

Newsletter

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Hummingbirds! Fabulous Flying Jewels

Story & Photos by Deanna Frautschi

Hummingbirds are often referred to as the flying jewels of the sky. We are visited by only one regular jeweled visitor east of the Mississippi - the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. In the West, there are 16 varieties. Worldwide, there are over 350 species.

After tracking Ruby-throated Hummingbirds' arrivals and departures in my Central Illinois yard for 40 years, I've found that the first male usually shows up by the end of April and females arrive a week later. It's good to have your feeders out by April 15. You want the hummingbirds to stop on spring migration in hopes they will stay and have young in your yard.

When you think of how small this bird is (with a wing span of five inches and a body length of three and one-half inches) and that it would weigh less than a penny in your hand, it's a miracle so many make it here from Mexico and Central America.

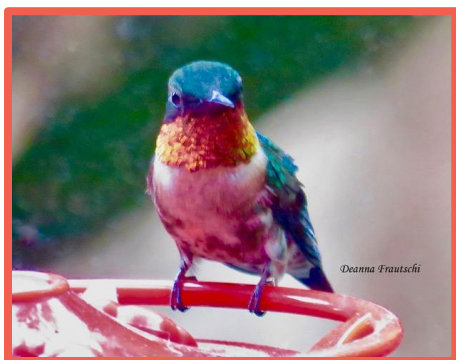
Only the males have the ruby reflective gorget (throat). Females are all white underneath. After they both arrive, the courtship is short. The female begins nest building and starts her family within a week of arrival. She lays only two eggs at a time. It takes about two and one-half weeks for the eggs to hatch and another two and one-half for the young to fledge.

Flowers or Feeders?

Hummingbirds' first preference is natural nectar from flowers. However, they quickly come to feeders when flowers are not plentiful or when there are too many other birds and insects competing for them. Humans have helped them in their travels by supplying feeders along their journey.

Making your own nectar is simple. Mix four cups of water with one cup of sugar. Heat and stir on the stove to dissolve sugar well. Cool. Fill feeders. Store any extra in fridge for refilling.

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Hummingbirds, continued from page 1.

My preference is flat, saucer-like feeders. They don't drip, are easy to clean and have a place for the hummingbirds to perch. You certainly want to see them after you've gone to the task of attracting them. Don't be afraid to bring your feeders close to the house. Hanging them on deck poles or under eaves is fine.

There are many flowers that attract hummingbirds, but those with reddish, orange or pink hues and are tubular are preferred. Some good ones to plant are cardinal flowers, sage, coral vine, columbine, salvia, bee balm, agastache and penstemon.

Ruby-throats know when to leave instinctively. The rule of thumb is to leave your feeders out until two weeks after you've seen the last one to catch any stragglers. Males leave first, usually in August, followed by females and then the young in September. Developing good hummingbird habitat takes time. Like all wildlife, they need food, water and shelter. Water can be offered through a bird bath, pond or fountain. A variety of trees and shrubs will give shelter and places to build nests. Since nests are golf ball size and well hidden, you may never see one. If you do, approach cautiously and consider yourself incredibly lucky.

ParkLands Report: Hike with a Naturalist at Lexington Preserve

by Terrie Howard

We had a beautiful day for a "Hike with a Naturalist" at the ParkLands Foundation Lexington Preserve on Saturday March 16. Thirty-three nature lovers joined Volunteer Stewards Jeff and Terrie Howard as they led a hike along the Mackinaw River, where the path was covered with Virginia Bluebells almost ready to bloom. We saw some racoon and deer tracks, and some Downy Woodpeckers. Most of the group continued on for a longer hike--past the savanna where we planted 5000 trees last spring, along Turkey Creek where we saw past beaver signs, and around the restored prairie. The highlight of the hike was seeing a small DeKay's brownsnake! We also saw Turkey Vultures and a Bald Eagle enjoying the windy spring-like day. ParkLands has a hike almost every month this year so please join us for the next one!



It's Time to Get Seedy!

by Frank Sanders

At ParkLands, we are all about restoring prairies and savannas. Much of the preserve lands we have were once depleted farmlands. So, we see mostly grasses and increasingly invasive plants growing where there once were native forbs, grasses and trees. At the South Side of Chinquapin Bluffs, a small group of Volunteer Stewards began doing what ParkLands will be doing in the future – collecting the seeds of native plants. This past September, we collected the seeds of Rattlesnake Master, Ironweed, Pale Coneflower, and Compass Plant on the hill looking over the Mackinaw River floodplain below.

We collected those seeds in paper bags and let them dry in my dehumidified basement. The seeds were immediately spread out on trays to prevent spoilage. They dried for at least three months before they were returned to the prairie.

We waited until there was a forecast for snow before we took them back to Chinquapin. While you can't always trust the weather forecast, we got lucky. With a forecast of two to three inches, we went back to the hill where we collected the seeds. We each took a bag and stationed ourselves equidistant apart to spread the seeds. We were close to where we originally collected them but moved over on the same hill with approximately the same elevation and scattered the seeds by hand. It felt like the old paintings you can see of how farmers used to plant fields. We had a stiff wind that day, so with us swinging our hands back and forth to scatter the seeds, the wind did a good job of helping.

