

# The Habitat HERALD

September 2005

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## Saving Crete's Oak Savanna

By Mary Cannon



The proposal to develop the 12 acres was introduced last November: three condo buildings, a parking lot, a retaining wall, and access roads would be built on the three acre-parcel; and 16 townhouses and access roads would be built on the other nine. The three acres is now an oak and hickory woodland and the nine a prairie surrounding a wetland.

"At first I thought the trees would be used as a backdrop; but, no, they were going to cut down all of these 150 year old oaks and re-grade the whole area—destroying all the wildflowers and a prairie remnant as well. They even wanted to fill in the wetland, but the Army Corps of Engineers won't let them. Now they want to build on its perimeter," says Keith Nowakowski. Keith, a landscape architect who has written a book on using native plants in home gardens, agreed to do an evaluation of the area. He says, "Mary Anne McLean was the moving force and did most of the work. As her friend and an area resident, I wanted to help."



Photos: Mary Anne McLean

Mary Anne McLean (top), Keith Nowakowski, and Mary-Kay Stanfield, chairperson of Crete Neighbors United, helped save this oak savanna by cataloging its plants and mobilizing their community. The would-be developer still hasn't moved its trailer off of the site.

"We need to focus on the conservation of open space as of equal importance with economic development."

Indeed, McLean, who monitors butterflies and birds and serves as education chair for Thorn Creek Audubon, is well-suited to the effort. "My husband and I became aware of the threat to the savanna because it's just up the road from our house. Walking the dog, I encountered the surveyors," she says. That was last summer. By November 7, when the developer petitioned the Village Plan

Committee for a favorable vote on annexation and re-zoning, McLean had alerted community members who attended and expressed their concerns. Nonetheless, the vote was for approval and went next to the Village Board for consideration.

At that point, McLean and others formed Crete Neighbors United, and began gathering signatures for their own petitions. On May 23, McLean and Nowakowski were among those who spoke for the 100 like-minded citizens who attended the meeting. There they spoke of the environmental impact and emphasized the value of the natural landscape not only for the fauna and flora but also for people. "The predominant feeling I have for the natural world..



# 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**

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

Karen Glennemeier 847-965-1150

### **Chicago Wilderness Calling Frog Survey**

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### **Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network**

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### **Plant Community Audits of woods, prairies, or wetlands**

Karen Glennemeier 847-965-1150

### **Plants of Concern Rare Plant Monitoring**

Susanne Masi 847-835-8269



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*We welcome to our newsletter*

*team new writers, editors, stamp*

*lickers, photographers, graphic*

*artists, staplers, and anyone else*

*who would enjoy getting involved.*

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# Wild Things Feedback

*By Tom Peterson*



*Now that some time has passed since the "Wild Things" Conference last February, we thought we'd check in with some participants to see what sticks with them. I sent out a message to some attendees; here are a few of their responses.*

**Priscilla Meldrim** says she picked up a very useful tip about encouraging children after they give a wrong answer: Providing a wrong answer to a question is acting like a scientist, whose hypotheses are often proven false by experiment. Speaking an idea is like forming a hypothesis, and we can be open to forming a new one based on the evidence. That education tip was worth the conference to her.

**Oliver Pergams** gave a talk about Franklin's ground squirrel (FGS) conservation. He says, "I had someone come up to me after the talk and tell me that ComEd had recently done a lot of damage (while working on power lines) to the only known remaining NE IL FGS site. We took this information to the IL Endangered Species Protection Board."

**Bob Lootens** participated in the Fermilab session on large site management methods; he made contacts for seed trading. And, since the conference, people have contacted him seeking more information for managing their smaller sites. He enjoys being in touch with people doing similar work.

The common thread in these comments and others, as well as my own experience, was the value in hearing about other people's approaches to similar problems, what other people are doing in the Chicago region, and making these contacts with people who have similar interests. There is a lot of experience out there, and it was very helpful and a lot of fun to tap into it.

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is one of reverence," says McLean. "In my view, we need to focus on the conservation of open space as of equal importance with economic development."

The result: the Village Board acted only on the annexation petition and voted to deny. For the moment, The Crete Neighbors have won. However, the vote was scarcely taken before there was talk of the developer being able to come back at any time. So, the work continues. "They are trying to be blockbusters; they want no untouched land. I am trying to keep the character of the area. We have to look at what's being lost," says Nowakowski. Adds McLean, "Our predecessors bequeathed us a wealth of natural resources...

