



FEBRUARY – MARCH 2021

NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY



A chapter of the National Audubon Society

Sharp-shinned Hawk
Accipiter striatus

A tiny hawk that appears in a blur of motion—and often disappears in a flurry of feathers. That's the Sharp-shinned Hawk, the smallest hawk in Canada and the United States and a daring, acrobatic flier. These raptors have distinctive proportions: long legs, short wings, and very long tails, which they use for navigating their deep-woods homes at top speed in pursuit of songbirds and mice. They're easiest to spot in fall on their southward migration, or occasionally at winter feeders.

www.nwilaudubon.org

NIAS MONTHLY PROGRAMS

Join us the first Tuesday of every month, September through May. All of our programs are open to the public.

Please note: schedule and location of programs are subject to change due to COVID-19 restrictions; please see newsletter and website for up-to-date information.

Most programs are held at the St John United Church of Christ, 1010 Park Blvd., in Freeport.

Most programs begin at 7 PM with announcements, followed by the program at 7:30 and then refreshments.

Check the current newsletter or our website nwilaudubon.org for specific monthly details, special events or any changes to the usual time and place.

Please join us!

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- Bird ID text: allaboutbirds.org
- Bird ID photo: Alan Schmierer
- 2/2 Program photo provided by David Olson
- 3/2 Program photo provided by USFWS Genoa Fish Hatchery
- Illustrations by Carol Litus

THE FEBRUARY AND MARCH PROGRAMS WILL BE VIRTUAL PROGRAMS, PRESENTED VIA ZOOM.

For all individuals who want to join the program, please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com to receive the link to join this Zoom program. These programs will begin at 7:00 pm, first with any chapter announcements from the president and board members, followed by our presenter. There will be time for questions and discussions at the end. These programs are open to the public!



Photo provided by David Olson

BOBCAT: ILLINOIS'S NATIVE CAT

Tuesday, February 2nd, 7:00pm | Zoom Program

Bobcats, named for their short, bobbed tail, are about twice the size of a common house cat. They use their keen sight and hearing to hunt rabbits, squirrels, small rodents and some birds. They are mostly nocturnal, reclusive animals that prefer forested or wooded areas. Once hunted almost to extinction in the Midwest,

bobcats have been making a comeback over the past 40 years.

In this talk, Jennifer Kuroda will cover every facet of the elusive cats, including history, biology, predator perception, management and information about the ongoing bobcat population studies in Illinois.

Jennifer Kuroda is the founder of the Illinois Bobcat Foundation. She received her bachelor's degree from Rockford University and is a lifelong Rockford resident. She serves as the board president of the Sinissippi Audubon Society and Audubon Council of Illinois. She has been a nature lover since she was a young girl.

MUSSELS, LAKE STURGEON, AND HINE'S EMERALD DRAGONFLIES, OH MY!

Tuesday, March 2nd, 7:00pm | Zoom Program

Our presenter for this evening will be Orey Eckes who is employed by the USFWS at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (Genoa, WI) as the lead fish biologist. Orey will take us on a virtual tour of the hatchery that is located in Southwestern Wisconsin. Its ability to create different rearing environments, makes it one of the most diverse hatcheries in the nation. The Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) has played a major role in the conservation of aquatic species since its founding in 1932. Over the last 75 years, the mission of the hatchery has changed from providing sport-fish for area waters to a conservation hatchery concerned with the recovery of endangered aquatic species.

The station rears more than 26 aquatic species of varying life stages equating to more than 40 million fish, eggs, and mussels to support management, restoration, and research objectives all across the country, from New Mexico to Georgia. We will take learn more about their important projects working with endangered species such as the Higgins eye pearly mussel, lake sturgeon, coaster brook trout, Hine's Emerald dragonfly and others.

Orey Eckes' experience and dedication to the preservation and enhancement of fisheries resources has led him to pursue a career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He has a Master Degree from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in Biology Aquatic Science. His interests include research for depleted fish species (specifically lake sturgeon) to develop fish management techniques that aid in species recovery. We appreciate him sharing his knowledge, experience and time with us.



Photo provided by USFWS Genoa Fish Hatchery

CALENDAR CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the uncertainty of future cancellations associated with COVID-19, please check our website calendar before any scheduled event or call any leader on the event. If you would like to be notified by email, please send a message to nwilaudubon@gmail.com to be placed on an email contact list.



M **Tuesday, February 2, 7:00 p.m.**

Monthly Program (virtual via Zoom):
Bobcat: Illinois's Native Cat (cover)

M **Tuesday, March 2, 7:00 p.m.**

Monthly Program (virtual via Zoom):
Mussels, Lake Sturgeon, and Hine's
Emerald Dragonflies, Oh My! (cover)

E **Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 p.m.**

Elkhorn Creek Woodcock Watch

F **Thursday, March 11, 1:30 p.m.**

Field Trip: Skunk Cabbage Walk at
Franklin Creek (see page 3)

F **Saturday March 13, 10:00 a.m.**

Field Trip: Spring Awakening Scavenger
Hunt at Oakdale Nature Preserve (see
page 3)

E **Saturday, March 20, 7:00 p.m.**

Elkhorn Creek Woodcock Watch

E **Thursday, March 25, 7:00 p.m.**

Elkhorn Creek Woodcock Watch

F **Saturday, March 27, 9 a.m.**

Field Trip: Spring Mississippi River
Waterfowl (see page 3)

M **Meeting**

F **Field Trip**

E **Event**

O **Other**

Questions About Your Membership?

