

The Habitat HERALD

January 2006

Volume 7, Issue 1

Picnic in Chicago's Park Dunes: Recognition for Montrose & Loyola Beaches

By Mary Cannon



Photo by Pete Lekki

Julian Rodriguez, an eighth grader at Waters School in Chicago, removes a mammoth cottonwood sapling at Montrose Beach Dunes.

"It's a wonderful site and will now be more secure."

Debra Nelson, IDNR District Biologist is talking about Montrose Beach Dunes, which received an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) designation in October. Created in the '70's, INAI's goal is compiling a statewide inventory of the significant, highest level, natural areas that will serve as a guide for government and non-government organizations when making long-term decisions about natural resources.

Angela Sturdevant, the Chicago Park District's Natural Areas Manager is delighted. "This is the first park district designated site," she says. So, why Montrose—the largest public beach in Chicago? Leslie Borns, long-time Plants of Concern (POC) monitor and Montrose Beach site steward answers.

"Interesting vegetation started showing up on the beach in the early 90's. The vegetation managed to take hold because the park district's beach-grooming machines had inadvertently missed it. Soon the plants

started to collect sand, and small dunes formed." By the late 90's, Borns was documenting more plants, including Lakeshore Rush (*Juncus balticus*), not seen on a Chicago beach in 50 years. At that point she approached the Chicago Park District (CPD) and asked them to fence and protect the area.

The fencing worked, allowing more dunes to form and vegetation to naturally occur. The CPD helped by doing some planting in 2001 to stabilize parts of the site, which encouraged even more growth.

IDNR's Nelson explains further. "When Leslie called and then toured the site with me and Susanne Masi (coordinator of POC), I realized its importance. It has five State-Listed (E/T) plant species and four nesting bird species. It even has a Panne community, which is globally imperiled—with fewer than 200 acres world-wide," she adds.

Borns points to more features. "The vegetation is not only important in its own right but provides wildlife habitat and is rich in food sources and cover for birds. It's a critical stop-over for migratory birds, including the federally-endangered Piping Plover. It's also wonderful for people—while others are playing volleyball or swimming on the main portion of the beach, we might have photographers, birders, Native-American medicine circles or a Tibetan chanter enjoying our site." She adds, "This was my vision, and it's thrilling it has become a reality. The Park District should be commended for nurturing biodiversity in the middle of a big city."

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

Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network

Melanie Manner 847-464-4426

Dragonfly Monitoring Network

Gareth Blakesley 773-755-5100 x3032

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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Picnic In Chicago's Park Dunes- continued from page 1

Spurred by her findings at Montrose, in 2000 Borns started exploring other areas looking for volunteer vegetation. After finding some at Loyola and Kathy Osterman Beaches, she notified Susanne Masi and the CPD. Soon these sites became protected and managed like Montrose Beach Dunes. Ann Whelan eventually took

“The Park District should be commended for nurturing biodiversity in the middle of a big city.”

over as POC steward at Loyola. (“Acting Locally,” Jan. 2005 Herald). Now the park district has received an \$18,000 grant to perform more work there. “This will allow us to prepare a restoration plan, control invasives, plant native species, and provide outreach and education. We’re trying to increase dune habitat on the lakefront, trying to enhance this natural gift,” says an energized Angela Sturdevant. Ann Whelan agrees. “If we can find ways to bring improved habitat into the area and educate people about wildlife so they’re happy with it, then we can talk about co-existence. Picnics in the city park dunes could be a new adventure.” Or, as Debra Nelson says, “If you build it—maybe they will come.”

Note: Volunteers at both beaches are needed—and welcomed. Contact Leslie Borns at birdperson1@msn.com or Susanne Masi at smasi@chicagobotanic.org.



Piping Plover at Montrose Beach Dunes.

Photo by Carol Freeman

Learn From the Experts

Classes are offered in partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, Geneva Park District and Fox Valley Park District.

Register on-line at www.genevaparks.org or call 630-232-4542.

For questions, please contact Renae Frigo at 630-584-1885.

Going Native: Why, How, and How Much? As a homeowner, would you like to save money, time and resources – while beautifying your property AND promoting environmentally friendly practices? Jack Pizzo, Senior Ecologist and owner of Pizzo and Associates will review the numerous benefits of going native, how to establish native plants on your property, and the costs and maintenance involved.

