

The Habitat HERALD

September 2012

Volume 13, Issue 3

Better Butterfly Conservation

By Karen Glennemeier and Tom Peterson

Audubon and the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network (IBMN) have just completed a new guide to land management for butterfly conservation. We've ranked every butterfly species in the Chicago Wilderness region according to its conservation status. Then for the species of highest conservation priority we've developed a list of host species that feed their caterpillars and nectar plants that feed the adults. This can help stewards and other land managers provide good habitat for butterflies of conservation concern.

To see the lists, visit <http://www.habitatproject.org/projects/ibmn.html>

Of course, the most important way to support diverse butterfly populations is to conduct large scale, effective, consistent management. Maintaining good habitat for appropriate host and nectar species for butterflies of conservation concern is a natural extension of standard management.



Here is a How-To Guide for using the new lists:

1. Contact your site's butterfly monitor (if you don't know, ask us) and ask for a list of species they've found;
 - 1b. If you don't have a butterfly monitor, contact us to arrange for a monitor or butterfly blitz of your site;
2. Look on the Conservation Status list to determine which species are remnant-dependent or responsive;
3. Look on the Host Species list to find the species' host and nectar plants;
4. Find existing populations of host and nectar plant species on your site, and focus on maintaining them. If host or nectar species are few or non-existent, and if it is consistent with broader management goals, consider establishing host and nectar species on the site through seeding or plugging;
5. Establish butterfly monitoring routes that go through the host plant areas, and record butterfly numbers over time according to the IBMN protocol to test the impact of your management. Contact us for help getting started;
6. If there are no butterfly species of concern on the site, consider establishing host plant species for responsive butterflies (see Conservation Status list).

Again, visit <http://www.habitatproject.org/projects/ibmn.html> to see the lists of conservation status and host species.

Questions about how to use these lists or about the butterflies on your site? Contact Tom Peterson (gladpeterson@comcast.net) or Karen Glennemeier (kglennemeier@audubon.org).

See page 3 for descriptions of the butterfly conservation categories.

Species such as the Bronze Copper, Black Dash and Gray Comma and are likely to respond well to good management. A new online resource can help stewards improve habitat for such species on their sites.

Grassroots Opportunities

The future of nature in Chicago Wilderness depends very much on the thousands of stewards, advocates, other volunteers, and staff who work for the wellness of wildlife and habitat.

Weekend Workdays

<http://www.habitatproject.org/opportunity/restore.html>

Site Stewards

Train to supervise volunteer restoration of a prairie, woodland, or wetland preserve. Contact Karen Glennemeier 847-328-1250, kglennemeier@audubon.org for help finding the volunteer coordinator of your county forest preserve district or other landowner.

Habitat 2030

A new generation of stewards devoted to making friends, having fun, and restoring habitat.

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Calling Frog Survey

www.habitatproject.org/frogsurvey

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Plant Community Monitoring of woods, prairies, or wetlands

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Plants of Concern

Rare Plant Monitoring

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Advocacy and policy work

www.sierraclub.org/il/ or
www.fotfp.org (Cook County)

Check us out on facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/wildthingscommunity>

Steward finds a creative solution

By Joan Crabb

Bartel Grassland Steward Dick Riner faced a cruel dilemma – a choice between letting invasive yellow sweet clover drop hundreds of thousands of seeds or destroying the nests, with eggs and young, of many ground-nesting grassland birds.

This year's weather produced a bumper crop of sweet clover, which blooms and sets seed right in the middle of grassland bird breeding and nesting season (roughly June). "It's the most yellow clover I've seen in the last eight years," Riner said. "If it isn't cut before it sets its seeds, it will take over."

The quick solution was to have the Forest Preserve District of Cook County cut the clover with its 20-foot mower, as it has done in previous years. But this year, because of the massive amounts of sweet clover, the big machine would have crushed the nests of hundreds of Bobolinks, Dickcissels, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Henslow's and Savannah Sparrows.

