grove

Dragonflies, Year Two

By Gareth Blakesley

Last year marked a great start to the Dragonfly Monitoring Network (DMN), with lots of interest and 17 sites monitored by 17 monitors. A total of 96 census routes were run during the season and 18 verified species were found. A great beginning. Now we have a good foundation for the expansion of the DMN this year. We hope to increase our understanding of Odonate populations in Illinois by adding new monitors and new sites to the program.

The DMN has definitely piqued people's interest. According to monitor Adele Combs, "There were two types of people



Photo: Allen Chantler of the Michigan Odonata Survey.

Libellula pulchella is one of many dragonfly species monitors will be looking for this summer.

who would be looking at me as I monitored –those who thought I was acting strangely and should be avoided, and those who were interested in what I was doing. Many people thought I was bird watching or butterfly monitoring, but were surprised and interested when I told them I was looking for dragonflies. It definitely is harder than watching butterflies. There were these big black things that kept zipping by that I thought were dragonflies. I was frustrated in not being able to get a better look. When one settled I realized it was a 'mud dauber' –a large dark wasp."

My own personal experience was the excitement of reading and learning about the creatures in the winter months and then observing them in the wild during the summer. At every outing, I learned a little more about their character and behavior. Anthropomorphic, I know, but one of the attractions of these creatures is their charisma. Their speed of flight, their bright colors and their aerial acrobatics make them a joy and a challenge to watch. My fascination increases with every outing and each new species. I know many of those who undertook the monitoring last year share my new found love for this group.

I hope you can join us in the upcoming season and share our love for these animals.

Dragonfly monitoring for 2nd year monitors:

Advanced workshops are on the following dates:

Wednesday, April 14—6-8pm

Saturday, April 17—10-12pm

At the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago. Please RSVP to Gareth Blakesley gblakesley@naturemuseum.org 773-755-5100 x3032. These are specifically for second year monitors. However those people who are familiar with dragonflies but new to monitoring are also welcome to attend.

Monitoring a Restoration Success

By Lee Ramsey



Margaret Mechtenberg counts birds at an increasingly open Bluff Spring Fen.

Margaret Mechtenberg is among the first to arrive for the workday at Bluff Spring Fen. She is there to monitor the birds, something she has been doing since 1992, first as part of the breeding bird survey, but year-round since 1998. This particular morning is a brisk one in early January, with little obvious activity, but Margaret is already beginning to pick out the calls of downy woodpeckers, nuthatches, a flock of goldfinches, and blue jays. Later a few over-wintering robins show up, and there is at least one unexpected find: a pair of rusty blackbirds.

Every year the brush retreats a little more, providing more space for grassland birds and more work for Margaret.

Bluff Spring Fen is a 110-acre site in far western Cook County, near South Elgin, which now has a protection plan focused on maintaining the flow of water that keeps the fen alive. Ongoing restoration, with workdays twice a month year round, is under the guidance of co-stewards Leon Halloran and Doug Taron. Doug also monitors butterflies there, while Susanne Masi and Roger Hotham keep track of rare plants.

Restoration activities have gradually been opening up the thorn thicket that existed 15 years ago, providing space and sunlight for the native sedges, grasses and forbs. As this happens, of course, birds such as willow flycatchers, red-eyed vireos and eastern towhees have declined in numbers as their woodland habitats give way to fen, prairie, and edge. But sedge wrens nested for the first time in 2003. Red-headed woodpeckers continue to use the dead cottonwoods, and eastern bluebirds, another cavity nester, and orchard orioles seem to be on the increase. An exciting new visitor the past two years has been an American bittern that stops over in fall migration. He probably won't ever choose to nest here, however, because he'll find too much human traffic through the site.

As the restored area grows in size, Margaret's work as a monitor increases too. It can now take her three hours to cover her route, about twice as long as it originally took. And every year the brush retreats a little more, providing more space for grassland birds and more work for Margaret. She is now getting help, though, from a monitoring companion, Cheryl Hayes, who modestly downplays her bird identification abilities but does have the computer savvy that Margaret intentionally lacks. (Margaret describes herself as "computer illiterate" and says she intends to stay that way.) Cheryl is working to get more of Margaret's monitoring data recorded on the eBird/BCN web site.

Hours after she began, Margaret returns to her car and her picnic lunch. The restoration crew is at work nearby, dragging brush from the woodland to a roaring bonfire that cuts the January chill.

Looking for Herps

This season's herp searches will be concentrated in a couple of areas, including the City of Chicago, which is hosting its first-ever herp searches in city parks. If you are interested in more herp outings, consider joining the study team that is canvassing the region's savannas. For more information about the savanna study, contact Karen Glennemeier at 847-965-1150 or Bob Brodman at 219-866-6215.

2004 Herp Searches—All dates rain or shine.

Sunday, May 2—1pm Spring Creek in NW Cook County. Meet at the parking lot on Penny Rd.

Sunday, May 16—1pm Spring Creek, same as above.

Saturday, May 22—10am North Park Village Nature Center, Chicago

Saturday, May 29—10am LaBaugh Woods, Chicago

Photo: Courtesy of U.S.G.S.



