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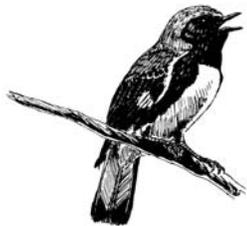
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Find us on the web at:
www.parklandsfoundation.org

Newsletter
April – May 2011

Celebrate Spring at ParkLands



Black Throated Blue - Steven D'Amato

Avian Migration

The annual natural phenomenon of spring migration has begun. Dozens of species of birds move hundreds, even thousands of miles north each spring to nest and raise young during North America's summer season. April and May are the best months to witness the impressive number and diversity of birds which take advantage of ParkLands properties during migration. Dabbling ducks are moving through and using the wetlands and impoundments in early April. Other uncommon water birds such as American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Sora and Wilson's Snipe will use the wetlands as stopover sites. Migrant songbirds also start showing up during April. Fox Sparrows have already been around and are on the way out. Migrating Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned and Ruby-

crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, Winter Wrens and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers will be using our preserves during the month of April.

Things gradually start cranking up during the second half of April. Neotropical migrants start trickling in from their southern winter haunts. Gnatcatchers and vireos snatch up some of the early insect hatches available. Doves of sparrows, such as White-throated, White-crowned and Swamp Sparrows can be found using our area preserves.

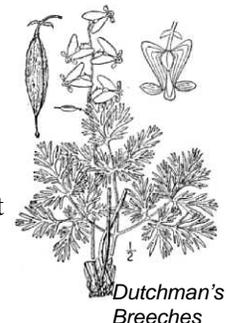
The beginning of May brings a turning point as migration begins to shift into high gear. Colorful wood-warblers start coming through in numbers and foraging in our oaks. Northern Parulas, Black-and-white Warblers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks can be heard singing on an early May morning. Migration usually reaches its climax just before mid-May. Orioles, tanagers, cuckoos and tyrant flycatchers can be heard singing and seen foraging and flying around. The strident song of Tennessee Warblers can be heard virtually everywhere. As many as 30 species of warblers can be found using the properties we have set aside. Many will be sporting magnificently patterned spring plumages and

continued on p. 2

Spring Ephemerals Come and Go

Everyone anticipates the appearance of the first woodland wildflowers. It truly heralds Spring. The flowers are aptly called Spring ephemerals because they squeeze their life span into the brief period between the sufficiently warm soil and the leafing out of the overhead trees. They soon become dormant until the next spring, but in that brief period they provide us a welcome beauty with which to celebrate and enjoy nature.

The earliest of such harbingers of spring, such as harbinger-of-spring and snow trillium, can be found at Funks Grove in March, but the remaining species appear in early April and can be enjoyed at the Merwin Preserve. Walk in from the south gate, continue across the creek up the small slope and examine the



Dutchman's Breeches

continued on p. 4

Fire Season

March proved to be a great month for burning ParkLands properties as part of our restoration efforts. Many thanks to all the volunteers who assisted me in this challenging, exhausting and thrilling task!

Letchers Bottom on March 16th (reconstructed prairie) — Dave Jeffries, Susie Sears, Barry Brenneman, Frank Zimmerman, Jack Pffafman

Weston Nature Preserve Cemetery Prairie, March 14th — Frank Zimmerman, Wayne Eyman

Merwin south and north savannas on March 19th — Jason Horner, Kristi Shoemaker, Barry Brenneman, Roger Anderson, Frank Zimmerman



Letchers Bottom burn - Mary Jo Adams photo

Jason Shoemaker

Drat! It's Dreaded Garlic Mustard Season

Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), a European biennial herb first recorded in North America in 1868, was likely introduced as a salad green and medicinal herb. After a 100-year lag it began to spread exponentially, and is now a severe threat to native woodland flora, including trees, across the greater part of the U. S. and Canada. Lacking controls here, it rapidly out-competes native plants, especially the delicate Spring ephemerals, and quickly dominates whole woodlands.



The villain

Garlic mustard is extremely difficult to control. It grows in full shade to full sun, and in all but very acid soils. One plant can produce more than 800 seeds, which remain viable for up to 5 years. The sticky seeds readily attach to animal fur, shoes, tires, etc., so humans and animals help it to spread.

It imperils not only native plants which it displaces, but also all the wildlife which depend on those plants for their foliage, nectar, fruits, seeds and roots. It produces secondary compounds toxic to native invertebrate and vertebrate herbivores, and which may also inhibit the growth of other plants. It is suspected of disrupting interactions between tree seedling roots and micorrhizal fungi, thus suppressing the regeneration of native woodland trees.

We have been battling garlic mustard in ParkLands for at least 15 years. The woodland bluffs area overlooking the Mackinaw has responded well. The use of fire in areas being restored to savanna has reduced its spread, though it continues to threaten large areas in ParkLands.

Garlic mustard is easy to recognize and easy to pull, especially after a spring rain. We pull it when breath-taking drifts of spring ephemerals are at their height. Please help us preserve Illinois' wondrous native flora for coming generations. Meet us for the next garlic mustard pull at the Merwin South Gate, 9:00, on Friday, April 22.

Meredith Schroeer

Migration cont'd

singing their songs in anticipation of breeding season.

In late May things start winding down. As Black-poll Warblers start showing up in numbers, it's a sign we're past the peak. Redstarts begin to disappear and the Tennessee Warbler is heard less and less. Cape May, Magnolia and Black-throated Blue Warblers are mid-May migrants. A few later warblers can still be found. It's a good time to look for Canada, Mourning and Connecticut Warblers. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Olive-sided Flycatchers are later migrants to watch for too. So get ready and get out there. Spring is here!