Though it looked like a choice between killing the clover or killing the birds, Riner decided it didn't have to be that way. "We could use what we had – weed-whips adapted to use metal blades instead of string, and a 27-inch walk-behind self-propelled brush cutter."

It wasn't quick and had to be done on foot. The weed-whips were used on the smaller patches and the brush-cutter on the bigger tracts. Working on foot instead of from the seat of a big machine allowed operators to cut very selectively, noting where birds flew up to defend their nests, and sparing those areas.

Riner and his team worked ten hours a day for fourteen days, always being sure to cut below the lowest living leaf after the leaves started dying back, to prevent resprouting. He had help from several Forest Preserve District (FPDCC)/Audubon interns, a contractor who works for FPDCC, and some of his regular volunteers. The weather cooperated: it was mild and windy with low humidity. "We couldn't have done it during one of this summer's hot spells," Riner said.

Most of the yellow sweet clover didn't go to seed, and the birds hatched, fledged, and flew up to join the flock.



Photo: John Denk

Left unchecked, yellow and white (pictured) sweet clover can quickly destroy an ecosystem. Lucky for Bartel, Dick Riner and his partners discovered a way to remove it this year without harming nesting grassland birds. such as this sedge wren.

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We welcome to our newsletter team
new writers, editors, photographers,
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who would enjoy getting involved.

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Photo: Mary Kay Rubey

Pipevine Swallowtail is a responsive species at the edge of its range in our region.

Butterfly conservation categories:

Remnant-dependent species require remnant, undisturbed habitat and are unlikely to relocate to a newly restored site on their own. There is little stewards can do to attract these species if they aren't already present, but if they are present maintaining (and, if practical, expanding) their habitat should receive highest priority.

Responsive species may survive in less than pristine habitats, but may be uncommon, and they are likely to respond positively to good management. With large scale, effective, and continued management these species become common. These species should receive the greatest attention from most stewards, who can work to expand or introduce appropriate larval host and nectar plants for them, in addition to broader management efforts.

Common species are common everywhere and don't warrant management attention.

Migrant species do not survive the winters in our region, but migrate in. Some are not common, in that they only reach our region on rare occasion.

Edge of range species are typically uncommon to rare locally. However, their rarity is not related to habitat but because we are at the edge of their ranges.



Photo: Mary Kay Rubey

The Bronze Copper is a responsive species.



Photo: www.cirrusimage.com

Pearl Crescent is a common species in the Chicago wilderness region.



Photo: www.cirrusimage.com

The Monarch is a migrant.

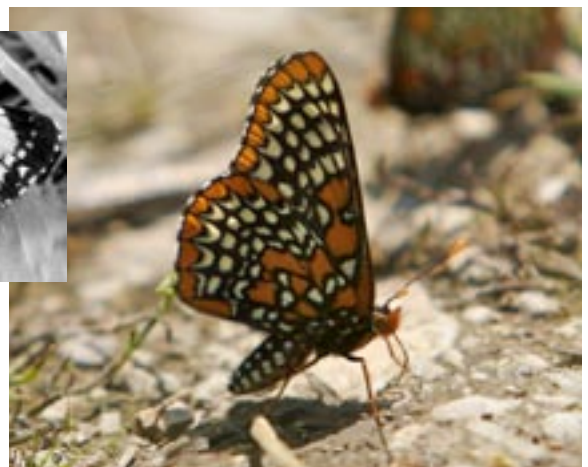


Photo: Arlene Kazior

The Baltimore Checkerspot is a remnant-dependent species.

Realizing Hackmatack: Plans for Refuge Taking Shape

By Greg Rajskey

Photo: Jeanne Muellner

What began as a lofty vision conjured some seven years ago by a small group of grassroots organizers in McHenry County may soon become the first National Wildlife Refuge in the Chicago Wilderness region. Hackmatack, Algonquin for the tamarack tree, *Larix laricina*, is the name proposed for the wildlife refuge, which would straddle the Illinois-Wisconsin state line in McHenry and Walworth counties.