Now it's our turn to see what kind of natural heritage we will leave to our successors."

*Note: Mary Anne, Keith, and their neighbors have won the first round, but the fight continues: the developers have recently presented a new plan to the village board. This one would have two condo buildings instead of three, and three stories instead of four. Not much consolation for the 150-year-old oaks that will be destroyed to make way for these 40 units. The proposal was remanded to the Crete planning and zoning commission, where Crete Neighbors United will again state their objections. If you would like to help them save this savanna, contact Mary Anne at 708-672-5494.*

# Grassland Audit gets Grade A

While it's unlikely we'll be able to say the same thing about the condition of our grasslands, this summer's Grassland Audit received high marks. Seventy-five plant monitors set out in the prairies and grasslands of six counties to record all species and their abundances within  $\frac{1}{4}$ m<sup>2</sup> quadrats along 100-meter transects. In total, we covered more than 2,200 quadrats.

The days were hot and dry, but we got the chance to see what our grasslands look like, up close and personal. We went off of the beaten path, into areas that, while part of our public lands, are not often seen by preserve users or even seasoned naturalists. We had to crash through some thickets to get there, and we got a few chigger bites and sunburned ears on the way, but it was an adventure well worth taking. We have completed the first-ever, regionwide assessment of our grasslands and prairies. The data will tell us the condition of these beloved lands overall: What percentage gets an A? How many need remedial help? Are there some unknown jewels that need immediate attention?

Chicago Wilderness will use these data to garner more resources for grassland restoration. And we'll look back on the results as our baseline for decades to come, asking how the prairies look compared to the 2005 benchmark. Without this baseline, it would be impossible to know how well we're succeeding at prairie restoration across the region.

These data are a critical first step, so that some day, all of our prairies will make the grade. Congratulations to everyone who has been a part of this groundbreaking project.



Photos: Rebecca Blazer



Grassland Audit participants learn plants and protocols in preparation for this summer's monitoring.

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## Ornithology Classes at the Morton Arboretum

The Ornithology Certificate Program leads you through a study of bird biology, behavior, identification, and conservation. The following courses are offered this autumn:

**Birds of Illinois: Fall**—You will learn to identify birds by call and field ID marks.

- Section A: Five Sundays, Sept. 11 – Oct. 9. Denis Kania, Restoration Ecologist, St. Charles Park District
- Section B: Five Tuesdays, Sept. 13 – Oct. 11. Carol Fialkowski, Arboretum Instructor

**Creatures of the Air**—Originally named Systematics & Taxonomy. Carl Strang, Ph. D., Naturalist, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. Learn how birds are classified and consider the challenges of determining who is related to whom.

- Four Saturdays, Oct. 1 – 22; 9 am – noon.

**Waterfowl of the Palos Region**—Gloria Dobry, Arboretum Instructor and Walt Anderson, Visual Echoes Nature Photography. The sloughs and wetlands of the Palos area are prime places to see migrating waterfowl. • Saturday, Oct. 22; 9 am – noon.

**A Thousand Sandhill Cranes!** Field Experience at Jasper Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area. Gloria Dobry, Arboretum Instructor. Join us to see this unforgettable autumn ritual. • Saturday, October 29; 1 – 9 pm.

*For further information, a complete certificate description, course listing, and online registration; visit [www.mortonarb.org](http://www.mortonarb.org) or contact the Registrar's office at 630-719-2468.*

# Smack Dab in the Middle: Nesting Swainson's Hawks

By Mary Cannon

Although there had been isolated breeding records for Illinois, it was not until 1973 that a population of five nesting pairs of Swainson's Hawks was discovered in Kane County. In 1983, four nests were found in the same area. This population has persisted until present, but no detailed survey had been conducted since 1983.\*

That situation changed when Bob and Anita Morgan took up their quest. For the last three years, each week, from April through September, they've searched 37 square miles in Kane and McHenry counties and have located some six Swainson's Hawks' nesting sites—the only ones east of the Mississippi. "I'm a college librarian, but Bob



“Because we study the hawks,  
we know where they are  
and how they're doing;  
so we can alert people.”

worked with the British Trust for Ornithology and the British Antarctic Survey. He loves studying birds in the field, concentrating on one species' behavior; and now I love it too,” says Anita. That love recently focused their attention on McHenry County.