Contact Teresa Smith at 815-238-3963
or timtreetsmith@gmail.com



American Woodcock by Dan Barron

ELKHORN CREEK WOODCOCK WATCHES

Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 p.m.

Leader: Anne Straight, 815-938-3263

Saturday, March 20, 7:00 p.m. (Happy Equinox!)

Leader: Mary Blackmore, 815-938-3204

Thursday, March 25, 7:00 p.m.

Leader: Mary Blackmore, 815-938-3204

COVID-19 precautions: Bring your mask for when you may be closer than 6 feet to another person. Any additional COVID-19-related information will be given to you when you call a leader to register.

Join us for any or all of these evening outings to watch and listen for American Woodcocks performing their amazing courtship display. It will be especially gratifying to witness the return of these birds after what may be a long hard winter.

The woodcock's "Sky Dance" itself is part ground-strutting and part zig-zagging flight, barely visible in the early evening sky. More fascinating perhaps are the sounds that go with it, the repetitious vocal "peent!" followed by the twittering and chirping sounds made when air rushes

through primary flight feathers during the bird's flight. On a quiet evening, it is pure audio magic.

In the past we have had 3-6 woodcocks performing their twilight display for about 3-4 weeks. When and if this begins is an educated guess, so be sure to call the listed leader to register in advance and to receive confirmation that the birds have returned and the weather is suitable.

The preserve is located about 3 miles southwest of Forreston in the southeast corner of West Grove and Freeport Roads. The parking lot is off of West Grove Rd.

Make time to experience this unique avian harbinger of spring. The joy will be all yours.

FIELD TRIPS

COVID-19 Precautions: Be sure to bring your face covering for when you are unable to social distance. Additionally, optical equipment, including spotting scopes, cannot be shared.

SKUNK CABBAGE WALK AT FRANKLIN CREEK

Thursday, March 11
1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Leader: Mary Blackmore, 815-938-3204
(call to register)

Join us as we stroll the hard-surfaced paths at the Franklin Creek State Natural Area in northern Lee County looking for that wetland harbinger of spring, Skunk Cabbage. If the weather conditions are right we may see the interesting patterns that are made when heat from the growing Skunk Cabbage melts a circle of snow or ice around the emerging plant.

Predicting plant emergence is an educated guess. After you have called to register, Mary will call you if cancellation is necessary.

We will car-caravan from the Forreton municipal lot (adjacent to the library) at 1:30. Each driver will be given a map in case we get separated.

SPRING AWAKENING SCAVENGER HUNT AT OAKDALE NATURE PRESERVE

Saturday, March 13
10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Leader: Richard Benning, 815-865-5279
(call to register)

Getting out in the natural world can be a great way to relieve the sense of isolation caused by the pandemic. This activity, taking place one week before the equinox, will encourage family units to get out and about at Oakdale searching for certain tangible and intangible things. Meet at the parking lot near the Mogle Center anytime within the above stated time parameters to get your scavenger hunt list. Wearing masks and physical distancing will be requested when getting your list and should you find yourself in close proximity to other family units. Participants are asked to call Richard Benning (815-865-5279) to register for this activity in case it becomes necessary to limit participation.

SPRING MISSISSIPPI RIVER WATERFOWL

Saturday, March 27
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Leader: Mary Blackmore, 815-938-3204
(call to register)

Join us as we look for migrating waterfowl on the Mississippi River south of Savanna. Usually a wide variety of both diving and dabbling ducks can be observed, with males in their colorful breeding plumage. We also should see grebes, pelicans, eagles, geese and some songbirds. Hopefully we'll spot some cranes and swans as well.

Meet at the river overlook across from the FWS Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center, 7071 Riverview Rd., Thomson, as Spring Lake will likely be closed. Other downstream sites that we'll visit include Big Slough, Thomson Causeway and Lock and Dam #13. Bring a sack lunch if you plan to stay past noon.

WHAT IS Zoom?

Yes, zoom is a feature on your binoculars to see a bird more clearly, but lately, Zoom is also an online platform that allows online meetings and audio/video conferencing.

Although most people use a computer to use Zoom to watch and participate in programs, you are also able to use a phone to listen to the program and still participate.

Now that NIAS is using Zoom for special events and programs, please contact Juliet Moderow at nwilaudubon@gmail.com or 815-599-3578 if you need instructions on how to use Zoom.

Seed Sowing at Elkhorn Creek Biodiversity Preserve

Photo by Pam Richards



Awesome Auduboners still at it, December 10th, 2020

Mary Blackmore, Bernard Lischwe, Molly Doolittle, Kara Gallup, Paul Brown, Harlan and Judy Corrie, and Pam Richards

It is hard to tell with the masks, hats, and sunglasses; but eight of us gathered at Elkhorn to disperse seed collected this fall. Some were from conservative species such as Lead plant (*Amorpha canescens*).

