

The Habitat HERALD

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If You Build It: Reclaiming Rollins Savanna

By Mary Cannon



Photos: Ed Beilfuss



A birder since he was 12, Jim Solum became a monitor for Rollins Savanna two years ago as part of the Bird Conservation Network (BCN) Breeding Bird Census. “Once Rollins went from farm

to forest preserve, and the wetland restoration started, it became a goldmine,” he says. “Now the indigenous species have doubled; the marsh in the middle of the site is attracting more birds; and the Lake County Forest Preserve (LCFP) is asking for birders’ input as to the best place for a public-viewing area. This is just one more step in the cooperative planning that started when they asked us to work with them on a mowing plan that would save nesting birds,” he adds.

“Birds, wildlife, and people are noticing what’s happening at Rollins Savanna.”

Nick Huber, LCFP project manager for Rollins Savanna, gives credit to the birding community for advising on the adaptive management strategy for the preserve. Work on

the 1,225-acre preserve began in 1996 and has accelerated in recent years as the work moves into the “implementation phase.” The work includes disabling over 13 miles of drain tiles; installing over 200,000 native wetland plants, 2,000 native trees and shrubs, and several hundred acres of prairie restoration (native seeding and controlling invasive species).

Controlling invasives is one area where the birders’ input has been needed. According to Nick, “Mowing invasives to provide native prairie seedlings more sunlight and soil resources has proven difficult because the most effective time to mow corresponds with nesting time for some of the early-arriving prairie birds. Therefore, we do not mow in June or July unless it’s a field that’s... not attractive to birds anyway.”

Nick describes some of the positive trends. “Natural hydrology has been restored to wetlands; and birds, frogs, salamanders, turtles and fish have responded well,” he says. “Further, native wetland plants are gaining a foothold over invasive species, and native trees and shrubs are providing perching habitat for birds, like shrikes.”

Birders see positive trends as well. Donnie Dann, long-time volunteer for the BCN who monitors the site several times a year, says that seven or eight years ago, the place was a “fallow farm without much bird life.” Now, with the drain tiles gone, wetlands have been created; and there have been confirmed nestings of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Common Moorhens, Least Bitterns, American Coots, Ruddy Ducks, and the Virginia and Sora Rails. He adds, “In the winter, we’ve also seen Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers; and, in the summer we have grassland birds like the Henslow’s and Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissels, Bobolinks, and Eastern Meadowlarks.”

The birders and land managers have a great appreciation for each other’s work. Donnie Dann says, “I can’t praise Jennifer Filipiak (wildlife biologist), and Nick Huber and the entire Lake County Forest Preserve District enough; they’ve provided this wonderful habitat for birds.”

Volunteer site steward Ed Beilfuss says, “I’ve been thrilled to watch the progress of the restoration. The number of

The Habitat Project serves the grassroots of the Chicago Wilderness conservation community:



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 helps to provide resources for the thousands of grassroots scientists, monitors, stewards, and advocates who work side by side to assure the holistic and effective conservation of Chicago Wilderness.

Grassroots Opportunities

BIRD CONSERVATION NETWORK CENSUS

LEE RAMSEY 847-501-4683

BIRD BLITZES TO MONITOR GRASSLANDS, WOODLANDS, SHRUBLANDS, OR WETLANDS

JUDY POLLOCK 847-965-1150

CHICAGO WILDERNESS CALLING FROG SURVEY

KAREN GLENNEMEIER 847-965-1150

BUTTERFLY MONITORING

MELANIE MANNER 847-464-4426

DRAGONFLY MONITORING NETWORK

CRAIG STETTNER 847-925-6214

PLANT COMMUNITY AUDITS OF WOODS, PRAIRIES, OR WETLANDS

KAREN GLENNEMEIER 847-965-1150

PLANTS OF CONCERN RARE PLANT MONITORING

SUSANNE MASI 847-835-8269

RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP

WWW.HABITATPROJECT.ORG/RESTORATION PROJECTS OR THE VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP NETWORK WEBSITE AT:
WWW.NATURE.ORG/WHEREWEWORK/NORTHAMERICA/STATES/ILLINOIS/VOLUNTEER/ART9844.HTML

