

Newsletter

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A Tree-mendous Earth Week

To celebrate Earth Week, ParkLands Foundation hosted a workday at Sweeney Woods Preserve and participated in an annual day of community service with Illinois State University (ISU), Bring It Back To Normal.

Volunteers at Sweeney Woods, led by volunteer steward Tom Farmer, accomplished a feat of tasks including trimming overgrown trees, lopping invasive honeysuckle, and planting 300 trees!! More than 20 individuals from State Farm participated as volunteers to make the workday possible!



**BRING
IT • BACK • TO
NORMAL**

a community wide day of service

April 14, 2023

1:30-3:30pm

Shout out to ISU Student Volunteers!

Since 2008, Bring It Back to Normal has provided annual opportunities for students to give back to the community surrounding ISU. This year the ISU Center for Civic Engagement partnered with ParkLands Foundation for their Bring It Back to Normal (BIBTN) event on April 14th.

Our Moon Tract preserve and South Chinquapin Preserve proved to be fantastic service sites for several student volunteers and volunteer stewards. Students helped with invasive species removal, via cutting and lopping, while volunteer stewards followed closely behind to spray the invasives.



Merwin Bluebell Experience

Throughout the month of April, ParkLands Foundation volunteers attended tables at the North and West Merwin Preserve gates to greet and assist hikers as they flocked to witness the Virginia Bluebells in full bloom.

Our annual Wildflower Walk worked out perfectly to take place on Earth Day. Although the weather was unpredictable for the event, with snow making an appearance, several hikers bared the cold to experience the fantastic spring wildflowers blossoms including Virginia Bluebells, Trilliums, Violets, and more!



Explore New Trails!

Our volunteer stewards have been hard at work developing new trails across various preserves for the public! Some of the preserves treated to new trails include Lexington Preserve, Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve and Kenyon-Baller Woods Preserve thanks to Jeff and Terry Howard, Andy Smoot, Chuck Croxton, Jason Shoemaker, Mary Jo Adams and Peg Schikendanz.

Upcoming Events

July

8

6th Annual Bike Ride

Mark your calendars! ParkLands Foundation's 6th Annual Bike ride through the scenic Mackinaw River Valley is July 8th this year!

[REGISTER HERE](#)



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR

ANNUAL BIKE RIDE JULY 8TH, 2023



HELP ENSURE OUR ANNUAL BIKE RIDE IS
A SAFE AND FUN EXPERIENCE FOR ALL!



[HTTPS://WWW.PARKLANDSFOUNDATION.ORG/EVENT/BIKE-RIDE-VOLUNTEERS/](https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/event/bike-ride-volunteers/)

ALL proceeds go to support ParkLands Foundation

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Spotting Bluebirds

By Frank Zimmerman

For the last 15 years you may have noticed bluebird boxes located at various Parkland properties. More importantly, we hope you've noticed a strong population of bluebirds especially in the adoring and summer months. Bluebirds are year-round residents of central Illinois, though most bluebirds migrate to warmer climates in winter.

Beginning in the 1930s, a man from western Illinois began to construct, place, and monitor multiple bluebird boxes on a so called "trail" to help the rapidly declining species. Ornithologists generally believe that such human intervention has significantly aided the species in its recovery from dangerously low levels.

While all grassland birds are declining across the continent, after decades of success in a bluebird rebound, I'm sad to report that blue birds populations have been stagnant or declining in the last 20 years due to what we believe are a variety of complex interrelated reasons.

Unfortunately, the states with the most bluebirds, Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky have experience in the last decades significant decreases. Also of all the states that have bluebird populations, after Kentucky, it is our own state of Illinois that has experienced the second most precipitous decrease of bluebirds in recent years. One of the greatest threats to helping bluebird populations thrive amidst so many challenges are simply aging bluebird monitors, who have not trained, inspired, and secured a younger generation of enthusiasts to take over their responsibilities. We welcome the participation of both young and old, adults, teens, and children. If you would like to learn more about bluebirds, and maybe even volunteer to monitor one or more of our 75 bluebird boxes on Parklands property, please contact Parklands member and volunteer monitor, Frank Zimmerman at zgslc@icloud.com.