Saturday, February 4—1-4pm, Pottawatomie Community Center, St. Charles. Ages 18 and up. \$18 per person.

Urban Tree Advancements Want to learn about urban trees and what qualities make them special? Dr. George Ware of the Morton Arboretum will review his work and current issues in the field of trees in the urban and suburban environments.

Thursday, February 9—7-9pm, Pottawatomie Community Center, St. Charles. Ages 18 and up. \$8 per person.

Going to the Dogs: A Report on a Prairie Invasive

By Joe Walsh

Grey dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is a native weedy invader that overruns wet prairies in the absence of fire. It grows clonally underground in dense thickets which produce no good fuel for fires. By itself, it is a great plant—birds eat the berries, the thickets provide cover for animals, and, under natural conditions of periodic fire, the thickets are contained. But without fire, it is a bully.

“From a management standpoint, identity matters”

During the moratorium on restoration work in my local preserves on the North Branch of the Chicago River, lots and lots of dogwood invaded the sites. When I first started teaching a field ecology class at Northwestern, I thought this would be a fantastic case for the students – an intersection of local fire ecology, invasiveness, biodiversity, management issues, and politics – the perfect learning experience. So, the students mastered the identification of two-to-three dozen plant species, set up meter-square plots, measured the biodiversity of the plots, and the effect of the dogwoods. I knew for sure that, with these sun-loving prairie plants, we would see a decline in biodiversity per plot, whether we used the number of species, or a measure like evenness (the idea being that 5 robins and 5 crows is more diverse than 9 robins and 1 crow). When we collected data that first year, it looked like there was a trend; unfortunately, the statistics came back as not quite significant. I said, “Aah, we just need more data.”

So, I went back again this fall—thinking we would clinch it with more data. We didn't. Number of species per plot and evenness did not respond at all to dogwood invasion (until, of course, you measure a dogwood-only thicket). I love it when nature sticks its thumb in the eye of your pet hypothesis. After thinking some more, I realized that, from a pure theory standpoint, one species is as good as the next. But, from a management standpoint, identity matters. So, I had the students calculate FQI, floristic quality per plot. FQI rates conservative species higher than weedy ones. Wow, what a result. It turns



Photos by Joe Walsh

Students settle down in the prairie to scientifically document the negative effects of dogwood invasion.

out that as dogwood invades there is a silent turnover in prairies—from high-quality species, like blazing stars, to weedy ones, like tall goldenrods. Slowly, and imperceptibly, those plots were going to the dogs. All the rare and important stuff that lives around here was dying off while the weedy generalists found on any roadside were ousting them.

The good news is that the moratorium is over for most of those sites, and now we can watch them rebound in quality. We can also get out there and count crayfish burrows after the fires. Why? Well, we did it once, and my students noticed that the crayfish really seemed to avoid areas with dogwood. Good to know if you are trying to preserve the smooth green snakes and the red-bellied snakes that use crayfish burrows for hibernating. Now, we just need one more year's data...

BCN Census Data Shows Where the Birds Are

By Lee Ramsey and Judy Pollock

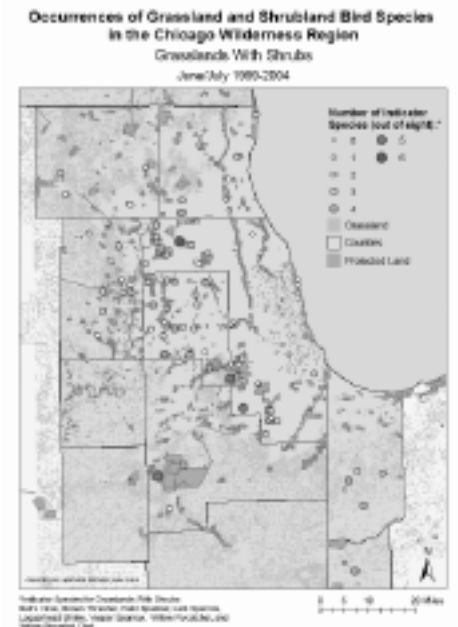
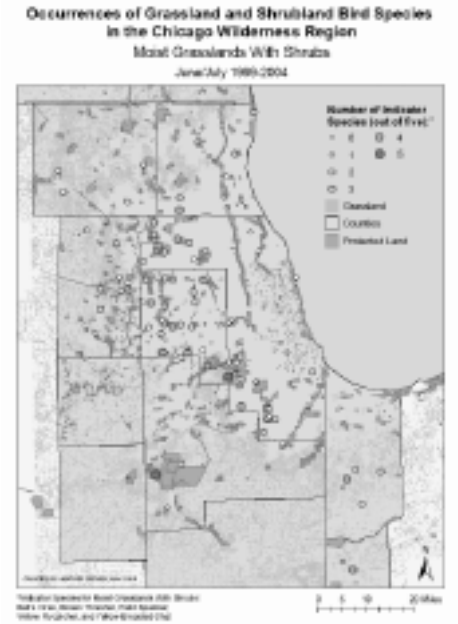
How are grassland and shrubland birds doing in the Chicago area? According to a recent study done for the Bird Conservation Network (BCN), populations are in fair-to-poor condition overall, but several preserves in outlying areas of Chicago are still maintaining a healthy diversity of species.