– Pam Richards

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

This year marked the 121st time that the Christmas Bird Count was held on a national basis. The very first CBC was held December 25, 1900, with a limited number of local counts taking place across the United States. Over the years it has grown to approximately 2500 individual counts and takes place in most of the countries in the Western Hemisphere. This year was the 45th time that the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society has participated in the CBC.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not affected the birds, but it did change the protocol in the way counts were held. All field counters were required to socially distance themselves from everyone except members of their immediate family while participating in the count. Our typical count day organizational breakfast, mid-day lunch, post-count supper and carpooling were canceled. However, alternate strategies were utilized and our count, which was held on December 19, proceeded smoothly. Some field counters had members of their immediate family with them as they perused their territory. Other field counters had to go it alone. Several feeder counters also participated with the changes due to the pandemic not affecting them very much.

One of the constants of the CBC is that all observations must be within a defined territory, ours being a fifteen mile diameter circle centered at Read Park in Freeport. We tallied a grand total of 7114 birds, representing 44 species on the day of the count. Two more "count week" species were also observed, meaning they were observed up to three days before count day or up to three days after count day, but not on count day. A complete list of species observed, and the number of individuals representing each species, can be accessed online at www.christmasbirdcount.org. However it will take a while for results to be entered into the database.

Here are a few notables from this year's count. A record number (42) of Bald Eagles was observed for our count circle. This was the seventeenth year in a row that we have seen this species. The number of Dark-eyed Juncos was more than double that of last year. American Tree Sparrow observations rebounded from a very low total last year. Despite a light snow cover, which makes them easier to see, open country ground birds were again down in numbers. However we did tally one Snow Bunting and 44 Horned Larks, but no Lapland Longspurs. This year's top ten list is as follows;

European Starling (2102), Canada Goose (1145), House Sparrow (1100), Dark-eyed Junco (559), Rock Pigeon (450), American Tree Sparrow (292), Mourning Dove (212), American Crow (196), Blue Jay (145) and Mallard (124).

Thank you to the following individuals for helping with this year's count. Field observers were Richard Benning, Mary Blackmore, Jeremy Dixon, Leah Dixon, Wyatt Dixon, Laura Dufford, Doug Dufford, Gary Gordon, Mary Pat Gordon, Mark Keister, Sheryl Pitts Wolff, Teresa Smith, Tim Smith and Anne Straight. Feeder observers were Harlan Corrie, Judy Corrie, Bob Curtis, Carol Curtis, Somer Elgin, Richard Luthin, Juliet Moderow, Rebecca Shriver, Lurane Slaght and John Walt. Special thanks to Tim Smith for storing our CBC data in digital format.

– Richard Benning
Freeport Circle
Christmas Bird Count Compiler



NEW SPECIES AT OUR PRESERVES

We continue to find new species at our preserves, celebrating each new find. Contributing to these numbers was our ability to visit the sites more often, especially during the spring. Many thanks to everyone who helped locate and identify these additions.

For a complete species list of each preserve, consult our website or call Mary at 815-938-3204.

Elkhorn Creek (9)

Forbs

Pussy Toes
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
Curly Dock
White Snakeroot

Trees

Choke Cherry

Insects

American Painted Lady
Hackberry Butterfly
Halloween Pennant



White Snakeroot
Ageratina altissima

Birds

Ovenbird

Silver Creek (17)

Forbs

Early Buttercup
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
Hooked Buttercup
Bloodroot
Pale Purple Coneflower
Prairie Dock
Compass Plant
Tall Coreopsis

Trees

Black Oak

Insects

Mourning Cloak
Bald-faced Hornet

Birds

Yellow-throated Vireo
Blackpoll Warbler
Canada Warbler
Northern Bobwhite

Amphibians

American Toad
Western Chorus Frog



Early Buttercup
Ranunculus fascicularis



Bald-faced Hornet
Dolichovespula maculata

Photos by Dan Barron

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION



Photo by Mary Blackmore

While COVID-19 precautions did not allow for chapter indoor events this year, it was safe to conduct our many activities at both our Elkhorn Creek and Silver Creek Biodiversity Preserves. These collective actions made a big difference not only in the woodlands, wetlands and prairies that we care for, but also in the lives of many of our volunteers.

Beginning with prescribed burns in March and ending with overseeding various prairie forbs in December, volunteers donated many hours to stewardship efforts in 2020. After the burns, the seasonal cycle continued with removing Garlic Mustard, then cutting parsnip and clover, on to seed collecting, and concluding with lopping and/or uprooting honeysuckle and Multiflora Rose. In addition,

considerable trail maintenance work was done involving mowing, chainsawing and moving wood. There were 64 scheduled stewardship sessions plus considerable non-scheduled work that totaled well over 1000 volunteer hours. During the year 34 people volunteered at the preserves. Whether someone volunteered one time or dozens of times, every person was deeply appreciated.

During the year many volunteers remarked on how grateful they felt to have these opportunities, enabling them to be around people safely and to join together to do good work. The unity of our efforts was especially appreciated in a year of pervasive divisiveness. Our collective action and commonality of purpose was very gratifying. While our stewardship routine was different – with masks, social distancing and the absence of an official break time with homemade treats (the latter sorely missed!) – volunteers were able to talk with each other, albeit more loudly due to distance and/or masks (there were lots of jokes about our eventual collective challenge of lowering our voices). We also were able to strengthen our relationships by sharing books, articles, garden produce, flowers, photographs and much more as we greeted one another in the parking lot.

Our relationships to the sites and the various living things also strengthened. Many new species were recorded, fascinating behaviors noted, stunning colors and light observed, great photos taken, cyclical changes appreciated, and “favorites” declared.