“As of two years ago, we had five breeding pairs, and now we can find only three. One of them is on what was a private farm, but the farmer sold 60 acres to a developer who wants to build single-family houses.\*\* We found the re-zoning sign in April, when we went to check on the nest,” she says. “We immediately alerted the IDNR. Then we wrote letters to McHenry County Board members and to area conservation groups. No one seemed to know there were hawks in the area!” Bob adds, “Because we study them, we know where they are and how they're doing; so we can alert people. Our part has been to document their presence and bring them to public awareness.”



By the May County Board meeting, the IDNR had recommended denial of the developer's petition, and it was withdrawn. By “alerting” people, the Morgans were able to stop the re-zoning bid—but maybe not forever. “Hedgerows and small woodlots bordering farm fields provide the nesting sites which have consistently produced three to four surviving young per year. To thrive, these birds need hundreds of acres of grasslands, but for-sale signs are springing up everywhere. Unfortunately,

the IDNR has some say over wildlife but no power over the land,” says Bob. Judy Pollock, of the BCN, adds, “The hawks are a state-endangered species, so you can't kill them; but you can destroy their habitat.”

Nonetheless, Bob and Anita Morgan aim to make that destruction harder. “Development seems to take precedence over everything, and the hawks are right smack in the middle of the building boom. We can't give up; we'll continue to do our work. We probably won't see this again, so we must make the most of it,” says Bob. “It's great to be involved in this opportunity—to try to preserve what's here—still offering this excitement and beauty. We don't want to lose these hawks in Illinois,” adds Anita. One thing is certain, if the hawks are smack in the middle of development, the Morgans are “smack in the middle” of defending them and their habitat.



This Swainson's hawk habitat has been saved from re-zoning through the monitoring, advocacy, and hard work of Bob and Anita Morgan and a coalition of determined neighbors.

Swainson's Hawk and Swainson's habitat photos: Arlene Kezior

\* Paraphrase from *Observations On Nesting Swainson's Hawks in Illinois, 2002—2004*, by Robert and Anita Morgan (to be published in the fall 2005 issue of IOS's *Meadowlark*)

\*\* On July 31, checking this same McHenry County nesting site, the Morgans found a pair of Swainson's tending two new fledglings.

# Birds Blitzed at Bong

By Elizabeth Plonka

**B**ong State Recreational Area in southeastern Wisconsin has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) due to data collected through the Chicago Wilderness Grassland Bird Blitz. Led by the area's naturalist Beth Goepfinger, the Bong Blitz was part of a three-year, regionwide effort to count as many birds as possible in all known grassland habitat.

"Without the Blitz I don't know how we could have gathered that data," said Yoyi Steele, the Wisconsin IBA program coordinator. The Blitz, which covered the nearly 5400-acre park, showed the presence of significant numbers of grassland birds, including vesper sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, northern harriers, upland sandpipers, short-eared owls, bobolinks and the federally-threatened Henslow's

**"The Bird Blitz volunteers have shown Bong to be a significant site for grassland birds."**

sparrow. There is no place in Chicago Wilderness where the short-eared owl and harrier regularly breed. The second most common bird on the site, after the red-winged blackbird, is the bobolink (312 bobolinks counted in 2003!).

Because of the quality of the results furnished by the Bird Blitz volunteers, Bong was nominated and designated as an IBA with just two years of data. Sites under consideration must meet the criteria set by Bird Life International and the National Audubon Society before they can be designated. "The Bird Blitz data clearly showed criteria species on the property in



*Data collected through the Chicago Wilderness Grassland Bird Blitz has been used to designate Bong State Recreation Area an "Important Bird Area."*



Photos: Yoyi Steele

numbers," said Steele. The next step for Bong is to get more recognition, funding and restoration. Steele hopes the designation will "lead to conservation planning and stewardship." Bong is a multi-use area with dog training, hunting, and all-terrain vehicle use. The data from the Blitz will help define the appropriate uses for certain areas where birds-of-concern find suitable habitat.

Even though the site now has IBA status, the Bird Blitzes will continue. Goepfinger arranges for free camping for the Blitz volunteers, and the Friends of Bong Recreational Area group cooks breakfast for the birders after they finish their routes. "I did the Blitz this year for the first time," said Steele, "We had a gorgeous day. It was fun." She hopes more and more birders will participate as the years go on and the area will get more respect from birders and other visitors because of the quality of the bird community. The Bird Blitz volunteers have shown Bong to be a significant site for grassland birds, and the IBA status should help draw in the resources to make it even better.