Lo and behold, it snowed that night helping to push the seeds further towards the earth and, I suspect, preventing some of the seeds from being easy targets for birds, had they been thrown on top of the snow.

Will we be successful in spreading more native forbs at Chinquapin? We don't know but we certainly are giving the plants a better shot at spreading that just letting them fall directly to the ground. Should you wonder if we will hurt the area where we collected by "stealing" the seeds, please don't worry. We were not able to take that great a percentage of the seeds, even though we spent hours collecting them. By staying in the same general area and at the same elevation, we hope that we were locating them in a similar soil type and moisture content that was in the original area.

Should we be doing this more? You bet. We did this with Volunteers Stewards of Chinquapin. The cost of seeds can run about \$250 to \$300 per pound. By collecting from ParkLands' own plants, we know what we have, where they are already propagating, and can judge our success. This will increase our success in the future.



2024 Events

April

Wildflower Walk
Merwin Nature Preserve
April 27, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

May

Hike With A Naturalist:
Hayes Woods Preserve
May 5, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

August

Hike With A Naturalist:
Letcher Basin Preserve
August 24, 9-11 a.m.

June

Hike With A Naturalist:
Kenyon-Baller Preserve
June 15, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

September

Annual Meeting of Members
Moon Preserve & Davis Lodge
September 8, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

July

7th Annual Bike Ride
July 13, 7 a.m.-1 p.m.

October

Stargazing with the
Twin City Amateur Astronomers
South Chinquapin Bluff Preserve
October 4, 6:30-10 p.m.

August

Musseling in the Mackinaw
South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve
August 17, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

November

Hike With A Naturalist:
South Chinquapin Bluff Preserve
November 2, 1-3 p.m.

Visit the "Events" page on our website to sign up or
scan the QR code !

www.parklandsfoundation.org/events/



Interested in Hosting an Event at a ParkLands Preserve?

Our preserves are perfect for group hikes. If you're interested in hosting a hike with a group larger than 15, please let us know in advance so that we can ensure that no other conflicting events are taking place at the preserve you are interested in! Reach out to us via email at info@parklandsfoundation.org.

Board Member Spotlight:

Vasudha Gadhiraju

What is your profession? I am an urban and regional planner by training, presently holding the role of Director of Innovation and Technology for the Town of Normal. My role extends beyond overseeing day-to-day operations to leading and assisting on initiatives that bridge the gap between urban planning and technology, including environmental sustainability initiatives. I am constantly exploring ways to utilize technology for the betterment of our community.

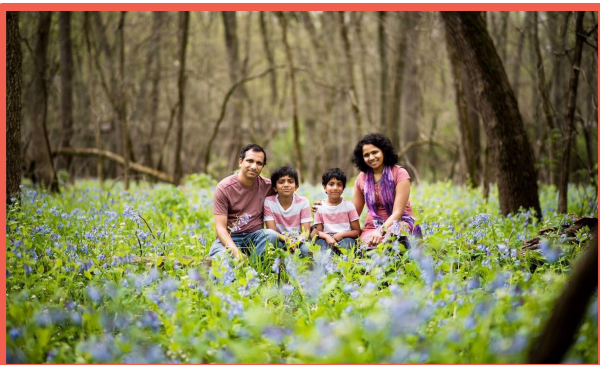
What is your favorite ParkLands spot? My preferred destination within the ParkLands preserves is the Merwin Preserve. The trails boast a diverse range of landscapes that never fail to enthrall me. Throughout the summer, I cherish our walks there with family and friends. The sight of the bluebells in full bloom, typically from April to May, adds an extra touch of beauty to our experience.

How long have you been with ParkLands? I've had the pleasure of collaborating with ParkLands since 2013 during my tenure as the Executive Director of McLean County Regional Planning (MCRPC). I became a member of the ParkLands Board in 2023.

Why volunteer with ParkLands? As a student of Urban and Regional Planning at Iowa State University, I interned at the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to conserving Iowa's land, water, and wildlife through collaboration with landowners and public agencies. This experience profoundly influenced me, both personally and professionally. Subsequently, I worked as an environmental planner in Decatur, Illinois, and served on boards that furthered environmental sustainability, including the Rock Springs Conservation Area of Macon County. Since relocating to Bloomington-Normal in 2013, I've been involved in Greenways initiatives, and greatly appreciated ParkLands Foundation's efforts in preserving Central Illinois' natural beauty. My family and I cherish our experiences in ParkLands' protected areas, which is why volunteering with ParkLands allows me to contribute, albeit in a small way, to its crucial mission - to protect, restore, and manage natural lands in the Mackinaw River watershed of Central Illinois.



Board Member Vasudha Gadhiraju's sons at Merwin Preserve in 2023.



Vasudha Gadhiraju's family in a sea of bluebells at Merwin Preserve in 2016.
Photo credit: Vinay Devari

What is your favorite memory with ParkLands? One of my most cherished experiences with ParkLands is at Merwin Preserve. We stumbled upon this gem during the bluebell season in 2016 when my children were young. Since then, we've made it an annual tradition to return each summer for hikes. With limited cell connectivity, we were truly present, connecting with each other and nature. ParkLands made it possible for us to instill a love for the outdoors in the next generation.



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