The writer Robin Wall Kimmerer captures the importance of all of those relationships beautifully in these lines from her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

“Species composition may change, but relationship endures. It is the most authentic facet of the restoration. Here is where our most challenging and most rewarding work lies, in restoring a relationship of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. And love.”

Though I am writing this on the Winter Solstice, it will be only a couple of months before the stewardship cycle begins again. I invite you to join us once or as many times as you’d like in 2021 for what you may discover to be some of your most rewarding relationships.

– Mary Blackmore

Jim and Keith's hill at Elkhorn Creek Biodiversity Preserve

Photo by Kara Gallup



GETTING STARTED WITH NATIVE PLANTS

Sarah and Dan Barron

No matter your garden, or gardening experience, planting native species can be aesthetically pleasing while contributing to local biodiversity. To some, the “native” gardening journey may seem daunting. We’re writing to provide you with valuable resources that we hope will turn hesitation or fear into enjoyment and excitement.

Between the two of us, we have experience working in the native nursery trade, as well as seed collection and bare root propagation. We’ve also had our own experiences with urban plantings, such as converting a fence-to-fence lawn into an urban lot with over 80 native species.

We’ll walk you through five key areas to get you started on your journey; why you should consider planting natives over non-natives, what to expect through the process, options for preparing your site, choosing species, and finally, methods of planting.

Let’s start with the most overarching question: why plant native species?

In truth, this article would be never-ending if we addressed this question solely, but here are a few solid reasons to begin with.

Biodiversity: No matter how much land you’re working with, planting native species is an assured way to bring biodiversity to your area, which, in turn, helps the greater environment. When you put a native plant in the soil, even if it’s just one, you’re bringing more than just plant diversity.

Even our small yard in the middle of La Crosse, Wisconsin, has attracted foxes, opossums, warblers and on occasion a Wood Thrush. We’ve also witnessed steady increases in the diversity of solitary bees, beetles and butterflies. There are countless insect species reliant on native plants and many more bird species dependent on those insects, especially when raising their young.



A lightning bug rests under the flower of *Anemone virginiana* (Tall Thimbleweed).
Photo by Sarah Barron

Whether it be goldfinches dining on the seeds of a mature *Silphium perfoliatum* (Cup Plant), monarch butterflies on milkweed (*Asclepias spp.*) or bumblebees on *Monarda fistulosa* (Wild Bergamot), a minor inclusion of native plants can have a monumental impact on the local environment. Encouraging biodiversity also contributes to your own satisfaction; the ability to look out your window or stroll around the yard, always with a possibility of seeing something new.

Inputs (or the lack of): We’re struck by the supplemental efforts that many conventional ornamental varieties require, which may include the application of concentrated fertilizers. Generally native plants require no input of nutrients – aside from the occasional inclusion of compost or mulch (don’t rake those leaves to the curb!). The application of highly concentrated fertilizers will often only benefit fast-growing annual weeds.

Many non-native ornamental varieties are prone to insect damage and pathogens. This is primarily due to the fact that these (non-native) ornamental species evolved in a different part of the world, with a different array of insect herbivores. When growing species native to your region, you can be assured that most of those plants have had thousands of years to “work out” many of the insect and fungal issues that cause some gardeners to turn to pesticides and fungicides. While natives are not exempt from insect predation and the adverse affects of pathogens, you will find that occurrences are less problematic. In fact, predation from native insects might be part of your goal all along (host species!).

Resiliency: Being a resident of the midwest, you can understand how variable and harsh seasonal weather can be. Plant

species that have endured the extremes of summer and winter for thousands of generations are best able to thrive in, or at least endure increasingly adverse growing conditions. For example, many shortgrass prairie species have evolved to conserve water. You’ll see this most often in plants with a dense covering of hairs and/or deep tap roots.

Carbon Sequestration: Complex or deeply rooted native perennials sequester massive amounts of carbon from our atmosphere. The resulting richness in soil is one reason why nearly all of our tallgrass prairies were plowed under and converted into farmland.

Education: Lastly, we’ll note that whether you’re a beginner at observing the natural world, or a seasoned naturalist, you’ll find that having native plants so close to home provides endless educational opportunities. Having natives plants a few steps from our front door helped us learn identifying factors through various plant life stages, not to mention the ever-interesting insect species that frequent those native plants.

Now that you’re familiar with some of the benefits of planting natives, let’s discuss what to expect.

As gardeners of native plants, you’re creating small habitats. And with that, comes the unpredictability of nature. We’ve planted, dare we say, hundreds of roots and seeds that never sprang up. Or, they did, only years after expected to do so, which then had to compete with hastily chosen (back-up) species over the same area. If your plan is to maintain order of the natural world, you may achieve that goal partially, but never fully. The natural world is not a well ordered English garden. Having said that, planting natives doesn’t have to mean you’ll have a “wild” looking yard. As with all gardening, the visual aesthetic is ultimately dependent on the work of the gardener.

Being seed collectors and growers of 1,000’s of plants per year, we are frequently faced with an abundance of “seed cleanings” and roots that are too small to sell. In our case, the result was a series of “experimental” beds that have been affectionately referred to as our “urban chaos prairie”. In reality, the “chaos” is diverse and ever-changing, more resembling a reconstructed prairie

than an intentional planting. Species that worked well in this situation were typically similar in habit, or at least complimentary in regarding to growing season – *Dalea purpurea* (Purple Prairie Clover), *Sisyrinchium campestre* (Prairie Blue-eyed Grass), *Asclepias verticillata* (Whorled Milkweed) and annual *Chamaecrista fasciculata* (Partridge Pea) provided full season interest and forage for insects in a dry, sunny corner of the yard.