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## In the News:

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Butterfly monitor Tom Peterson was featured on the WBEZ morning radio program, Eight Forty-Eight, on July 18. Interviewer Gianofer Fields joined him on a butterfly walk, where they talked about the monitoring, the butterflies, and the importance of providing habitat for area wildlife. Congratulations, Tom, and thanks for sharing your expertise with Chicagoland listeners.

# Re: Why Was the Meadow Mowed?

*Restoring natural areas is a complex, long-term process and typically requires the dedication of many staff and volunteer stewards. It requires the hard work of both land managers who make difficult decisions and wildlife monitors who can tell us how the plants and animals are responding to our efforts. Below is an email exchange between birder Arlene Koziol and Restoration Ecologist Chris Hauser of the Kane County Forest Preserve District. It reflects well on the maturity of our community that we are able to grapple with difficult issues together. Thanks to Arlene and Chris for helping to educate all of us about restoration and communication, and also for their hard work at protecting wildlife and habitat. –Eds.*



Photo: Arlene Koziol

*The bobolink is one of many grassland species that benefit in the long-run from weed control at Burnidge Forest Preserve.*

June 22, 2005

Dear Chris,

This summer I went on two field trips to Burnidge Forest Preserve in Kane County. I was delighted to find golden grasslands, alive with songbirds and butterflies. On a visit to Burnidge this morning, I was shocked to see large areas of the prairie had been mowed! Habitat for our declining grassland bird population has been destroyed. Would you please investigate this matter right away? Perhaps you could save what is left. –Arlene.

Hi Arlene,

Thanks for the concern that you and several other birders had expressed about the mowing of this field.

Briefly, let me explain what we're doing here: For the past 100 years, that area was an agricultural field and provided nearly zero habitat for native wildlife. Shortly after acquiring this property, starting in 2003, the Forest Preserve District started the long-term process of converting this field to native grassland (prairie).

The plants that you saw out there were mostly noxious agricultural weeds (like Ragweed, Sow Thistle, Penny Cress, Foxtail Grass, etc), and are the plants that we call "pioneer species" because they are the first plants to grow in freshly plowed soil.

The restoration process involves sowing the seeds of dozens of species of native prairie grasses and wildflowers, followed by several years of summer mowing to keep the non-native pioneer weeds in check. If the seeding is done right, and we get enough rain, the prairie plants will eventually become dominant enough that the mowing will be confined to small weed patches. However, even after the native plants become firmly established, a second group of weeds (like White Sweet Clover, Field Thistle, and Wild Parsnip) starts to become an issue, so we occasionally mow patches of established prairies to control them.

We sadly acknowledge that we are destroying habitat for countless species, and we are also directly killing many bird nests when we mow, but we must make this short-term sacrifice for healthy habitats in the long-term. If we didn't do this mowing, we would NEVER have good successful habitat, as these coarse weeds generally provide poor bird habitat, and the prairie plants don't establish well without the mowing. In the future we will try to postpone mowing until late June or early July when many of the young birds have fledged.

If you want to talk about this more, please feel free to contact me. –Chris

*Conservationists have made a lot of headway at spreading the word that hayfields should not be mowed before August 1st, to protect the nests and nestlings of grassland birds. But, as Chris points out, when restoration is going through the tricky process of re-establishing a healthy natural ecosystem, it is sometimes necessary for a year or two to mow whenever the weeds are vulnerable. Fortunately those areas typically are not much used by grassland birds, but it sadly hurts some just the same. Having well-informed and caring people means that the best will be done for the long run. –Eds.*

# Signs of Recovery at Spring Creek Valley

By Lee Ramsey



Photo: Stephen Packard

Spring Creek volunteers and Forest Preserve staff seeded native plants at Penny Road Hill last autumn, followed by brush clearing in the winter and burning in the spring. By June, the grasshopper sparrows were showing their approval of a job well done.