ADVOCACY AND POLICY WORK

WWW.SIERRACLUB.ORG/IL/ OR WWW.FOTFP.ORG (COOK COUNTY) OR WWW.HABITATPROJECT.ORG

GRASSROOTS EDUCATION

WWW.HABITATPROJECT.ORG

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We welcome to our newsletter
team new writers, editors, stamp
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artists, staplers, and anyone else
who would enjoy getting involved.
To learn more, contact Mary
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mjkcannon@hotmail.com

A New Face in Chicago Wilderness

By Justin Pepper

About ten years ago, a friend loaned me a book. It had a big impact on me.

It was the summer before my senior year at the University of Kansas and I had the great fortune of being employed as a pool attendant. To say the responsibilities of this job were limited would be an understatement. On a poolside table was a clipboard with sign-in sheet and a pencil. When pool visitors arrived, I made sure they signed in. That was it.

And so I spent that placid summer reading of endangered species recovery, island biogeography, of monumental avian migrations and other tales of our interconnected world. Of those many stories opened my eyes to what citizens could accomplish together. The book was *Miracle Under the Oaks* – a story of restoration in Chicago Wilderness.

Later that same summer, I accepted an internship with The Nature Conservancy of Missouri, and after the internship, I worked with TNC in Minnesota as the state volunteer coordinator. Then I returned to Missouri with the Department of Conservation – all the time working with volunteers and citizens to protect biodiversity through ecological stewardship.

Now, as Audubon-Chicago Region's Deputy Director, I have the privilege and honor to join in the work that so inspired me and shaped my understanding of how citizens can drive conservation. Since taking on this new role in September, I have been continuously surprised and heartened by the vibrancy of the conservation community here. One program I supervise is the Cook County

internships – a partnership between Audubon and the Forest Preserve District. The interns augment volunteer stewardship by tackling management beyond the scope of volunteer workdays while simultaneously training the next generation of conservation professionals.

The great people I've met here confirmed my high expectations for those committed to the stewardship of Chicago Wilderness, and I'm excited to work within such an extensive network of knowledgeable individuals. I look forward to the many great things we will achieve together and invite you to offer any suggestions for how an Audubon staff person can help move this noble cause forward.



Photo: Don Penker

Justin Pepper joins Audubon-Chicago Region and the Chicago Wilderness conservation community after many years of citizen-based conservation work in the Midwest.

THE HABITAT HERALD IS PRODUCED BY AUDUBON TO SUPPORT THE GROWING CONSERVATION COMMUNITY. AUDUBON-CHICAGO REGION WORKS EXCLUSIVELY ON LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ISSUES, AND WE RAISE ALL THE FUNDS FOR OUR WORK OURSELVES. DONATIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR FUNDING, AND GIFTS FROM OUR FELLOW MONITORS AND STEWARDS ARE ALWAYS PARTICULARLY TREASURED. (MANY THANKS TO THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY SUPPORTERS.)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO JOIN OUR FAMILY OF CONTRIBUTORS, OR IF YOU'D LIKE TO RECEIVE A COPY OF OUR ANNUAL REPORT AND CONSIDER OUR PLANS FOR 2007, PLEASE CONTACT [SANCHETA@AUDUBON.ORG](mailto:sancheta@audubon.org) OR SEND US A NOTE AT 5225 OLD ORCHARD ROAD, SUITE 37, SKOKIE IL 60077.

volunteers has been steadily increasing, and Rollins now gets more volunteers than any other forest preserve in Lake County. I'm very encouraged by the large numbers of younger people getting involved in restoration work as well." People come from all over the Chicago area to see the birds at Rollins, according to Ed, who says, "Just as the birds and wildlife are noticing what's happening at Rollins Savanna, I think people are noticing too."