Conversely, we've had wonderful success with native plants in areas that needed to appear "landscaped", such as the front of our house. In these situations it's really important to understand the habits of the plants you choose. These habits can be exploited to support a particular aesthetic or need.

For instance, clump-forming grasses, such as *Andropogon gerardii* (Big Bluestem) and *Sporobolus heterolepis* (Prairie Dropseed), and sedges, such as *Carex radiata* (Eastern Star Sedge) and *Carex sprengei* (Sprengel's Sedge), make excellent borders – with shorter species in the front and taller bringing up the back. Taprooted species like *Silphium laciniatum* (Compass Plant) will tend to stay in place, while its rhizomatous cousin *Silphium perfoliatum* (Cup Plant) is eager to form colonies (it also makes a great seasonal privacy fence). Baptisias such as *Baptisia lactea* (White Wild Indigo) make excellent specimen plants. A combination of mulching around smaller areas with "well behaved" species, like *Echinacea pallida* (Pale Purple Coneflower), while promoting more aggressive species like *Monarda punctata* (Spotted Horsemint) in larger areas can provide different textures, while minimizing long-term cost and labor.

It's also important to recognize that natives have aesthetic interest often before and after bloom times. So, when choosing species, cast a wider net than just how

the flower looks. A few shining examples include *Geum triflorum* (Prairie Smoke) with its billowing pink seed head and seemingly evergreen basal leaves, or the lush foliage of *Polemonium reptans* (Spreading Jacob's Ladder). Sometimes dormant foliage is the showiest, such as *Schizachyrium scoparium* (Little Bluestem) and *Lespedeza capitata* (Round-headed Bush Clover), both providing long-lasting winter interest.

Now we'll cover a few options for preparing your site. We should note that we've decided to abstain from the use of herbicide, so all of these options are "mechanical".

In well established lawn, where annual weeds have been mostly controlled via mowing, the physical act of "**de-sodding**" can be very effective. While mainly practical for smaller areas, de-sodding removes short-rooted sod below the root (generally around 2") along with many weed seeds that rest dormant in the top layer of soil. There are a variety of de-sodding methods available, including manual and gas powered sod cutters that can be rented from many hardware stores. The most simple (and cheap) way is to vertically "slice" a contour of your future bed with a sharp spade. The contour line will permit sliding the spade horizontally beneath the root layer, severing the roots and resulting in "mats" of sod that can be rolled up and moved off of your garden site. This method is low-cost, but labor heavy. In our case, we ran out of uses for the de-sodded layer (there are only so many low spots in a yard to fill), so we piled it up in a long row (upside down) and covered it with repurposed permeable landscape cloth. This eventually became a nice "mound" for gardening cucumbers, squash and watermelon.

Smothering is an excellent solution for reducing competition on small and medium-sized areas. It can also be the least labor intensive method, but that will mean waiting a full season or more to ensure that smothering has done the trick in reducing or eliminating the pressure of existing vegetation. There are different takes on this method, but almost any large object that blocks light can be used to smother an area (plywood, large tarps, cardboard). For large areas (frequently used by commercial growers), rolls of



Once areas were desodded we laid out half gallon pots, which had been planted two months earlier with bare roots.
Photo by Dan Barron

water permeable but light-blocking landscape cloth can be rolled out and secured with 6" sod staples. This method is highly effective and the plastic is reusable for many years. Still, the plastic can be expensive – and will eventually contribute to the waste stream.

Solarizing has been promoted by some organizations, such as the Xerces Society. This method is similar to smothering, as the method covers an area with a plastic substrate, but in this case the plastic is clear, allowing light to permeate. The goal is to encourage heating of the top soil layer – which in theory kills vegetative growth and existing weed seeds within that stratum. This method is more expensive than smothering because a high-grade (UV stable) transparent plastic, such as greenhouse covering is needed (though recycled options may be available for free). Also, all of the edges must be buried in soil to form a tight seal that "captures" heat.

Mulching can be an excellent method to control existing vegetation. Mulching is essentially "smothering" with organic, biodegradable materials. We've found that raking our fall leaves into simple enclosures of chicken wire (which prevent the leaves from blowing away) provide an ideal area for planting seed or plugs. By spring the leaves (even 20"+) will compress into a thin layer, often resembling rich compost. We've had success with covering this "leaf layer" with growing medium and directly sowing seeds. Some have also experimented with piling sand or wood chips on top of cardboard "mulch". The resulting barrier between existing vegetation provides at least a season of coverage and may promote direct sowing of seed mixes. This has been proven effective when layers of sand are coupled with the planting of seed mixes containing shortgrass prairie species. (Cont. page 8)



Monarda punctata (Spotted Horsemint) spreads by rhizomes and quickly dominated areas of our "urban chaos prairie". The annual *Chamaecrista fasciculata* (Partridge Pea) is seen in the background.
Photo by Dan Barron

THE PRESIDENT'S TWEET

We are certainly living through some interesting times, to say the least. In reflection over the past year, 2020 has been a tremendous challenge, a difficult year filled with loss, uncertainty and a whole new way of doing things like school and meetings and even family gatherings. I did not think that ending 2020 and moving into 2021 would suddenly be without issues or events, and it has not disappointed. While we are still in lockdown, the substantial snow storm with ice before and after the snow, followed by several beautiful days of rime ice, left the area looking picturesque and at the same time drove an abundance of birds to our feeders. We gladly watched these beautiful creatures while recovering from all the shoveling we ended up doing.

