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www.parklandsfoundation.org



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**Newsletter
February -
March 2014**

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Searching For Herps At ParkLands

As Curator of Vertebrates at ISU, I received permission from ParkLands and the Ill. Dept. of Natural Resources to inventory herps (snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs, toads, salamanders) as part of a broader project covering McLean and Woodford counties. Recent discoveries suggest that remnant populations of herpetofauna thought to be extirpated may still exist in our area, and ones formerly unknown may actually occur here. We need to know where so that they can be further protected.

My initial focus was the state-threatened Mudpuppy, a permanently aquatic salamander. Thanks to fieldwork help from ISU students, we have now documented it in the Mackinaw River at the following ParkLands Preserves: Letcher, Lexington, Merwin, Mohr, and Sweeney.

Another objective has been to determine if Small-mouthed Salamanders still exist on our preserves. The last report was in the 1970s from our Breen II Preserve near Lake Bloomington. Last year we found a healthy number still at Breen II and discovered a new breeding colony at Merwin. Other potential wetlands are targeted for search this spring.

The Smooth Greensnake is an Illinois species of conservation concern; the Lincoln Park Zoo is breeding them for reintroduction into Lake County. Two years ago we discovered the snake on our Lexington Preserve. We've heard of older sightings from the Merwin Preserve, but no recent records, so that is a targeted search area for this year.

Thanks to the sharp eyes and diminishing ophidiophobia of Mary Jo Adams, we have the first record of Red-bellied Snake from one of our preserves (Wyatts Ford), a snake only recently discovered by Matt Fraker to live in Woodford County. This snake superficially resembles the common Dekay's Brownsnake, but is more habitat restricted.

How Can You Help?

We have many more species that might still exist in our preserves/counties, so how can you help? If you see any interesting herps please take a photo. Ideally, a photo of their uppersides and undersides (which means gentle handling then release). If you find a road kill (no matter how flat) place it in a plastic bag and then place in the freezer, recording date and location. Send the photo to me or email me for road kill pickup at: apcappar@ilstu.edu

A good website to learn more about our Illinois herps, including which ones would be county records, is: http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/animals_plants/herps/ilspecies.html

Angelo Capparella



Smooth Greensnake - Lexington Preserve



*Small-mouthed Salamander -
Merwin & Breen II Preserves*

Meet a New Board Member - Jessica Chambers

As a child I loved being outdoors. My dad would take my family to different parks like Matthiessen, Allerton, Garden of the Gods, Funks Grove and other Illinois destinations. We would fish, camp and sometimes boat. A camping family delicacy was “camp crap” a mix of scrambled eggs, corn and SPAM.

Being a “Sparks” (my maiden name) my cousins and I would spend hours in the creeks at what is now Fairlakes Golf Course. Playing in creeks, getting muddy, and eventually lost were our specialties. On occasion we would end up in the Mackinaw, crawling out at “Sparks Bridge”.

It is obvious to me now as ISU Horticulture Center Director that my time outdoors as a child was fundamental in choosing my discipline. But when I give tours of gardens at the Center I stress the importance of not only children experiencing nature but grown-ups as well. Whether they know it or not, I believe, it is essential that **all** people have meaningful quiet times in nature (without their cell phones!)

My husband, Jason, likes to tell people he works for the county. Needless to say that between our busy jobs

our biggest joy is spending time with our three awesome children. We have decided that one of the gifts we would like to give them is to experience our National Parks. There are 401 areas within the park system – monuments, battlefields, historic sites and the “wow” parks (think Grand Canyon.) We have been to Acadia, the Great Smokies, Gettysburg, Isle Royale, Mesa Verde, Canyonlands with plans to see more.

A couple of years ago a waitress at Mesa Verde asked me, “What is Illinois like?” (**She pronounced the “s”**) I thought to myself for a moment, and then I smiled and responded, “It’s beautiful.” Being on the board of Parklands gives me the opportunity to help protect that beauty. And it might just be, that the most spectacular park, is right here in our very own backyard.



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Out and About

Exotics Removal Workday

Friday, Feb. 7 & 14, 9 am

Merwin - South Gate

Workdays Leader:

Jason Shoemaker

309-531-7065

shoemaj@hotmail.com

Exotics Removal Workday

Friday, March 7, 9 am

Merwin - West Gate

Workdays Leader:

Jason Shoemaker

309-531-7065

shoemaj@hotmail.com

Nature Photographer

Tom Ulrich

Wed. March 5, 7 pm

IWU Center for Natural Sciences

201 E Beecher

Registration & fee

www.sugargrovenaturecenter.org

309.874.2174

“Well-behaved Native Plants for Landscaping”

Mon., Feb. 10, 7 pm

U of I Extension

402 N Hershey, B'ton

Ill. Prairie Wild Ones

Wildones.org/chapters/ilprairie

“Propagating Woodland Plants”

Mon., March 10, 7 pm

U of I Extension

402 N Hershey, B'ton

Ill. Prairie Wild Ones

Wildones.org/chapters/ilprairie

“Phantoms of the Prairie: Cougars”

Thurs., March 20, 7 pm

IWU Center for Natural Sciences

201 E Beecher

www.jwp-audubon.org