This has been a busy year in the development of plans for the refuge. In March 2012, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) released an environmental assessment that summarized four possible options for siting the refuge. Public meetings followed in April, held in Ringwood, Illinois and Genoa City, Wisconsin, with a month-long public comment period. According to Cindy Skrukruud, one of the founders of Friends of Hackmatack and Clean Water Advocate for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, “about 450 people attended the public meetings.” She reported that USFWS received around 3,000 comments and that 95 percent of them favored the establishment of the wildlife refuge.

In May of 2012, in a bipartisan effort led by Republican Senator Pam Althoff and

“[This is] one of the most exciting land conservation opportunities to come along in a long time.”

Democratic Representative Jack Franks, both chambers of the Illinois legislature adopted resolutions in support of the refuge.

The USFWS Environmental Assessment, Land Protection Plan, and Conceptual Management Plan (March 2012) recommends a *Cores and Corridors* site plan (Alternative C) that would establish a ring-like refuge that features four large core areas linked by corridors and including a number of existing conservation areas. According to USFWS, “the cores would provide sufficient habitat for nesting grassland

birds and waterfowl that are sensitive to fragmented habitat and edges. The corridors would assist terrestrial migration of small mammals, herptiles, and plants that

may be impacted by climate change.” (<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/Hackmatack/index.html>)

Among the bird species expected to benefit from the establishment of the refuge are grassland birds such as Henslow’s Sparrow, Short-eared Owl, Upland Sandpiper, and Dickcissel, along with savanna species such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and wetland species including Pied-billed Grebe and Least Bittern.

Friends of Hackmatack also hosts a website (www.hackmatacknwr.org) that contains a wealth of information about the proposal. One of the original organizers, Lenore Beyer-Clow, refers to Hackmatack as “one of the most exciting land conservation opportunities to come along in a long time.” Beyer-Clow, who is Policy Director for Openlands, credits organizations such as hers, along with the Trust for Public Land,

the Sierra Club, and other environmental groups as well as governmental agencies with supporting the effort.

Cindy Skrukruud is decidedly upbeat about their prospects: “We are hoping any day to hear the USFWS has taken the next step and approved Hackmatack as our nation’s newest National Wildlife Refuge.”

Great News! We learned at press time that the Hackmatack Wildlife Refuge has been approved.



Grassland birds such as the Dickcissel (top of page), Short-eared Owl (above), Henslow’s Sparrow (above right), and Bobolink (right) are among the many species that will benefit from the proposed Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge.

Photos: Short-eared Owl by Jeanne Muellner; Henslow’s Sparrow by Josh Engel; Bobolink by Ariene Kozio

Reclaiming a little corner of paradise

By *Cindy Grau*



Right next to the busy traffic on Dempster Avenue in Park Ridge lies a sliver of undeveloped Illinois habitat that has been around for about 7,000 years. You might miss the less than one acre preserve, unless your keen eye catches the sign, partially covered by buckthorn, surrounded by a battered chain link fence, announcing “Oak Savanna.” The oasis, on the campus of Maine East High School, was rediscovered in 1991 by a concerned citizen, Justine Kussner. She identified it as an oak savanna by researching a deed from 1840. Since then her find has been carefully tended by a series of teachers who have acted as stewards – cleaning out the trash and trying to remove and control the usual curse of invasive plants.



The preserve’s current caretaker, Shelby Riha, a biology teacher and the Ecology Club sponsor, recently developed a four year plan to turn the area into a destination spot for students and wildlife. The principal of the school approached Shelby because he was concerned that the spot was an eyesore. He suggested that the fence be taken down and the space be made more “usable.” Shelby advocated for restoration instead, and they agreed that with some investment of time and money the spot could become an integral part of the learning environment and an asset to the school.