And then there is the election (I really can't believe this is the 3rd Newsletter where the election has been included as part of my subject matter...) What would normally be a simple process, the certification of the 2020 election, promised to be a bit more difficult this year with some expected objections to the electoral votes, but to see the views of the Capitol of the U.S. being stormed by rioters was an image we won't soon forget. We are very hopeful that once January 20th has come and gone, the dust will settle and the Nation can get moving on to the healing that is so badly needed. (Hoping for some rolling back of the destructive changes wrought during the previous administration—We will continue to keep you posted via text and email about advocacy opportunities and if you would like to be added to our contact list, please contact me via email at gary.gordon@comcast.net)

We are looking forward to being a positive force in the community as we will be reaching out in some interesting ways in the coming months. We are approaching 2021 with some guarded optimism. There will be a number of special community events we will be a part of including a Bird and Art Exhibition along with special activities we have planned for Earth Fest (formerly Earth Day). In addition 2021 is the 50th anniversary of the creation of this Audubon chapter and we hope to have some celebrations around that important milestone. We also look forward to outdoor activities including the spring bird walks to see the spring migratory birds, the bird-a-thon, woodcock walks, campfires, and stewardship activities.

For the immediate future we still have some excellent programs lined up over the next several months as part of our Zoom events. Please continue to mark your calendars and also check out the NWILAudubon.org website as we move ahead.

Of course, we are looking forward to further distribution in the area of the COVID-19 Vaccines, which will certainly mean we will continue to be safer and be able to move out of our isolation bubbles back to some level of normalcy.

Enjoy the newsletter this month and continue to stay safe.

— Gary G Gordon
NWIL Audubon President

Getting Started with Native Plants...

If planting into a larger areas, say 1,000 square/feet or more, you may want to look at the process a bit differently. While not the scope of this article, we will note that many large areas have been successfully over-seeded with native plants without the use of herbicides. This method, which mostly pertains to prairie reconstructions, relies on **periodical mowing** to suppress fast-growing weedy competition. As the characteristics of a garden or planting are variable, so too are the methods required to propagate and manage native plantings.

Now let's dive deeper into the fun part – choosing species!

We've covered some potential options throughout this article, but there is a lot to consider when starting out. How do you ensure the plant is actually native? Or maybe the plant is native to the North America, but not to your region – or perhaps there are species that are “native” but may not work well for your site? One obvious method is to visit a local native remnant that mirrors your site, to see what is growing. Still, seasonal variability and experience may prove daunting. Also, many state and federal natural areas provide species lists, which can be used to guide your site plan. Finally, most reputable native plant nurseries may provide this information online, or via consultation. The important factor is to ask questions (is this species a cultivar, is it native to my areas, etc).

If ordering from a nursery, double check the botanical name on the species. Word of warning – never buy plants or seed that don't list the botanical name. Some species, like *Monarda fistulosa* (Wild Bergamot), are often found in catalogues, but may actually be cultivars of a native species (nativars). Be wary of “nativars” which are typically plants bred for human appeal, while ignoring ecological impacts. These commercial hybrids usually have names like “Rudbeckia Cherry Brandy” or “Sombrero® Salsa Red Echinacea” (notice the “®”). As with all plants, you'll also want to pay attention to necessary growing conditions, like sun exposure and soil moisture.

When planning small garden areas, some sources suggest avoiding native plants deemed as “aggressive”. We'd like to present a case for planting those exact

Sadly, Alice Akins passed away on Monday, January 4.

Alice's history with the Elkhorn Preserve goes back to the beginning. Alice's husband Jim saw the “For Sale” sign on the Elkhorn property and alerted Keith.

For those of us who volunteer at Elkhorn, we will remember Alice's good cooking. Once a summer she invited us to her home for breakfast following a work session. It was something we all looked forward to.

If you would like to send a sympathy card to Alice's family:

Jesse Akins (Alice's son)
15355 W. Lanark Rd.
Forreston, IL 61030

The family has established a memorial in Alice's name to Faith Lutheran in Forreston.

— Nancy Ocken

— We will have information to honor Alice in our next newsletter.



The somewhat aggressive *Anemone canadensis* (Canada Anemone) formed a large patch around our rain barrel.
Photo by Sarah Barron

species. Our small gardens had several “aggressive” species, and they were some of our favorite garden areas. Aggressive (rhizomatous) species are particularly handy for gardeners who have tight budgets, or have difficult growing conditions. Sure, our *Anemone canadensis* (Canada anemone) found its way between our brick pathways. But, so did the quack grass and annual weeds. Our view is that if an area requires the removal (management) of “weedy” plants, it would be better to cull native species, instead of non-native varieties. A bonus of culling native weedy species, is that they can be transplanted somewhere else or given away! If in doubt, do a little homework. Many gardeners chose aggressive non-



The seeds of *Aquilegia canadensis* (Red Columbine) can easily be shaken into an envelope or paper bag. Sometimes difficult to grow once dormant, seeds planted immediately after collection tend to germinate quite well. | Photos by Dan Barron

native plants that we deem much more of a nuisance. Invasive species such as Japanese barberry, European buckthorn and multiflora rose should be avoided at all cost. Of course, every gardeners circumstances are different, but we hope to provide some support should you feel convicted to choose an “aggressive” native.

