



The Prairie Breeze



July/August 2013

Notes From The Prairie Society

Issue # 287

UPCOMING EVENTS

INSECT SAFARI: Saturday – July 13 - 10 am

Join our two insect experts, Mike Rush and Lawrence Godson, as we search the Prairie for bugs and beetles. Later, in the shade of the Prairie House porch, we will identify, study, and release them.

Wear sturdy shoes, long pants, and bring a container. Children under twelve free; General Admission \$5.

Prairie Walk: Saturday - August 17 - 7 pm

Enjoy a relaxing and informative evening stroll on the August Prairie. We will be identifying both plants, birds, and insect sounds. Park in one of the three inlets along 31st Street.

Artists and Crafters Wanted

The annual Prairie Fest will be held on Sat., Sept 28 between 10 and 4 pm. Inquiries welcome. Applications can be obtained at either www.savetheprairiesociety.org or by calling the number below.

For more information concerning events, call 708-354-5512.



FPDCC PURCHASES PRAIRIE BUFFER LAND

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County purchased two acres adjacent to the Prairie. The house that now stands on the two acres will most likely be demolished. This purchase is indicative of FPDCC's commitment to safeguarding and extending our prairie habitat.

RECENT SIGHTINGS OF PRAIRIE BIRDS

Baltimore Orioles, Bluebirds, Bluejays, Brown Thrasher Cardinals, Catbirds, Chimney Swifts, Cedar Wax-wings, Cowbirds, Downy Woodpeckers, Eastern Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Field Sparrows, Flickers, Grackles, Hairy Woodpeckers, House Sparrows, Hummingbirds, Indigo Buntings, Mallards, Mourning Doves, Nighthawks, Orchard Orioles, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-wings, Ring-billed gulls, Robins, Song Sparrows, Starlings, Tree Swallows, Willow-flycatchers, Woodcocks, Yellow Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers.

Spotters: J. Banaszak, C. Boese, S. Boese, C. Brouk, E. Jans, G. Jerzyk, L. Godson, F. Marbella, M. Cray, R. McCabe, R. Meyer, E.J. Neafsey, S. Neafsey, Linda Padera, B. Schreiber



Photo by Fidencio Marbella

AN UNMATCHED REPERTOIRE

It is a point of pride for those of us who love Wolf Road Prairie to be able to say that we have a resident family of brown thrashers. The adults were first spotted mid-spring near the Prairie House. Since then, they have been seen east and west of the House, in the Savanna, and west of Hickory Lane. In late June, one was spotted enjoying the House birdbath. This is the third year in a row that we have recorded sightings of them. The prairie's bio-diverse habitat is meeting their specific needs for food and shelter.

You do not have to be a birding expert to identify this rather secretive bird. With its striking rufous color, yellow eyes, and long tail and beak it is hard to confuse the brown thrasher with other birds.

But a bigger thrill is not in seeing the thrasher, but in hearing him. He is arguably the most versatile songbird in North America. The author of "The Singing Life of Birds," Donald E. Kroodsma, recorded a male thrasher for two hours in which it sang 4,654 trills. Kroodsma then subtracted the repetitive songs and tallied 1,800 distinct songs. Further research showed that the Brown Thrasher has the capacity to sing 3,000 different songs. More often than not, each one is repeated twice and frequently includes imitations from the songs of other species. It has been observed that the older the male, the more expansive his repertoire giving him a decided edge when aspiring to impress a potential mate. Thus age has the advantage in matters of brown thrasher courtship. Although we have heard our male singing, we have not been lucky enough to hear him at length. Early spring being the best time to experience his virtuoso performance.

It gives one pause to think that hearing such an outpouring of song was once a common experience for many rural folks. One wonders if they took for granted his sustained and mighty effort as he heralded the beginning of spring.



"What grief cannot be lightened, upon hearing a rufous thrasher on an April morn pour forth his song with unbounded exuberance and airy joy."

Thomas Cavanagh

Wolf Road Prairie Has A Butterfly Monitor

We asked our new butterfly monitor Stephanie Walquist to tell us about herself and what it is a butterfly monitor does. We received this delightful and informative response:

I have been a gardener for most of my life (since I was 13, so gardening for 30 yrs), and the past ten years have been spent specifically gardening for butterflies and learning about the different species and their fascinating life cycles.

This year I am taking this interest into more organized formats to spread awareness and contribute to their survival. With some other people in Oak Park, we are creating a Wild Ones chapter in the hope of encouraging people to incorporate more natural landscaping which is friendlier to butterflies, birds, and other creatures.



I also decided to participate in a different way in the study of butterflies and to volunteer for the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network (IBMN). The IBMN's purpose is to collect data about butterflies through citizen scientists. Tracking the numbers of butterflies gives useful information about a particular habitat.

Monitors are supposed to visit their assigned site 6-8 times from Memorial Day through August 8. Four of those visits need to happen before July 20 and data needs to be entered online. Monitors may net the butterflies to obtain specific identification, but I do not feel quite comfortable enough to do that yet. Many of the butterflies we are looking for are ones that I am familiar with and can identify while in flight. Now, some of those similar-looking skippers and small hairstreaks who might move off too fast are another story! Luckily, even unidentified skippers or hairstreaks are still useful data.

This is my first year, and I am so happy to do it at Wolf Road Prairie. It is a special place, and one I look forward to visiting each time. I love seeing the changing landscape and hearing and seeing beautiful birds too. I haven't seen a Common Yellow-throat in forever and have never seen a Woodcock but saw one up close when we startled each other. Thanks to all of you who have worked so hard to preserve such a magnificent place.

Eco-rangers Exploring The Prairie

On June 12, twenty-four Oak Park Conservatory Eco-rangers between 6 and 8 years of age arrived at the Prairie for 2 hours of discovery and exploration. For docents Mary Cray, Larry Godson, and Rita McCabe leading them through the Prairie was more fun than work.



Our Volunteers Learn More About Stewardship

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County and Chicago Wilderness offer courses for volunteers to hone their stewardship skills.

Volunteers Nate Fremont, Earl Gose, Frank Martino, Shonagh Neafsey, and E.J. Neafsey enrolled in many of these classes to better serve Wolf Road Prairies's needs. These classes included: Brush Pile Burning, Prescribed Burn Classes, Chicago Wilderness Burn Crew Member Classes, CPR and First Aid classes, How To Run A Volunteer Workday, Herbicide Study Class for Preparation for Licensing, Chainsaw Skills and Power Equipment Class, a Leadership Course, Rights of Way Aquatics, and a Plants of Concern class offered by the Botanic Gardens.

We appreciate both their time and dedication to preserving the Prairie. Special recognition goes to Nate Fremont who completed the most classes.



Contact Information: www.savetheprairiesociety.org; facebook.com/prairiesociety;

The Prairie House 11225 Constitution Drive Westchester 60526



Photo by Lawrence Godson

Eagle Scout Robert Tworak (in red shirt) supervises the building of a new bridge over the middle fork's tributary. This job was difficult and complex, but Robert was obviously undaunted.



Photo by Rita McCabe

Volunteers from Willowbrook Whole Foods generously donated their time to weed the Prairie House garden. No slackers here!



Photo by Lawrence Godson

The buckthorn did not stand a chance against the Hillside CarMax volunteers. Some mighty big ones bit the dust along Constitution Drive.