Donnie Dann says, "This is the classic example of the theme, 'If you build it, they will come.'" And, obviously, the wildlife and people are, indeed, coming. Nick Huber adds, "We are working for the future. After all, the preserve will be here long after we are gone." And, with continued cooperation, the "building" will continue.



Photo: Ed Beilfuss

Sandhill Cranes and Yellow-headed Blackbirds (page 1) have shown their approval of the restoration work done by Lake County staff and volunteers at Rollins Savanna.

This piece is part of an ongoing series highlighting some of the bird species of Chicago Wilderness and discussing what the BCN Census data tell us about each species' status.

A local wintering bird you should know— Short-eared Owl

By Bob Fisher

Short-eared Owl. For many birders this name conjures up the image of a giant butterfly or moth as the owl glides over open winter fields at dusk. The spare grace and elegance of its buoyant flight has the feel of a Japanese *haiku* poem. A bird of the tundra and prairie, there are few recent nesting records here in Illinois; when our wet prairie habitat was more abundant a hundred plus years ago, it was probably a regular summertime resident and breeder. It continues to be a regular winter resident in appropriate grassland/prairie habitat after migration from further north.

Today our best chance to see this graceful bird is to visit one of our area's larger grassland preserves (Rollins Savanna, Bartel Grassland, Orland Grassland, Springbrook Prairie, Midewin, and others) near dusk on a winter afternoon. At these locations this crepuscular species often can be seen flitting over the grasses like a ghost, momentarily hovering before pouncing down into the vegetation to grab an unwary vole or shrew. If you're lucky, you may see them interact with their daytime raptor counterpart, a Northern Harrier. Their hunting flight techniques are very similar, but it's easy to separate the two in flight – look for the harrier's large white rump patch and much longer tail, and the owl's much larger head.

Both species use the same ecological niche in a complementary fashion, the harrier during the day and the owl at dusk and dawn. Their joint use of the habitat is not always "peaceful coexistence." Harriers have been observed harassing owls until the owl drops its kill, which the harrier then plucks out of the air for an easy meal.

Short-eared Owls have more than a 3-foot wingspan and look quite large in the air, but weigh less than one pound. The species is of great conservation concern. It is on the Partners in Flight Watchlist because of a declining population trend and threats during the non-breeding season. Canada identifies it as a species of special concern, principally due to loss of habitat. Locally, some longtime birders believe they are easier to find during our winters than they were a few years ago, because grassland habitat restoration at some of the CW area's larger tracts provides these beautiful birds more suitable wintering habitat. The BCN website contains no breeding census data for this species, because it has not nested in our region for over 15 years. Who knows, perhaps our continued efforts to restore and increase suitable habitat will return these ground nesting birds to our area as summertime breeders.

Wintertime birding is tough – cold feet, cold hands, cold winds – just cold! But the adrenaline rush you may get standing at the edge of a field as the sky darkens and the moon rises, watching these graceful "butterflies" glide by, perhaps hearing them bark like a distant dog, will quickly make you forget the cold. Put on those hats, boots and gloves, and get out and watch these "ghosts of the dusk."

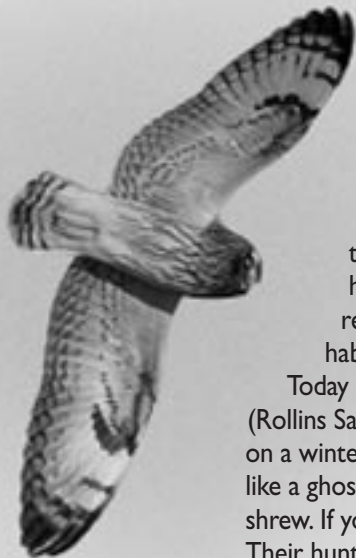


Photo: Jerry Kurnery

Large grassland restorations are providing more winter habitat for the Short-eared Owl.