Matt Winks

Nest Activity Raises Hope for Successful Eagle Hatch

There has just been too much activity up at the eagle nest in the Letcher Bottoms Preserve for a hatching not to have occurred! As of March 29, nearby neighbors Mary Jo and Sandy Adams still hadn't seen any little heads popping up, but they have observed both eagles perched up on the sides of the nest doing what appears to be feeding something. One of the eagles was seen landing in a grassy area of their field and taking grass back up to the nest and then doing a bit of arranging. *Seek the latest info at www.parklandsfoundation.org and our Facebook page.*



Last year's hatchling (on right) stopped by for a visit with its parent in mid-March while the other parent was on the nest - Mary Jo Adams photo

Following U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service recommendations, ParkLands is establishing a no contact zone in order to not disturb the eagles during the critical nesting period. A 330 to 400 ft buffer area has been flagged this spring around the nest tree. Signs will go up in the fall saying the no contact zone is in effect from November 1 to September 1. During the no contact period ParkLands will not be using loud machinery and will limit any management until after the September 1st date. Any farming practices that were taking place in the past will also be limited during these dates. ***Visitors are also encouraged to stay out of this no contact area during this period.***

*Mary Jo Adams
Jason Shoemaker*

Conservation News

Wood Duck Project

ParkLands Foundation is pleased to announce a joint project with the Illinois Prairie Chapter (Bloomington, www.illinoisprairie.org) of Delta Waterfowl. We are providing sites on our nature preserve lands for Wood Duck nest boxes; Illinois Prairie is donating materials and assisting with installation. Illinois Prairie Chapter was founded in 2005, and in 2009 was named a "Hero of Conservation" by Field & Stream magazine for its grassroots conservation work on behalf of waterfowl.

The loss of bottomland forest habitat in Illinois contributed to the decline of wood ducks, and ParkLands is actively protecting remaining habitat and restoring new habitat along the Mackinaw River.

Also, Wood Ducks naturally nest in tree cavities, but timber "improvement" practices often remove such trees important for many wildlife species. Fortunately wood ducks will eagerly accept man-made nest boxes.

ParkLands Foundation actively seeks joint projects with other conservation groups so as to advance local conservation, so we are pleased to see this partnership moving forward.

PSCC Annual Meeting

The Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) held its annual meeting on March 4, and ParkLands Foundation sent two representatives, one of whom (me) was elected to serve on the PSCC Board. PSCC's mission is to assist land trusts throughout the state of Illinois on issues requiring a united voice. Dr. James Herkert, director of the IDNR Office of Resource Conservation, was the keynote speaker. He illustrated how budgetary constraints at the state and federal levels will seriously impact conservation initiatives in Illinois, especially as some key funding sources used by land trusts will be eliminated. Although IDNR is hoping that land trusts can fill in part of the gap, that will depend on generating increased membership support to compensate for lost resources. Unfortunately, the forces eroding healthy ecosystems and causing species declines do not stop during economic downturns.

ParkLands and PSCC will continue to do the best it can in the face of these challenges.

Angelo Capparella



P. O. Box 3132
Bloomington,
Illinois 61702-3132
(309) 454-3169
Ecology Action Center

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Ephemerals cont'd

woods to your right and toward the river. During April a variety of showy species includes spring beauty in abundance, purple and yellow violets, toothwort, Dutchman's breeches, squirrel corn, wild ginger, bluebells, Jacob's ladder and bloodroot. Continuing down to the river floodplain, then bearing left along the bottom of the slope you will find a seep that contains marsh marigolds (don't walk into it!). Also, swamp buttercup is here and the first Ohio buckeyes may be in bloom. Our **April 16 Spring Wildflower Walk** concentrates on this area.

Another group of flowers blooms in May and can be found along the trail from the Merwin west gate. Spring beauties still bloom here and species found in this drier area include early buttercup, star grass and yellow-eyed grass (members of the amaryllis family), woodland phlox, spiderwort (be sure to look for the pink variety), blue and yellow violet, red trillium, sweet cicely (smells like licorice), white trout lily, bellwort, hoary puccoon (a prairie species on the south slope at Station 3), shooting star (between Stations 5 and 6), wild geranium, dwarf dandelion, columbine and violet woodsorrel. If you wander down the steps at Station 8 to admire the bluebells, look for pink and white varieties.

The **May 9 Spring Wildflower Walk** concentrates on the area from the west gate and covers the short loop back to the west parking lot. Other species will bloom in mid and late summer as well and provide a visual feast throughout the growing season!

Dale Birkenholz

Calendar of Events



Spring Wildflower Walk
Sunday, April 17, 1:00 p.m.
Merwin Preserve South Gate
Dale Birkenholz, leader
309-452-8086
dbirke@ilstu.edu

Garlic Mustard Control
Friday, April 22, 9 a.m.
Merwin Preserve South Gate
Leader: Mary Horgan
309-527-5636
horgan@mcchs.org



Sweeney Woods Tour
Friday, April 22, 1:00 p.m.
N. 1725 East, just south of Kappa RD.
Leader: Jason Shoemaker
309.5310-7065 or shoemaj@hotmail.com

Spring Wildflower Walk
Sunday, May 9, 1:00 p.m.
Merwin Preserve West Gate
Roger Anderson, leader
(309) 452-5728
rcander1941msn.com

NOTE: *Dates are subject to change.*
Join Jason's e-mail list or log on to
www.parklandsfoundation.org