As the most ambitious restoration project ever undertaken in our area—in Cook County’s Spring Creek Valley Forest Preserve—approaches its first anniversary, monitors have been visiting areas newly cleared of invasive brush or opened up by prescribed burns looking for signs of returning wildlife. It’s early, of course, to expect much. What’s worse, our drought conditions seem to have depressed some populations, particularly those of frogs and wetland birds. But none of this deters the enthusiasm or dedication of a cadre of volunteers, who will make sure that the Spring Creek Valley restoration becomes notable not only for its size but also for the detailed record of its results.

Planning for the project began in early 2004, with support from a number of national, state and local groups. Clean up and brush cutting got underway at a kick-off event October 9th. During the fall and winter contractors came in with Seppis; volunteers turned out for regular workdays; FPD staff conducted prescribed burns. On Earth Day 2005, some local politicians and officials turned out to give moral—and, in some cases, muscle—support. Today the work continues, but much more remains to be done. Spring Creek Valley contains nearly 4,000 acres, mostly in Eurasian meadow, overgrown woodland and shrubland. It will take 4-5 years before the most critical work is done in returning it to prairie, savanna and

“The restoration of Spring Creek Valley is already providing habitat for an international species of concern, the grasshopper sparrow.”

healthy forest. So far restoration has occurred mainly in about half a dozen areas of ten to 50 acres each.

So what have we been finding?

The most encouraging and exciting find was Alan Anderson’s report of ten grasshopper sparrows at newly-cleared Penny Road Hill this June—after never having found them there before. Grasshopper sparrows are an international species of concern, according to the Partners in Flight ranking program.

There are more encouraging signs for birds. Wendy Paulson has been monitoring an area called the “Valley” since 1972 and has witnessed some dramatic changes during that time. After years of declining bird diversity and numbers, corresponding to years of grassland habitat decline, things are now looking up. About three years ago, the brush was cleared with a Seppi, and now the numbers of meadowlarks and bobolinks seem to be increasing every year. Wendy looks forward to the planned removal of the drain tiles, which promises to bring back the wetland species.

Bird monitor Margo Milde found a burst of activity in woods bordering a previously “impenetrable buckthorn thicket,” recently cut down—indigo bunting, wood thrush, American goldfinch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, great crested flycatcher, veery. Robert Sliwinski found blue-winged warblers (a “surprise”) and a Cooper’s hawk in shrubland at an area called “Headwaters,” in addition to eastern bluebirds outside of the restored area. According to Sliwinski and Anderson, the numbers of Henslow’s Sparrows appeared to be down this year.

Dale Harper, butterfly monitor and editor of the newsletter, “Spring Creek Revival,” says it’s too early to tell if the restorations have made any difference for butterflies. In 2004 at Hill Prairie she found great spangled fritillaries, eastern tailed blues and duskywings along with large numbers of tiger swallowtails. This year on a butterfly walk at Headwaters she spotted mourning cloaks, pearly eyes, wood nymphs, wood satyrs and black

swallowtails. All of these are expected species in our area. Dale is confident that “if we improve the woodlands, the aphrodites, great spangled fritillaries and pearly eyes will increase.”

Mike Redmer conducted a “Great Herp Search” in Spring Creek Valley during 2004 and kept records from several field trips there in 2003-04. They found eastern tiger salamanders, painted turtles, snapping turtles, plains garter snakes, eastern garter snakes, Dekay’s snakes, and fox snakes. They haven’t done a follow-up study yet, but Mike observes that there have been



# Long-term Grassland Bird Data from the U.S. Army-Joliet Training Center

by Andy Neill



Photo: Andy Neill

Bob Pechtold and Garrett Hyzer (standing) measure vegetation height and density at Joliet Army Training Area to determine their effects on grassland birds.

Since 2001, we have been monitoring the grassland birds and vegetation at the Joliet Training Center (JTC) near Elwood, Illinois. The JTC is north and adjacent to the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and is an active U.S. Army training facility. In keeping with federal mandates, we are responsible for monitoring non-game wildlife species to document the effects military and other activities are having on the natural resources at the JTC.

The large open buffer areas around the shooting ranges are comprised mostly of typical old-field species. We have identified just over 70 plant species in these fields, but they are dominated mainly by a handful of species, listed here in descending order of abundance: Canadian Goldenrod, (*Solidago canadensis*), Kentucky Bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), Hungarian Brome (*Bromus inermis*), Hedge Bindweed (*Convolvulus sepium*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Yellow Rocket (*Barbarea vulgaris*), Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) and Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). In 2004, the overall combined vegetative cover for the largest old-field complex

(approximately 1,200 acres) was composed of 29% grasses, 58% forbs and 14% bare ground. The average height of this vegetation was 86.7 cm and produced a litter depth of only 0.7 cm because of prescribed burning earlier in the year.