Volunteer Stewards Make the Difference

By Ed Collins

What do an 80-acre woodland of 150-year-old oak trees, a high quality sand prairie, a grade-A stream corridor, and an ice-age relict wetland all have in common? They are places where McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD) stewards are making an enormous difference to the future of these important pieces of Illinois natural heritage.

The past two years have seen an enormous growth in stewardship training, which has resulted in a doubling of sites under management from 10 to 20 in just three years. One of the unexpected surprises has been the formation of stewardship groups at many sites that District staff had not expected to be able to actively manage for years. Many of these sites contain significant biological resources that are improving as stewardship takes hold.

At the District's Grundstrom Woods, a 22-acre site in Hebron Township, stewards Chuck Dobsky and Anne Johnson are leading an effort to bring ecological health to old-growth white oak woodland. Chuck's commitment includes bringing his own adjoining portion of the woodland under management as well.



Photos: Pat Heald

Pat Heald, Harrison Benwell steward, and his daughter Emily, junior steward, examine an oak recently struck by lightning.



At the end of a workday: (left to right) Mark Healy, Chuck Dubsky, Arthur Tilstra, Kevin Click, Kathleen Roberson & Ken Talaya.

friendships, new career paths, and at least one engagement! It is that camaraderie that helps make the impossible possible. It is in the Volunteer Stewards of the District that Leopold's ethic has come to full flower.

residents. The MCCD Board of Trustees added the mission of integrating Aldo Leopold's land ethic into the everyday life of residents through restoration, education, and recreation on protected lands. This ethic reads in part, "A land ethic then reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects an individual responsibility for the health of the land."

Over the years the District's stewardship program has been the catalyst for new

Re-birth of Habitat— with Spirit and Fire

By Mary Cannon



Photo: Joe Nowak

The rich diversity of plants at Powderhorn Prairie is worth noting.

Powderhorn Prairie— one of the best, the richest, sites in Cook County— has suffered from neglect over the past decade, but things are looking up for this prized natural area. Two new stewards, Alice Brandon and Doug Chien, have stepped forward to bring this site back to life— an example of how volunteers can overcome challenges, not only from invasive species but also from stubborn bureaucracies.

Powderhorn Prairie was identified in the 70s by the highly regarded Illinois Natural Areas Inventory as one of the finest natural areas in the state. High quality prairie, savanna, and marsh supported rare animals including the Franklin's Ground Squirrel, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and King Rail.

Even at that time, invasives were degrading the habitats, and the site was an early priority for the Volunteer Stewardship Network to find and train citizen land managers. Joe and Marlene Nowak were among those early leaders, and their efforts at Powderhorn were energetically coached and supported by Forest Preserve District (FPD) ecologist Paul Strand. But some FPD bureaucrats did not support the volunteer program, and when a former Board President responded to some misleading newspaper articles by imposing a temporary moratorium on restoration in the early 90s, some staff members took it as an opportunity to

Powderhorn Prairie- continues on page 6

make things more difficult for both the restoration staff and the volunteers. Before long, the three key restoration staff members had quit, along with some of the volunteers.

“It wasn’t so much the ‘moratorium’ but the roadblocks and endless paperwork demands from some of the staff,” said Marlene when asked what happened to the Powderhorn volunteers. Within a year, the formal moratorium was over except for five small preserves in the Edgebrook area of Chicago. The Cook County volunteer program soon was growing again, with leadership from new staffer Bill Koenig, and he quickly saw one of his challenges as defending the program from bureaucracy. Volunteerism was quickly thriving again in most parts of the county, and the FPD began to build a corps of professional land managers as well. But in the Calumet region, the recovery has taken a long time.

Enter Alice and Doug. Alice, who is Constituency Director for the Friends of the Forest Preserves, says she wanted to get out into the field and use her botany skills. “Doug and I started workdays this past September and are planning to protect these rare prairie plant species and the animals that depend on them.”

Co-steward Doug Chien, a Conservation Field Representative for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, also likes working

outside and has been doing stewardship for over 15 years. Both Doug and Alice are hoping to inspire greater community involvement and are happily accepting volunteers from nearby Washington High School. “We expect Ms. Aseves’ junior biology class to be coming through December every year,” he says.

