



The Prairie Breeze

Notes From Wolf Road Prairie

Deer Factoid: By studying impressions left in the snow, observers have noted that when deer bed down, they do so in a circle orienting their heads in such way that each deer is facing a slightly different direction. Thus ensuring that a wide circumference can be scanned by many watchful eyes.

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NATURE RESPONDS TO THE LENGTHENING DAYS

The call of the **black-capped chickadee** - Chick-a-dee-dee-dee, is one of the more common bird calls in our area and one of the first songs that birders learn. Even the polar vortex has not deprived us of this cheerful sounding refrain. But because these diminutive birds are sensitive to even a modest change in daylight, the male begins his more plaintive courtship song in late January - months away from their breeding season. Very soon now we should be hearing the chickadees "fee be" song with the "be" a lower pitch than the "fee" and each syllable only a half a second long. Birdsong expert Donald Kroodsman, describes it as the "**purest of whistles and the promise of spring.**"

The **striped skunk** has also been stirred by the longer days. In February, the polygamous male will increase his range from 1/2 a sq. mile to 4 sq. miles of restless wandering, exploring his extended territory for possible mates.

Coyotes are traveling farther afield with males and females scenting their trails more often. Females in estrus mark with blood-stained urine signaling males they are ready to mate. A mated pair will form a bond that will end only when one of the pair dies. The female gives birth in April., and the male will assist her by bringing food to the den.

In the deep chill of January, the hooting call of **great horned owls** can be heard as the male calls and the female answers. The pair mate and by February, the female is incubating her eggs. She will not leave the nest for a month braving snow, wind, and cold completely dependent on her partner for food. By not waiting for spring, their brood will be able to hunt before the young of other predators, giving the owlets a decided advantage. (This owl is common to our preserves.)

"As the January days pass by, the edge of snow which catches the fullest strength of the sun's rays melt at noonday. Slowly the snow draws back; little by little the live things and the growing things increase their tempo, until one day, the snow has gone and a foretaste of spring is in the air. " Virginia Eifert 1945

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Big Year – The Movie

Based on the non-fiction book by the same title, this adventure story is filled with humor, insight, and warmth. Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson star as three birders competing for the honor of sighting the most bird species in one year.

2 pm Wednesday January 29

Thomas Ford Memorial Library in Western Springs on the corner of Chestnut and Wolf Road.



STREETCARS OF TORONTO

Streetcar aficionado and storyteller Jack Doyle will share his knowledge of streetcars and his experiences in Toronto, Canada while exploring the best and largest streetcar system in North America. Jack will be sharing his excellent slides showcasing both the streetcars and the city.

2 pm Sunday February 23

LaGrange Park Library – 555 N LaGrange Rd. On the corner of Oak and LaGrange Rd.

Light refreshments will be served at both events.

Call 708-354-5512 for more information.



- www.savetheprairiesociety.org
- www.facebook.com/prairiesociety
- www.facebook.com/franzoproject

708-562- 3280

The Prairie House
11225 Constitution Drive
Westchester 60154

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT

Scout Jordan Chinchilla (a Riverside-Brookfield High School student) has chosen Wolf Road Prairie for his Eagle Scout project. Jordan will be supervising his fellow scouts in clearing a designated area of buckthorn. STPS President Larry Godson has been advising Jordan regarding needed equipment, and the best time and place for this endeavor. Jordan and the scouts expect to begin working in February with hopes of finishing the project in the beginning of March.



Winter Bird Survival



*Small and frail, inhabitants of the air,
Winter shall neither extinguish your flame nor silence your song.
~ Justine Rafferty*

The Cache: Black-capped chickadees, tufted titmice, downy woodpeckers, bluejays, and crows can all be credited with forethought. Starting in fall, they conceal reserves of small seeds, nuts, and insects under bark, in handy crevices, and on the ground - under leaves and other natural debris. The success of this strategy is dependent on the bird's spatial memory. At this, the bluejay is said to excel, retrieving 30% of its stash. A study of chickadees found that they grew more brain cells in the fall to increase spatial memory. (Stephanie Folk, Chicago Wilderness – Winter 2007).



Feathers: After their autumn molt, some species not only replace feathers that were shed but also grow additional feathers for added warmth. Fluffing their feathers adds more air pockets further insulating them from the cold. Waterproofing and insulating oil helps protect the feathers from wear and tear.

Positioning: Placing their backs toward the sun allows them to absorb more of its heat. Although the legs and feet of birds are covered with scales to minimize heat loss, birds can also constrict the flow of blood to the legs slowing down over-all heat loss. Positioning their bodies over their legs in a crouched stance or standing on one leg with the other tucked into its feathers further protects their extremities. Tucking their bills into their shoulder feathers is yet another protective practice.

Shivering: Even though shivering requires more calories, it raises the metabolic rate creating more heat.



Hypothermia: While sleeping, if need be, birds can lower their body temperatures a few degrees to conserve oxygen in the blood stream. Slowing down their heart beat and other bodily functions saves precious calories.



Forming Flocks: The more eyes looking for food the better the chances of finding it. So birds of different species will come together to increase the odds of sighting a source of nourishment. Having landed, they must then be alert for predators - again the more eyes the better. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in many flocks, the chickadees form the nucleus to which other birds gravitate including nuthatches, kinglets, woodpeckers, vireos, and creepers. Cornell sites a possible advantage in staying close to the chickadees: their chickadee dee dee call is an alert call warning of danger. The more dee notes at the end the greater the danger, and many of the attending species recognize the significance of this call.

Scavenging: Some birds like chickadees and crows will take advantage of a found carcass that has been opened up by a larger animal. Such remnant fat is a winter treat.



Bird Factoid: The dark-eyed junco aka snowbird belongs to the sparrow family.



WORKDAY SCHEDULE



Target: Buckthorn

The following workdays have been scheduled:

Saturdays 1 – 4 pm

February 15 and 22

March 1, 8, 15

Meet at the Prairie House

Hot cider & tools will be provided. If the weather is questionable, please call Larry at 708-562-3280 for confirmation

Volunteers Needed

Have any experience with **graphic designing?** We can use advice and help in designing our various publications both for the Prairie Society and Franzosenbush Heritage Project.

We will do our best to accommodate your schedule and to work in tandem with you whenever you deem necessary. Any hours that you are able to contribute will be appreciated. For more information, please call Larry at 708-562-3280.



Taking Advantage of The Frozen Ground

In order to achieve the Prairie Society's long-range goal of eliminating non-native brush and small trees from the Prairie, STPS has been working with Cook County Forest Preserve District's regional ecologist Kristen Pink who has formulated a restoration plan for the northeast corner of the Prairie.

For our part, the STPS board of directors has allocated money towards completion of the northeast corner project. Once the Illinois Department of Natural Resources has given their approval, it is our intention to call for bids to complete the proposed project.

Some of this restoration work must be reserved for winter when the ground is frozen and heavier equipment can be used without damaging the soil. So neither STPS nor FPDCC are hoping for an early thaw.