Bluebird facts

- Eastern bluebirds are about two-thirds the size of a robin.
- They have wingspans of 9.8 to 12.6 inches and weigh 1 to 1.1 ounces.
- Males are royal blue with a redbrown breast; females are more gray in color.
- Their diets include mostly insects, wild fruit and berries.
- In Central Illinois, bluebirds generally nest three times, starting in April or May.
- Four to six eggs are laid in each brood.
- Only the females sit on the eggs.
- Look for bluebirds perched in the open on fences or power lines.
- Some bluebirds stay in Central Illinois over the winter.



Looking Back Down the Trail

Buffalo Jones, Hell's Bend's Favorite Son

In the previous Newsletter, we highlighted the devilishly named nineteenth century settlement of Hell's Bend. It's been said the semi-isolated, heavily timbered community's curious name came from its rowdy residents and their propensity to raise a little you know what. Located in the general area where the Big Slough flowed into Money Creek (some of this land is now underwater as Lake Bloomington), Hell's Bend also encompassed what is today ParkLands Foundation's very own Moon Preserve.

The most celebrated resident to come from Hell's Bend was Charles Jesse Jones, born in 1844. In his early twenties, Jones "lit out" for the Great Plains and Kansas, where he found a bloody calling as a buffalo hunter and hide "harvester." The unparalleled butchery he participated in led to the near extinction of a species that once numbered in the tens of millions. Yet by the 1880s—confronted with ever-dwindling numbers of American bison—Jones refocused his attention to wildlife conservation. Thus one of the most celebrated killers of buffalo became one of the animal's greatest protectors.

"Buffalo" Jones (as he came to be known) eventually gathered one of the larger private bison herds in the U.S. The establishment by Jones and others of such "seed" herds played no small role in preventing what some feared was the species' imminent extinction. It was also during this time Jones attempted to interbreed buffalo with domesticated cattle, though the ill-tempered, infertile offspring—he called them "cattalo"—proved less than ideal as commercially viable livestock.



Buffalo Jones

Jones also became the first game warden of Yellowstone National Park, a position ideal for promoting buffalo conservation. President Theodore Roosevelt visited the park, and while there he tried on one of Jones' cattalo robes, described at the time as "soft as silk and as large as a parlor rug," with a luster matching that of the "finest Russian sable."

Space here does allow a full accounting of Buffalo Jones colorful career. In addition to buffalo hunter and protector, he could rightfully boast of being—at one time or another—a Wild West showman, Arctic explorer, consort to European royalty, and even cowboy of the East African Serengeti. Yes, it's all true! There's even a bronze statue of Jones in Garden City, Kansas, a town he helped put on the map. More importantly, the Kansas Historical Society commemorated his efforts in the "preservation and perpetuation" of the American bison.

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On occasion, Charles "Buffalo" Jones would return to the Twin Cities and visit old haunts and friends. On one such stay, he reflected on his role in the near extirpation of the most iconic of American mammals. "I remember the time shortly after leaving Bloomington when I used to shoot buffalo for 50 cents a head," he recalled. "There were millions of them all over the West and [for] the crime of killing those noble animals then I am seeking to atone for now by preserving them as best I can." That wish begs the question: As an individual seeks atonement, can a nation and its people seek it as well?

"Looking Back Down the Trail" contributor Bill Kemp is a proud member of ParkLands. His day job is that of librarian for the not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History.

Board Member Spotlight – Bob Fitzgerald



Profession

I teach history and philosophy at University High School.

Favorite ParkLands "Spot"

My favorite ParkLands preserves would have to be Merwin and Letcher Basin.

Years with ParkLands

This is my first year as a member of the ParkLands Board but I have been a member for a few years before then and have been visiting the preserves for a while.

Why Volunteer?

I believe the work that ParkLands is doing is essential, particularly in getting people out into nature. In an increasingly technological world, we need foundations and organizations like ParkLands now more than ever.

What is your favorite 'memory' with ParkLands?

My favorite memory with ParkLands Foundation actually happened before I became a Board member, and that was bringing my classes to Merwin on a field trip to hike for the day. We were studying Richard Louv's idea about nature deficit disorder and the preserve was the perfect space for students to witness firsthand the power of interaction he spoke of in his work. To be honest, it was that moment in particular that got me thinking about getting more involved with the Foundation.



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