FPD Volunteer Coordinator Bill Koenig congratulates Alice and Doug for their initiative. He’s proud that the Cook County FPD welcomes “experts from all walks of life.” He also confirms the importance of Powderhorn. “It’s a great site with great biological diversity. I was so happy when Alice and Doug stepped forward. It’s wonderful that people are so inspired by a site like this that they’re willing to donate their time, intelligence, and energy.”

The new Powderhorn stewards are certainly motivated. Alice says, “I love this because I get a break from urban life and a sense of renewed spirit working with people who care about nature. Doug agrees, “I love being outside, saving and preserving nature. You know what got me into this? Burning! Just watching this rejuvenating fire gets me emotionally and spiritually re-charged!”

To volunteer at Powderhorn or with other Cook County stewardship or advocacy, contact Alice Brandon at alice@fotfp.org or 312-356-9990.

Northwestern Joins Plants of Concern

By Diane Huebner

This past July I had the wonderful opportunity to learn to hunt for rare plants. I met with Leslie Borns, steward of Montrose Point Beach, and some of her fellow Plants of Concern (POC) volunteers and spent a beautiful day on the beach looking for rare sedges. I became hooked and asked Leslie about POC sites around Evanston, where I live. In late August, I met with monitor Ann Whelan for a crash-course on *Cakile edentula* (Sea rocket) and *Chamaesyce polygonifolia* (Seaside spurge) at a nearby Evanston beach. And then I asked permission of my professor, Dr. Nyree Zerega, Director of the Masters Program in Plant Biology and Conservation at Northwestern University, to search for the plants on our campus beaches. I very happily reported back that both species were seen in healthy numbers as well as Marram grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), and was pleased when the university gave its permission for the sites to be monitored in the POC program. According to POC’s Susanne Masi, “The Illinois Lakeshore from Illinois Beach State Park to Rainbow Beach on Chicago’s south side is being monitored by POC volunteers at more than 12 sites, as dune systems are being allowed to naturalize.”

Who would have thought that rare plants in Chicago can actually be space invaders?! The species in question, along with Lakeshore rush (*Juncus balticus*), are some of our more distinguished campus dwellers. These plants form the botanical



Marram grass is among the rare plants now being monitored through the Plants of Concern program at Northwestern University.

Photos: Diane Huebner

building blocks of sand dune habitats in the Chicago region, and like true hardy colonizers can come by land or sea (or lake). In seed form they readily float to shore, and once germinated, quickly colonize open ground. *A. breviligulata* does it by sending out lines of sand-grabbing stolons, *J. balticus* by rhizomes, and *C. edentula* and *C. polygonifolia* dot the open ground as sand-hugging annuals that set prodigious amounts of seed. The seeds of *C. edentula* in particular come in a fleshy, buoyant capsule that one can imagine tossing and drifting about on our spirited Lake Michigan currents to all points East and South. *C. polygonifolia*, classified as rare in our state, very closely resembles a common garden weed: *Chamaesyce maculata*, spotted creeping spurge, a regular pest in the backyard. You gotta love the fact that Seaside spurge is just as pushy for beaches as his rather pesky cousin is for a spot on the patio. We can’t wait for Spring Break to see what other botanical discoveries await us next season!

Kane County Enrichment Opportunities

The Wonders of Wolves

At this interactive family program Krissy English, representing the International Wolf Center, Ely, Minnesota, will help dispel the myths and explain the facts about these magnificent creatures. Krissy's presentation features hands-on activities, a variety of wolf artifacts, slides and a video.

Sunday, February 11th, 1-2:30pm
Red Oak Nature Center
in North Aurora

Call (630) 897-1808 for more information
\$6 per person / \$14 per family

Native Fish of the Floodplain Lakes along the Illinois River

Efforts are underway to return large areas of the floodplains along the Illinois River to more natural states. Dr. Mike Retzer of the Illinois Natural History Survey will discuss his efforts to reintroduce native fish species to three areas in the Illinois River valley.