“The oak savanna offers a real life lab for students.”

Ms. Riha has studied the drafts of the new national science standards so that she can include curriculum connections in her plan. She says the oak savanna offers a real life lab for students to work on skills such as making observations and inferences as well as collecting data. The current Geology and Earth



Science classes both focus on local natural areas and sustainability. Students study the value of this ecosystem and what ecosystem services it provides. They judge the economic value of intangible assets such as water retention and next year will learn how to measure carbon sequestration. An Environmental Science student’s final project involved hatching butterflies in a display case at the school, and Earth Science students created a Google map plant identification guide. English and Photography departments are planning on using the site as well. A sitting area is designed around a vernal pond that can be used as inspiration for creative writing and an opportunity to study and reflect. The students will be encouraged to use their senses and use descriptive writing in their science reports. Photography students will have a variety of wildlife and plant life for subject matter (see the Maine East Ecology Club blog at <http://maineeastecology.blogspot.com> for examples).

The oak savanna has brought people together who recognize the value of this special place. Fifty to 100 Maine East students come out on work days to cut buckthorn and cattails, scatter seeds, or do trail maintenance. Ken Schaefer of Oakton Community College has been teaching Shelby about the plants, sharing seeds, and bringing his students to work days. Art & Linda’s Wildflowers has held plant sales as fundraisers for the project. At some work days an African Drumming Project called the Maine East Rhythm Project has provided drumming during the work, in honor of an African cultural and historical tradition. A group called Friends of the Oak Savanna is being created to help fund improvements such as fencing and seating, as well as ongoing maintenance.

The relationship between the people and this place is heartwarming. Shelby has recently returned from a trip to Costa Rica on an ECO Classroom Grant, where she learned about “the interrelationship between biodiversity, climate change, and human activities.” She and 15 other teachers are equipped with new techniques and resources to enhance their own classroom teaching. She won’t have far to go to use her new skills.



Students and teachers are restoring, and learning from, an ancient oak savanna at their school.

Rare plants and their monitors cover the Lake Michigan Ravines

by Rachel Goad



Found scattered throughout the Chicago region are ecological jewels that are evidence of a once rich and varied landscape. Among these are the ravines along Chicago's north shore. The glaciers that carved out Lake Michigan left moraines, mounds of rock and soil, where they stopped their southward expansion and began receding. Changes in the lake's level over time resulted in drainages that cut down through these moraines and became the dramatic geological features that characterize the north shore. A unique microclimate is produced by this dramatic topography and proximity to the lake, which supports a suite of plant species that are often at the southern extent of their range.

There are more than 40 ravines along the lake shore, in both public and private ownership. Years of unchecked development and neglect have left many of these areas in poor condition. Siphoning water into ravines, either directly by means such as storm-water drainage pipes, or indirectly, as occurs when much of the surrounding landscape becomes paved, accelerates erosion and threatens these distinctive native plant communities. Invasion by exotic species, eager to take hold on the eroded cliffs, has further threatened native ravine flora.

While some people have long recognized these areas as special, there is now an increasingly large movement which does so. Organizations such as the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Waukegan Harbor Areas of Concern, Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake Forest Garden Club, Municipality of Lake Forest, and Openlands have begun researching the current state of the ravines through surveys of plant communities and other organisms, such as birds and aquatic invertebrates. With this information, restoration of these dynamic systems is now beginning.

Plants of Concern (POC), a regional rare plant monitoring program, has teamed up with a number of these groups to aid in monitoring rare plant species. POC has been monitoring



A coalition of conservation groups and rare plants monitors is hard at work restoring the ravines along Chicago's north shore.

rare species across the Chicago Wilderness region for the past 11 years. Each year, visits to known and new populations of threatened, endangered, and rare species result in data on the number of individuals, the area in which they occur, whether they are reproducing, and what's happening in the landscape around them. This information is provided to land managers to help guide management activities.