While the old-fields at the Joliet Training Center would never be confused with a high-quality prairie, its large size did attract 47 species of grassland-associated bird species in 2004, including the grassland obligate species (in descending order of abundance) the Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Sedge Wren and Henslow's Sparrow. The most abundant bird was the Red-Winged Blackbird with a mean relative abundance of 1.80 individuals per 100-meter radius census point. The Henslow's Sparrow has shown the greatest decline of all the species since 2001, in part because of prescribed burning, consistent with their preference for deep leaf litter and denser vegetation. However, the Henslow's Sparrow rebounded in 2005, one year after the burning.

Density mapping has shown as predicted, that the Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows prefer sites with shorter vegetation -- or in the case of the JTC, areas that are regularly mowed. The Bobolink and Henslow's Sparrow, both considered highly area sensitive, were located at the west end and largest portion of the old-field complex. In general, our density maps, based on census data, were consistent with the North American Breeding Bird Survey distribution maps.

For a copy of the full report and data bases on the long-term ecological monitoring of grassland and woodland birds and forest and dolomite prairie vegetation contact Andy Neill at 815-280-232 or [aneill@jtc.edu](mailto:aneill@jtc.edu).

Andy Neill teaches in the Natural Science Department at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, IL.

This research is supported in part by an appointment to the Research Participation Program at the U.S. Army Environmental Center (USAEC) administered by the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education through an interagency agreement between the U.S. Department of Energy and USAEC.

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“credible reports” of Blanding's turtle and “unconfirmed reports” of pickerel frogs, which haven't been documented in northeastern Illinois since 1948.

Craig Stettner and a group of volunteers have compiled data from 8 sites within Spring Creek Valley as part of Audubon's Calling Frog Survey. According to Craig, “This is a perfect year to illustrate the need for long-term data,” because frog populations are down all over the area. Western chorus frogs,

American toads, green frogs, bullfrogs were all present in large numbers in 2004 and can be expected to return. “Hopefully,” he comments, “the northern leopard frogs, whose strongest numbers seem to be in the Headwaters area, and the Cope's gray treefrogs, who seem to have a greater presence just outside of the preserve than inside, will expand their ranges.”

We are confident that 2005 is just the beginning of exciting times at Spring Creek Valley.

# Cricket Frogs at Big Rock

By Katherine Stola



Cricket frog photo: R.A. Fridell

I have been a frog monitor in Kane County since I was in high school. Now I incorporate my frog monitoring into my environmental science college curriculum, and this year's results have been particularly exciting.

My monitoring site is Big Rock Creek in southwestern Kane County, and this year, in addition to the common species of chorus frog, American toad, green frog, and bullfrog, I also heard the Blanchard's cricket frog consistently through June and July at both monitoring locations within the site. The cricket frog was once called the most common amphibian in Illinois, but it has been declining for years and is now rare.

When I first heard the cricket frogs, I was not certain of what I was hearing. I listened to the CD of frog sounds and determined it sounded like marbles hitting each other, which is characteristic of cricket frogs. I was so excited I asked my Dad to come down to the creek with me to record the calls of the cricket frog. Although we have several tape recorders, we could not find the appropriate batteries anywhere in our house. Finally at midnight, we recorded the call we heard. We informed Mary

Ochsenschlager, our Kane County coordinator, the next morning, and everyone involved became excited. Cricket frogs were definitely living in Big Rock.

Blanchard's cricket frog, *Acris crepitans blanchardi*, is a nonclimbing member of the tree frog family. It is one of the smaller species of frog, and it is found near streams and ponds. The coloring of the cricket frog is variable, but most frogs are brown, gray, olive, or tan. Cricket frogs also have a dark triangle between their eyes.

The distribution of the cricket frog extends from Ohio, south to Texas, and north to South Dakota. Populations of cricket frog are declining in northern states. Currently, the cricket frog is an endangered species in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Populations are declining in northern Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois as well.

The causes for the cricket frog decline are unknown but are suspected to include habitat fragmentation, climate change, traffic, and pollution. The existence of the cricket frog in Big Rock is surely a good sign of the health of the Big Rock Creek, and hopefully they will continue "click-click-clicking" there for many years to come.