Heather Secker prepared the report, “Occurrences of Grassland and Shrubland Bird Indicator Species in the Chicago Wilderness Region,” as a graduate research project. She used data collected by BCN volunteer monitors during the breeding seasons from 1999 through 2004. Our monitors found the greatest diversity of species at the John J. Duffy Preserve in Cook County and the Des Plaines Conservation Area in Will County. Other preserves with good numbers of indicator species were Orland Grassland, Bartel Grassland, Paul Douglas Forest Preserve and Poplar Creek Forest Preserve in Cook Co., Rollins Savanna in Lake County (Illinois) and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Will Co. (Note that Midewin does not have a BCN Census monitor. If we had complete data from that site, it would no doubt have ranked higher.)

The study analyzed more than 4,700 monitoring records covering 22 “indicator species” at 110 locations in six Illinois and two Indiana counties. The areas were considered in four different grassland categories, moist with shrubs (5 indicator species), moist without shrubs (11 species), dry with shrubs (3 species) and dry without shrubs (4 species). Greatest diversity by far occurred in the moist grasslands. Two preserves, Orland and Des Plaines, reported all of the moist-with-shrubs indicators (Bell's vireo, brown thrasher, field sparrow, willow flycatcher, yellow-breasted chat), and 14 other locations reported four of the five. Twenty-three locations reported more than half of the 11 moist-grasslands- without-shrubs indicator species, which include bobolink, dickcissel, eastern meadowlark, grasshopper and Henslow's sparrow, and sedge wren. Accompanying Heather's report are seven maps showing the results. These can be seen at <http://bcnbirds.org/data/ebirdmaps.html>.

Heather's analysis helps to confirm earlier studies that have shown how important the habitat structure is if we want to maintain a diversity of species, and gives us a good idea of the extent and diversity of these four groups of birds in the region. She recommends future studies of the history and the hydrology of the more diverse preserves. She believes that more intense focus on a few individual species and a few of the more important preserves would be profitable.

It's encouraging to see this new evidence of the contributions our volunteer monitors are making. As we bring in new recruits to our monitoring corps and get even better coverage in the future, perhaps we can bring some of Heather's suggestions to life.



Watch for a future article about Heather's brother Eric Secker's analysis of BCN data – scheduled to be released on www.bcnbirds.org soon after we go to press.

Swainson's Hawk Announcement

Help is needed to save a noble raptor. Each year 3 to 5 pairs of Swainson's Hawks nest in a small area of northern Kane or southern McHenry Counties. The area has the only breeding population of these hawks east of the Mississippi. This summer, three nests were found. The Swainson's Hawk Project has formed to search nearby areas in the hopes that hawks displaced by development are relocating there – and to find ways to protect them.

Field team volunteers are needed next spring and summer. For more information contact Vic Berardi 847-680-5281 or vbirdman@aol.com or Bob and Anita Morgan at 708-209-1938.



The Introduction of Multicolored Asian Ladybugs *Harmonia axyridis* and Consequent Decline of Local Ladybugs

By Moneen Marie Jones

Did you know that those swarms of orange ladybugs that try to make their way into our houses are an introduced species? They are often sold to gardeners to control aphids. One of our monitors recently studied their effects on native species.



'M' marking behind the head shows this is the Multi-colored Asian lady beetle.