Saturday, February 17th, 1-3pm
Pottawatomie Community Center
in St. Charles

Call (630) 584-1885 for more information
\$15 per person

Training Opportunities for Rare Plant Enthusiasts

Plants of Concern, a volunteer-based rare plant monitoring program coordinated through the Chicago Botanic Garden, will be holding three training workshops in April; one will be located at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Since 2001, POC has worked with more than 280 volunteers and 60 landowners to monitor rare plants at 170 sites throughout Northeast Illinois. Workshop dates and other locations will be announced in February.

For more information about POC or the training workshops, please contact Emily Hudson Richter at ehudson@chicagobotanic.org or (847) 835-6873; you can also come to our booth at the Wild Things Conference. Or check out our website: www.plantsofconcern.org

Frog Monitoring Workshops 2007

Note that we've added a new workshop for southern Cook County!

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.



Wednesday, January 24th, 6:30-8:30pm — DuPage County, Illinois

The Grounds and Resources Complex at 29 W 220 Mack Rd. in West Chicago, within Blackwell Forest Preserve. From Route 59, travel east on Mack Rd. for 0.6 miles. Turn north into the complex. Pass through the chain link gate and gas tank area. Park in front of the center building. Follow the signs to the workshop at the rear of this building. Contact Cindy Hedges, 630-876-5929.

Tuesday, February 6th, 7-9pm — Lake County, Illinois

Welcome Center at Ryerson Woods. Located about a mile south of Half Day Rd., between I-94 and Hwy 45. Head west on Half Day Rd. from I-94, then turn south on Riverwoods Rd. and look for the entrance on your right. Contact Tom Smith, (847) 968-3329.

Saturday, February 10th, 9am-noon — Kane County, Illinois

Pottawatomie Park in St. Charles. Coming west on Route 64 (called Main St. in St. Charles), turn north at Second Ave., two blocks before the river. Second Ave. ends at Pottawatomie Park – head west and go to the large building down by the river. Contact Mary Ochsenschlager, (630) 584-1885.

Tuesday, February 13th, 7-9pm — Will County, Illinois

Sugar Creek Administrative Building of the Forest Preserve District, 17540 W. Laraway Rd. in Joliet. Take Rte. 80 to Briggs, head south on Briggs (turns into 52-S), then west on Laraway Rd., and look to the north side of the street after about a half mile. Contact Renee Gauchat, rgauchat@fpdwc.org.

Tuesday, February 13th, 7-9pm — McHenry County, Illinois

Prairieview Education Center in Crystal Lake. At 2112 Behan Rd., just south of Hwy 176, between Hwy 31 and the Fox River. Heading NE from Crystal Lake on Hwy 176, turn right on Behan Rd, after passing Valley View/Silver Lake Rd., and take another right at the end of the road. Please call (815) 479-5779 to pre-register. For questions, contact Sara Denham, (815) 728-8307.

New location added!

Thursday, February 15th, 7-9pm — Southern Cook County, Illinois

Camp Sagawau, 12545 111th St., Lemont. One hundred yards east of Archer Ave., or four miles west of Swallow Cliff Toboggan Slides on Rt. 83. Contact Diana Krug, (708) 839-0696, diana.krug@comcast.net.

Monday, February 19th, 7-9pm — Northern Cook County, Illinois

Edgebrook Community Center. Located at 6100 N. Central on Chicago's northwest side. Contact Diane Huebner, d-huebner@northwestern.edu.

Thursday, February 22nd, 7-8:30pm — Porter County, Indiana

Valparaiso branch of the Porter County Public Library, 103 Jefferson St. in Valparaiso. Workshop will be in Meeting Room A. For location details, see: <http://www.pcpls.lib.in.us/>. Contact Alan Resetar with questions, 219-465-7231.

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- butterfly monitors • bird habitat • PR tools for stewards • wildlife monitoring • finding rare plants • nature in your backyard • soil •