© R.A. Fridell

## Call for Nominations

### *Help Recognize Local Heroes*



The Habitat Project is about collecting knowledge, effecting change, and building a culture of conservation in our communities through monitoring, stewardship and advocacy for natural areas. The Habitat Project Leadership Awards recognize those individuals who exemplify the Habitat Project spirit and are changing the world by doing so.

Do you know someone who deserves recognition for their hard work and leadership? Please nominate them for a Leadership Award and share their names and stories with the rest of us. Send a short paragraph describing why you're nominating them to Karen Glennemeier at [kglennemeier@audubon.org](mailto:kglennemeier@audubon.org) (or mail it to the return address on this newsletter). Nominations are due by October 15.

*Thanks for helping spread the word about these inspirational people!*

Illustration: Lynda Wallis

# Come out to the Habitat Hootenanny!




Come rain or shine,  
we'll have shelter!



Illustration: Lynda Wallis

Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 7 pm at Salt Creek Park in N.E. DuPage County

Celebrate autumn and the winding down of another glorious field season with other monitors, stewards, advocates, and friends!

-  **Bring the kids and family,** Frisbees, footballs, and games to share with the rest of us.
-  If you're musically inclined, **bring an instrument** (& a chair, if you have a favorite) for an impromptu music jam or two. Voices are instruments, too!
-  **Bring a dish to share if you like.** Drinks, plates, cups, flatware, napkins, and ice will be provided.

## Featured Events:

**Stories From the Field.** Inspiring, funny, outrageous, unusual, or other interesting stories of monitoring, restoring, advocacy, and other work that we do. Contact us to reserve a two-minute time slot to tell your tale, or the tale of a friend: [kglennemeier@audubon.org](mailto:kglennemeier@audubon.org).

**Way-Out Wilderness Awards.** Nominate a friend (or yourself) for one of the following awards:

- ✓ **Outback Award** for getting lost the best and longest.
- ✓ **Spirit Award** for the best attitude under the worst conditions.
- ✓ **To Hell and Back Award** for getting the most bruised and scraped in the field.
- ✓ **Hidden Jewel Award** for the best unexpected find.
- ✓ **Edison Award** for the best improvised solution in the field.

See the full list of 20 categories at [www.habitatproject.org](http://www.habitatproject.org). Contact us with your nominations: [kglennemeier@audubon.org](mailto:kglennemeier@audubon.org).

**Ask the Experts.** Experts on stewardship, advocacy, plants, birds, butterflies, herps, and photography will be available for your one-on-one questions about restoration, identification, saving habitat, and more.

**Networking and Recruiting.** We'll set aside a period for representatives of local organizations to gather and share their groups' missions with interested people. No tables, but reps might want to bring a name badge or a sheet of paper to identify their organization. Or bring flyers or "business cards" to share with each other.

## ...And More!

**What's the big ID?** A table with specimens and pictures of various species, with names identified on the reverse side.

For people who are excited about the identification skills they learned this summer and want to try them out.


**Kids' Art Table.** Adventures in nature art for kids and parents, led by local educators.

**Recycled Treasures.** Bring books, field equipment, or other items that you no longer need but that others might appreciate. The table will be open for all to rummage through and find new treasures, regardless of whether you've brought something yourself.

Salt Creek Park, in NE DuPage County is located on the north side of Elizabeth Dr., east of Addison Rd. and west of Wood Dale Rd. Exit I-290 at Rte. 83 and head north to 3rd Ave. (Oak Meadows Rd). Head west, then go north on Wood Dale Road, and west on Elizabeth.

RSVPs appreciated, to Karen Glennemeier at [kglennemeier@audubon.org](mailto:kglennemeier@audubon.org) or 847-965-1150 x20. Contact Karen to reserve a time slot for *Stories from the Field* or *Way-Out Wilderness Award* nominees.

Chicago Wilderness Habitat Project

 **Audubon** CHICAGO REGION

5225 Old Orchard Rd., Suite 37  
Skokie, IL 60077

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Whoop it up  
while you wind it down,

at the Chicago Wilderness

# Habitat Hootenanny!

Come celebrate and mix it up with other  
monitors, stewards, advocates, and friends

Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup> 4 to 7 pm  
Salt Creek Park in N.E. DuPage County

See inside back cover for details.