In shadowy ravines, POC monitors search for endangered species such as Limber honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*) and Downy solomon's seal (*Polygonatum pubescens*), which is at the southwestern extent of its range in Illinois. Rare trees such as Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) and Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) can be found as well. Along lake bluffs we find the endangered shrubs Purple-flowering raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*), and Buffalo berry (*Shepherdia canadensis*), the latter of which occurs in this state only along the Lake Michigan shoreline. In total, POC monitors keep track of 30 rare, threatened, and endangered species in Lake Michigan ravines.

Citizen scientists are an integral part of POC. These dedicated volunteers contribute significantly to region-wide and ravine-specific rare plant monitoring efforts. The data collected by POC volunteers is valuable to land managers and to the state of Illinois, and participating in programs such as POC can be a means of building a connection to the landscape and to our region's natural history. You can find out more about POC by visiting www.plantsofconcern.org.

Photos: Rachel Goad

Heat and drought

By Stephen Packard



Photos: Stephen Packard



I get depressed when the plants are hurting. Even though I know on one level that I should be happy for the ecosystem. Stress does it good. Drought helps the important (and supposedly “delicate”) conservatives rub out some invasive weeds. But how can I help agonizing over drought?! Everything wilts. Flower buds fall off; much turns brown; many rare animals may die, especially in isolated fragments. My life is tied to the ecosystem. When it’s gasping for life, I’m desperate to help. Yet there’s nothing – totally nothing – I can do. You can’t water hundreds of acres. (Rain dances are not effective.) You can’t even water the tens of acres where you broadcast rare seed last fall. You can’t apply sun-screen – or give the plants shades. I do carry water through the heat to newly planted plugs of some of the rarest conservatives that we can’t restore in any other way.

But it’s depressing too. What a waste of time! Or – not a waste? – just some very hard work that may be futile, but may work? I lugged water this year to plugs of lilies, prairie violet, prairie gentian – to tide them over. I lugged water to white-fringed orchids, hoping to help them set seeds and build up the population, despite the drought. Drops in the bucket, or rather more like drops in a dry ocean – but it may keep them alive until rain.

Is there any fun? One phenomenon that is indeed plain old superficial fun is to watch the deep-rooted plants thrive while the shallow-rooted wither. Our current drought isn’t as “bad” as some. The prairie can turn as brown as death – yet with perfectly green and happy leadplants, prairie clovers, and false indigos looking like no one ever told them there was a problem. The roots of some plants are so deep that they’re sucking moisture from rainstorms long, long ago.

In the large photo, we’re early in a drought. Most species are still green, but most are also slowly dropping flowers, or holding back flowers that haven’t opened. Yet, the deep-rooted compass plant (yellow flowers) thrives with deep-rooted pals, butterfly weed (orange) and leadplant (purple).

“An ecosystem matures only through many cycles of unusual weather.”

In some other season, conversely, many light rains in summer may favor the plants with upper-soil roots. In that case, the deep-rooted ones may stress. That’s what diversity is for. Whatever the conditions, there are plants ready to take advantage.

My emotions are more about myself than about the ecosystem. When there’s thriving life and beauty, it’s like a message to me of hope, courage, and confidence. Only a small part of my subconscious seems to be able to take the long view. I’m immature.

On the other hand, an ecosystem matures only through many cycles of unusual weather. Drought, flood, heat, cold, disease, grazing, and browsing. Seasons of plenty and seasons of want. Beautiful, powerful, and sustainable diversity results.

This piece is taken from a July 7, 2012 blog entry from Stephen Packard. To read more of Stephen’s thoughts on nature and life, and to contribute your own thoughts, please visit <http://vestalgrove.blogspot.com/>

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<http://www.plantanative.com/douglas-tallamy-bio.html>

To be involved in planning, contact chicagowildthings@yahoo.com