The introduced ladybird beetle, *Harmonia axyridis* has been thought to be responsible for the recent decline in numbers of native ladybird beetles, *Hippodamia convergens*. While adults of *H. convergens* eat an average of 75 aphids per day, and consume up to 350 aphids over their larval development, adults of *H. axyridis* eat approximately twice that amount per day and can consume up to 1200 aphids through their larval stages alone. These observations have led researchers to assume that declines of native species are due to the better competitive ability of *H. axyridis*.

However, it is also possible that predation is the cause, since larvae of *H. axyridis* are known to prey upon the native Pink spotted ladybug, and have also been shown to lower rates of larval development in another native, the two-spotted ladybug.

Predation occurs when species share the same prey resources. For my research, I studied the larvae of two co-existing, aphid-eating ladybug species, *H. axyridis* (non-native) and *H. convergens* (native).

In the laboratory, predation occurred between *H. axyridis* and *H. convergens* even when alternative prey was in overabundance, with *H. axyridis* the winner in the high majority of cases. *H. axyridis* larvae also ate each other at an even higher rate.

In the laboratory, *H. axyridis* also displayed shorter development time and

egg duration and longer larvae length, which could contribute to development and survival successes. These results suggest that while predation was a small factor, it does occur when food is overabundant and population density is not a factor.

I am currently surveying the distribution and habitat of *H. axyridis* throughout Illinois in hopes of discovering the correlation of beetle density to Illinois vineyards, crops, urban and natural areas.

For a copy of this paper in its entirety, call Moneen Jones at 773-220-7716 or email her at mmjones@neiu.edu.

Plants of Concern Training

Plants of Concern is a rare plant monitoring program, a collaboration of over 200 trained volunteer monitors working together with 54 cooperating landowners at over 165 sites in six counties. The data are providing land managers with information that helps them to set management practices. Plants of Concern will be holding training workshops on weekends during April and early May at various sites throughout the region.

Workshop Schedule for April

Saturday, April 8—Blackwell Forest Preserve, Warrenville, DuPage County

Sunday, April 23—Glacial Park, Ringwood, McHenry County

Sunday, April 30—Chicago Botanic Garden, Cook County

Workshops will be held from 9:30am to 3pm. This workshop will give you an opportunity to learn monitoring skills and to select a monitoring assignment or will refresh your skills for the new season. We strongly encourage any monitors who have never been to a workshop to attend.

Bring a lunch. Morning refreshments will be served.

Registration is required. A confirmation will be sent after registration and directions will follow shortly before workshop date.

More dates will be announced soon. For more information, please visit our webpage at: www.plantsofconcern.org.

To get on the mailing list, contact: Emily Hudson, Program Assistant, Plants of Concern, 1000 Lake Cook Road,

Glencoe, IL 60022, or call 847-835-6873 or email: ehudson@chicagobotanic.org.

Save the Date! Wild Things Winter Workshops

Chicago Wilderness and Audubon, Chicago Region will host a series of Winter Workshops at The Brookfield Zoo and DePaul University to discuss a variety of topics for advocates, stewards and volunteers. We encourage anyone who is interested to please join us!

Saturday, January 21—10am-12:30pm

DePaul University Student Center, Room 313

The Natural Science Research Agenda for Chicago Wilderness—Volunteers, stewards and interested members of the conservation community are invited to offer their suggestions as to the research that's needed to help us achieve our conservation goals. RSVP not required but appreciated: Lauren Umek, 773-325-4639 or lumek@depaul.edu. For more information, please visit: www.depaul.edu/~lumek/CWRResearchAgenda.

Sunday, February 19—10am-3pm

Brookfield Zoo

New Faces—Presentations and discussion on recruitment, outreach, partnerships and community and youth involvement. Learn what others are doing.

Friends and Politics—Presentations and discussion on advocacy, communications, the political process and dealing with public. RSVP not required but appreciated: Maggie Kurcz, 847-965-1150 or mkurcz@audubon.org. For more information visit www.habitatproject.org.

Frog Monitoring Workshops 2006

These workshops are for both beginning and experienced monitors. We'll teach and review the calls of our 13 species of frogs and toads, help new monitors find survey sites, and discuss the monitoring protocol. Experienced monitors are encouraged to attend, in order to learn any protocol changes, obtain data sheets, review frog calls, and share lessons learned from last year.