Finally, we’ll quickly cover a few methods of planting.

First, if you need “landscaped” results, then transplanting “**dormant bare roots**” or live “**plugs**” will be the way to go. Bare root plants, which are already 1-2 years old, will frequently flower within the same season of transplanting, though results will vary by species and growing condition. Commercial bare root plants are usually grown in beds, without inputs. If purchasing bare roots, be careful to

ensure that they were propagated for sale and **never wild dug**.

Plugs are typically grown quickly in a greenhouse and pushed to a sellable size with heat and inputs. Most plants sold as plugs are in their first growing season, making them less likely to bloom that year. Still, plugs are a good way to get plants in the ground, especially given their small uniform size and lower cost.

If purchasing live plants, you should note that many native plant nurseries start marketing their spring offerings as early as January. So, if you’re hoping to purchase live plants, you’ll want to finalize those orders by mid-February.



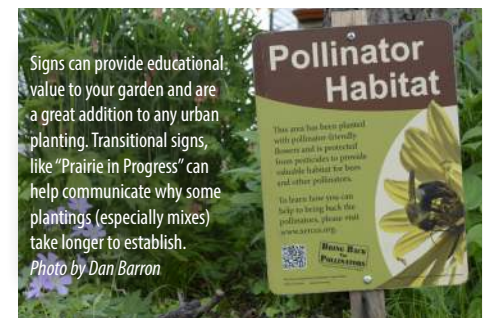
Greenhouse at Prairie Moon Nursery, Winona MN | Photo by Dan Barron

Alternatively, you might consider growing “plugs” or “roots” yourself. Really, this is the most rewarding and cost-effective method of gardening with natives. Seed packets can be purchased for a few dollars, or if done carefully, common species can be collected from roadsides. If you’re hoping to maintain local genetics, roadside collection is probably going to be your best option. Do your research before wild collecting seed. Never collect from managed wildlife areas or preserves, and limit your collection to less than 20% of a population.

Generally speaking, most native plant seeds will require some period of pre-treatment before germination can occur. The most common treatment is “**cold moist stratification**” which breaks a seeds dormancy by mimicking the effects of winter conditions on a particular seed. A few common examples include *Amorpha canescens* (Lead Plant), which requires 10 days of cold moist stratification, *Asclepias incarnata* (Swamp Milkweed) which requires 30 days of cold moist stratification (most *Asclepias* species require 30 days), or *Echinacea pallida* (Pale Purple Coneflower) which requires 90 days of cold moist stratification. Conversely, some species don’t require any pretreatment at all, such as *Pycnanthemum virginianum* (Virginia Mountain Mint), though these can be slow to germinate. Plants started from seed can usually be dug after 1-2 seasons. You’ll want to dig roots while the plant is dormant, early-fall or early-spring, before transplanting them to the preferred location.

If you have a large area and a few years, then a **seed mix** (or mixes) may be the way to go. To successfully introduce a native seed mix, you’ll do best with 1-2 years of “site prep” (suppression of existing vegetation). If you have no expectations and a fairly stable area, like a frequently mowed hay field of smooth brome, simply overseeding for several years and following-up with occasional mowing (and burning) will probably result in the eventual growth and success of some native plants – although this method will likely take many years.

Finally, combining all of the above methods might be an excellent and appropriate path forward as well. For example, using plugs or bare roots selectively around high visibility areas, such as walkways or building entrances, will ensure a more intentional aesthetic with blooming very likely in the first year or two. Meanwhile, you can utilize seed mixes for larger areas with less foot traffic and less pressure to achieve fast results.



Signs can provide educational value to your garden and are a great addition to any urban planting. Transitional signs, like “Prairie in Progress” can help communicate why some plantings (especially mixes) take longer to establish.
Photo by Dan Barron

It’s impossible to include everything there is to know about native plant gardening – and we certainly don’t know everything! – but we hope this has left you with an ambition to integrate more nature in your life. And, when you’re challenged, connect with others who are also engaged with this endeavor. We, and other native plant gardeners, are usually happy to share in joys, concerns, or to help pass the time until the first buds open. •

Feel free to contact us with any questions, including species suggestions, propagation methods and trusted native plant nurseries.

(Sarah) wonderinggeneralist@gmail.com
(Dan) dan@beewisue.us

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, originally named Stephenson County Audubon Society, was formed on June 10, 1971 and chartered in 1972 as a Chapter of the National Audubon Society.

We wanted to celebrate our amazing 50 years as a chapter by showcasing past accomplishments, stories, and photos from the beginning in the upcoming newsletters for this year and honoring the many people that were significant in the establishment of this chapter. Many of the stories you will see will come from a treasured scrapbook containing newspaper articles from 1971-1981 and from current Audubon members.

If you have any memories or stories that you would like to share, please contact Juliet at 201-233-0946 or by email at nwilaudubon@gmail.com to be presented in future newsletters this year.