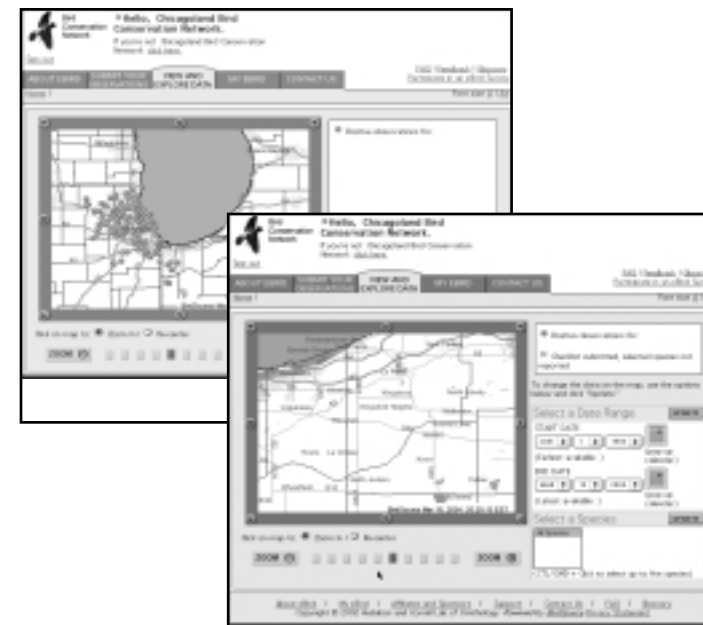
Look for green frogs and other herps at this year's herp searches.

The BCN Census Goes Digital

By Judy Pollock and Lee Ramsey

After six years of development (and seemingly constant changes!), the Bird Conservation Network (BCN) Census website has a permanent home and should now reward its users with stable monitoring protocols, access, and user systems. Our new home is the server at Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology, where the Census is integrated into Cornell's national reporting system known as eBird.

Take a look at the new site, at www.ebird.org/BCN. We think you'll find it user friendly, with clear instructions and plenty of easily accessible help. From the home page you can register, submit observations, or view data. If you've already been submitting BCN Census data, to the Field Museum or Cornell, you're already registered, and you use your existing ID and password. If you'd like to **become a regular monitor** at an assigned site, contact one of us before registering; and we'll help you get started. If you can help us keep track of local bird populations by submitting your **observations from recreational birding**, register and use the list of "hot spots." Be sure to do this on the eBird/BCN site, which is more specific to our region than the national eBird site (www.eBird.org). Please don't use eBird/BCN to list yard birds.



"The BCN Census website has a permanent home."

When you're registered with eBird, you can also **investigate the database**. Cornell has loaded the older data from BirdSource and the Field Museum into the server, and soon 14 years of Cook County Breeding Bird Censuses and 10 years of DuPage County data will also be added. Take the "View and Explore Data" link to a page where you can see the raw data you yourself have submitted or choose to view maps, graphs, or reports from the entire database.

Are you a current or would-be **monitor who doesn't own a computer**, or who does but hates to use it? You can still get your data into eBird/BCN. Just send it to the BCN

office in Skokie, using the forms we'll send you on request. (You can also find them on the BCN website.) We have volunteers who will enter your observations—but please use the forms so we'll have the information we need to do the entry.

Are you someone who wants to find out about birds or bird monitoring but **not ready to start monitoring on your own**? Check out Cornell's "All About Birds" website (www.birds.cornell.edu), go on some local bird walks (a list of all in the region can be found at the new BCN website, www.bcnbirds.org) and/or contact one of us to find a monitor-mentor.

Here's how to reach us. BCN at 5225 Old Orchard Road, Suite 37, Skokie 60077 or phone 847-965-1150. Email Judy at jpollock@audubon.org, Lee at leeramsley@comcast.net. Please use the subject line to indicate that your message is about BCN monitoring.

BCN Website

BCN has a new, more easily accessible website with a professional design, thanks to Eric Secker. It's at www.bcnbirds.org. Are you looking for Census forms, BCN news, green papers, minutes, or information about the list serve? This is place to find it. Do you want to know how to find a birding trip for next weekend or next May? Go to the BCN website and look at the comprehensive birding-trip calendar compiled by Randi Doeker.

Looking for Mentors

From time to time BCN gets requests from people who would like to improve their birding skills and learn how to do bird monitoring. If you're an experienced monitor and willing to serve as a mentor to such volunteers, please let us know.

Chicago Wilderness Habitat Project

 **Audubon** CHICAGO REGION
5225 Old Orchard Rd., Suite 37
Skokie, IL 60077

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Skokie IL
Permit #545



Getting Together

We're planning a series of field clinics to be held throughout the region this summer—and a major volunteer conference next winter. Thank you to the more than 100 people who took the time to share your thoughts in helping us plan these events.

The field clinics will be hosted by many of us, at sites throughout the region. They'll feature presentations and field exercises relevant to both experts and beginners in many areas of conservation work. If you have any ideas you'd like to share with the planning group, or if you would like to share your work or showcase your site at a clinic, please contact Rebecca Blazer at 847-965-1150 or rblazer@audubon.org. We'll keep you posted about the dates and locations of the clinics.

We also are building momentum toward a fantastic volunteer conference next winter. Volunteers across the region are just itching to share our best ideas and put our heads together to work through common challenges. A list of possible themes and session topics is currently being developed. Contact Rebecca Blazer if you'd like to receive periodic Conference Countdown e-mails so you can keep up with how the conference is evolving. Is there a restoration or monitoring topic that you would really love to learn more about? Or is there a topic that you'd like to teach others about? Let Rebecca know and we'll add it to the list of possibilities.



The Habitat Project is generously supported by the Illinois Conservation Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Grand Victoria Foundation, CorLands, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the National Audubon Society, Boeing, the Chicago Wilderness Trust and individual supporters of Audubon-Chicago Region.