Tuesday, January 24—7-9pm, St. Joseph College, Rensselaer, IN (Jasper County). On Hwy. 231 South, just off of I-65. Meet in the Science Building, Room 011. Contact Bob Brodman, (219) 866-6215.

Saturday, February 4—1-4pm, Ryerson Conservation Area Visitors Center (Lake County, IL). Located about a mile south of Half Day Road, between I-94 and Hwy. 45. Head west on Half Day road from I-94, then turn south on Riverwoods Road and look for the entrance on your right. Contact Tom Smith, (847) 968-3329.

Tuesday, February 7—7-9pm, Volunteer Resource Center (Cook County). Located at 6100 N. Central on Chicago's northwest side. This workshop is co-sponsored by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and the Chicago Park District. Contact Bill Koenig, (773) 631-0237.

Thursday, February 16—7-9pm, Sugar Creek Administrative Building of the Forest Preserve District (Will County). At 17540 W. Laraway Road in Joliet. Take Rte. 80 to Briggs, head south on Briggs (turns into 52-S), then west on Laraway Road, and look to the north side of the street after about a half mile. Contact Rebecca Key, (815) 722-7366.

Saturday, March 4—1:30pm-4:30pm

Brookfield Zoo

Invasive Species—

Comparing notes on what works and what doesn't. Evaluating and improving the region's "Best Management Practices", building on the Nature Preserve Commission's Invasive Species Guidelines—and our own experiences.

Restoration Planning—Presentations and discussion from a case-study perspective. Local examples of restoration plans that have improved the work (and sometimes attracted special funding). RSVP not required but appreciated:

Maggie Kurcz, 847-965-1150 or mkurcz@audubon.org. For more information visit www.habitatproject.org.

Confirmed Participants for the preceding 4 workshops:

Roger Keller and Joe Neumann, stewards, Palos Preserves
Barbara Birmingham, steward, Ted Stone Preserve
Dick Riner, steward, Bartel Grassland
Logan Lee, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
Renae Frigo, Nature Programs Supervisor at the St. Charles Park District
Sue Harney, Supervisor, Dundee Township
Donnie Dann, president, Bird Conservation Network
Sam Oliver, Citizens for Conservation
Dave Hodge, Turning Leaf





Setting Your Sights: A Photographer Reflects on Dragonflies

By Carol Freeman



Photo by Carol Freeman

Mystery Dragonfly or Black-tipped darner?

Could this be the first sighting of a Black-tipped darner in Illinois? Experts think so. I took this photograph at Illinois Beach State Park on September 9, 2005. After getting the film back and searching all my field guides, I decided I could not be sure what species I had found. I sent the photos to Gary Moore and Gareth Blakesley for some expert identification. They came up with two possible ID's: it could either be a Lance-tipped darner, (recorded throughout Illinois) or the Black-tipper darner, which has never been recorded in Illinois.

Several indicators point to the positive ID of this species as a Black-tipped darner. One of the reasons is size: the Lance-tipped is supposed to have an s-9 noticeably larger than s-8 because of the female having the largest ovipositor of the Mosaic's. On this photo, s-8 and s-9 seem to be the same. The lack of spots on s-10 also favors a Black-tipped ID. Another trait that might determine this "girl" is the color of the stigma and costa of the wings; the color observable in the photo (not seen in this newsletter's black-and-white rendition) is much closer to the color described in a major science book on dragonflies for a Black-tipped darner - "dark reddish brown," while the Lance-tipped would be more yellow-orange.

I was thrilled when I thought I had been the first person to spot this species in Illinois. I was then equally disappointed when told my sighting would not count because only specimens are accepted for official records. As a nature photographer and lover of nature, I would never consider collecting a specimen for any reason. Photographing nature has always been my way of "collecting" species. This is the second time I have photographed a first record of a dragonfly in Illinois (the last was in 2004 with a sighting of a Russet-tipped clubtail in Cook County); and yet my information is not being used because it is "only" a photograph. It seems a shame to waste this valuable information. I hope there is room somewhere to include citizen-science observations, as I am sure other non-scientists are seeing and recording firsts all the time.

Carol Freeman is a noted wildlife photographer. Her 2006 calendars are now on sale, with proceeds going to her Endangered Species Photography Project. You can reach her at carol@carolfreemanphotography.com.