In April 1971, "Ecology-minded" individuals were asked to contact Mrs. Grace Mitchell to start a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. The first requirement for a local chapter was a minimum of 35 interested individuals.

The first organized meeting for the Stephenson County Audubon Society took place on June 10, 1971. During this

meeting, the first elected officers were Tom Kubitz as president, Mrs. John Clark as Vice President, Mrs. Carl H. Davis as treasurer, Mrs. Erik Sohlberg as secretary, and Mrs. Roger Dunwell as membership and publicity chairman. The speaker was Mrs. Sohlberg, a native of New England, and she spoke about coastal Maine, with special emphasis on Eliot Porter's "Summer Island."



Original headlines from the NIAS scrapbook | Photos by Juliet Moderow

COMMENTS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Why did you become involved in the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society?

Juliet Moderow

(board member 2014 – present)

I moved to Freeport in 2006 as a brand-new faculty member at Highland Community College. During my interview, I mentioned my love of birds and the committee remarked about how the recently retired biology instructor, Keith Blackmore, was a bird enthusiast. The connection to birds might have secured me that job! I signed up for the National Audubon Society and was not aware that I would ultimately receive a local newsletter as well. Unfortunately, I did not get involved immediately. I recall a few times when Keith would come to Highland, he would mention "we need to get you to attend our Audubon meetings!" Similarly, Steve Simpson also nagged me as well! I finally attended my first program, which was the April 2013 banquet featuring Sandy Komito, otherwise known as the "Big Year" Birder. I skipped the potluck (I teach microbiology!), but was excited to



Juliet Moderow with "Big Year" Birder Sandy Komito

bird-geek out and meet Sandy (and then get my photo taken with him!). Though they might not remember, but somewhere that night I was introduced to Lynn Feaver, Teresa Smith, and Eve Wilczewski, for the first time.

Little did I know that the following year would start my streak of board membership from At-Large, to Publicity, to Education chair, and finally to President.

I appreciate ALL of the relationships that I have made along the way and here's to another 50 years!

The first newsletter, "News Bulletin #1" was distributed in September of 1971. The new group held their first fall chapter program with a picnic supper at "Oakdale Park" with 49 people in attendance. The program featured a Freeport Park Board member, Michael Cassidy, who spoke about newly acquired 26-acre grounds at Oakdale Park followed with a tour led by then-superintendent James Quayle.

Other programs that year included a presentation about the Lorado Taft campus in Oregon by Lincoln School Principal Miss Evelyn Dameier, a presentation on the development of the Koch Farm school property by David Lathrop of Carl Sandburg School, and "Trees and Plants of the Bible" presented by Mrs. Edith McKinley.

**Welcome
New Members!**

Cheryl Schneider
Freeport

Darcy Martin
Scales Mound

Would you like to join Audubon as a NEW Member or give a GIFT membership? *Two types of membership are available:*

1. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society and National Membership
includes this local newsletter, local mailings and the national "Audubon" magazine.

_____ National Membership \$20

All renewals for national memberships need to use the national membership form.

2. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society Local only Membership
includes this newsletter and other mailings from our local chapter.

_____ Local Only \$15

Name of new member or gift recipient _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

If this is a gift membership, please indicate the name of the person providing the gift membership:

Name _____

*Make check payable to **NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY** and mail to:
Treasurer, Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, P.O. Box 771, Freeport, IL 61032*

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THANK YOU!

Preserves fall stewardship volunteers through December 10 – Maria Gilfillan, Judy and Harlan Corrie, Kara Gallup, Don Miller, Nancy Ocken, Mary Blackmore, Teresa and Tim Smith, Pam Richards, Merry Blake, Bernard Lischwe, Paul Brown, Bob Curtis, Molly Doolittle and Bob Remer.

Richard Benning for creatively coordinating the December 19 Christmas Bird Count amid COVID-19 precautions, and compiling the count data.

Nancy Ocken and Mary Blackmore for contacting volunteers for preserves stewardship.

Prairie seed processing volunteers who did this task at their respective homes: Harlan and Judy Corrie, Kara Gallup and Mary Blackmore.

Richard Benning for leading a very interesting field trip at the Pecatonica Wetlands Forest Preserve on October 27.

Teresa Smith, Juliet Moderow and Mary Blackmore for serving as the NIAS board nominating committee, and to all of the people who agreed to take a turn on our board.

Juliet Moderow, for her thorough proofreading of our newsletters.

THANK YOU BRIAN AND STERLING

Our chapter is extremely grateful to Brian Lindquist and Sterling Taylor for installing a culvert structure on a section of badly eroded trail at our Silver Creek Biodiversity Preserve. The work was done on December 5, with Brian and Sterling providing all of the equipment, materials and labor at no charge. WOW!



New culvert at SCBP | Photo by Kara Gallup

Both Brian and Sterling have been supporters of our efforts at Silver Creek from the beginning. Brian built the many oak benches we've placed along trails, and Sterling used his tractor and field mower to mow our pollinator strip for a few years following the initial seeding, as well as selected areas of Field Thistles. Sterling even joined us once for stewardship when our target was multiple dense stands of Common Burdock.

We so appreciate the culvert work that they did which now has restored safe access to the loop trail in the south woods of the preserve. Thank you, Brian and Sterling!

www.nwilaudubon.org

**Northwest Illinois
Audubon Society**

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