

PRAIRIE PROJECTIONS

Newsletter of the North Branch Prairie Project
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Natural Area Internships

By Robyn Flackne

To solicit an internship in the natural areas field is to challenge ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, poison ivy, copperheads, dust, muck, infernos, disorientation, and always the fierce sun. When you emerge, you will not recognize your skin. And you will remain bewildered by natural areas, wild species and your folly in aspiring to manage them. Nevertheless, after accepting three internships, I recommend it to those with the time and the desire to try it. For your toil, you will become conversant with ecological theories, techniques and controversies. Internships have varying requirements. A background in biology and volunteer experience with the North Branch gave me the qualifications I needed.

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Railroad Prairie Saved from Monster Machine

By Gladys Bryer

As Railroad Prairie Steward Gladys Bryer attests, vigilance, persistence and communication are important ingredients to successful site management.

In June, one half of Railroad Prairie was mowed. Tracking down the correct railroad company, let alone the appropriate person to speak to, was not easy. After a series of phone calls, I managed to reach the Road Master of the Soo Line, Patrick Poeschel. By some stroke of luck, Poeschel remembered that over ten years ago the railroad management had directed the staff not to mow the area on the east side of the tracks across Lehigh Avenue, the area the North

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A Gift for an Herbarium

By Laurel Ross

A generous gift of \$750 from the Fort Dearborn Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society in honor of its president Dr. Margaret Murley, helped the North Branch pay for the mounting paper, folders and tools needed to establish an herbarium. The money is part of a gift given to the Fort Dearborn Chapter in Dr. Murley's name by her cousin, Windsor Bruce Murley, of Poughkeepsie, New York. The stated purpose of the gift is to support projects of enduring value to the environment.

Margaret Murley is a delightful person. A birder, botanist, and teacher, she is curious about everything related to nature. In addition to plants and birds, she is willing to teach about galls, insects, seeds

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Photo by L. Ross

A birder, botanist and teacher, Dr. Margaret Murley is curious about everything related to nature.

Editorial: On the Restructuring of the North Branch Prairie Project

Much of this editorial was written on a beautiful, July, Sunday morning at Bunker Hill. The wind was rustling oak leaves. Prairie dock leaves, broad and green, formed a deep carpet. Blazing star stood tall and slender and purple above plants that had bloomed and plants whose time for blooming was yet to come. The beauty of the landscape helped to put into focus observations and thoughts about the North Branch restructuring process which occurred over the last seven months. These observations and thoughts formed the basis for this editorial.

Last December the Steering Committee started a process to restructure the North Branch. It had become increasingly clear that we needed to deal with the organizational, financial, and legal problems associated with success. We needed to be better prepared to assimilate, teach and direct increasing numbers of new volunteers. Our growth as an organization was forcing us to deal with matters such as the question of liability in case of a mishap. It was also apparent that we would have to come up with a way of fundraising. Our funds were rapidly being depleted due to the greater need to acquire more equipment and publish for a growing readership. The Steering Committee decided that the only way to research and make decisions about these concerns was to ask for the help of all the members of the workgroups. A series of meetings was held over a span of a few months to brainstorm, problem solve and prepare a North Branch structure to take to the membership for approval.

The meetings confirmed that we agreed on our original goals of restoration and education and on the workgroup structure consisting of each workgroup taking the initiative, building expertise, and making its own decisions. Three subgroups were formed to research liability questions, the procedures and ramifications of incorporating as an independent organization and the practicality of affiliating with a larger organization. The Nature Conservancy was determined to be the only organization with which affiliation

would be achievable. Minutes from those meetings, giving details of the information gathered, the arguments presented and the decisions made, are available from workgroup chairpeople.

In the final meeting we agreed to propose to the membership that the North Branch both affiliate with The Nature Conservancy and incorporate as The North Branch Prairie Project. A group volunteered to write the affiliation Charter and the incorporation Bylaws. Drafts of both documents are now complete. The Draft Charter is reprinted on pages three and four. The Charter will guide the operations of workgroups and our relationship with The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. It will provide a framework for creativity, thought and communication. The Bylaws for incorporation will reflect what is contained in the Charter, but in legal terms.

What are the next steps? The draft Charter and the draft Bylaws must first be approved by the workgroup members. Next, the membership of the North Branch must approve. An affiliation agreement would then be jointly adopted by the North Branch and The Nature Conservancy and the formal papers for incorporation would be filed with the State of Illinois. Clearly, much work still needs to be done.

Did we make any mistakes during the restructuring process? I suppose we did even though our intentions were good. In the end, however, all of those good people who spent so much time and energy thinking and writing and talking and meeting over the last several months believed the restructuring process was important so that the North Branch can continue to lead in the field of restoration ecology. They are to be applauded for all of their hard work.

We, the North Branch volunteers, are making valuable contributions which strengthen the ecological, historical and human fabric of the community. We are focusing our energies on the organization's dual goals of restoration and education. We are pursuing the monetary and the intellectual means to progress. We are seeking new volunteers to fill leadership

roles. We are communicating with each other and with other volunteers who are contributing so greatly to the restoration and management of prairies and savannas in Illinois. We are evolving: restoring, teaching, growing, leading, creating, inventing, and enjoying the results of our labors.

Karen Holland

The meeting for all workgroup members to approve the Charter and Bylaws will be held on Saturday, October 19, 1:30pm at North Park Village Nature Center. The meeting for all North Branch members to approve the restructuring will be held in January concurrently with the annual potluck supper. The January date has not yet been determined.

North Branch Prairie Project
CHARTER
Draft-July 1, 1991

1. NAME. The name of this organization is the North Branch Prairie Project (abbreviated North Branch).

2. PURPOSE. The North Branch Prairie Project's primary reason for being is to assist the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and other agencies in protecting and restoring native Illinois ecosystems. We work toward our mission through hands-on ecological management and through education of landowners, volunteers, and the public. Increased understanding of the importance of native ecosystems by public agencies and the public is a key goal of our effort.

We are advocates for and stewards of our native landscape. These ecosystems, once part of the vast Midwest grassland, are vanishing rapidly due to urban development and competition from aggressive nonnative species. We work to establish ecological and cultural conditions that will allow these natural wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the Chicago metropolitan area.

We envision a future where the native landscape of our public land is restored and managed for its long-term health and for the benefit of all, and where volunteers work hand-in-hand with landowners who are supported by a knowledgeable public.

3. PARTNERS. The North Branch cooperates with the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, participates in the Volunteer Stewardship Network, and supports the natural area protection and restoration efforts of the Chicago Group of the Sierra Club and the Chicago Audubon Society.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION.

A. Volunteers. The North Branch is a cooperative, all-volunteer effort, and new volunteers are always needed and welcomed. Everyone who participates, within the guidelines established by the North Branch charter, bylaws, policies and procedures, in any North Branch activities is a North Branch volunteer. This charter will be distributed to new volunteers in order to encourage understanding and participation.

B. Members. Volunteers can become members by (1) attending at least four (4) workdays in a calendar year; or (2) contributing at least twelve (12) hours of volunteer work in a calendar year in other ways, including (but not limited to) participation on a workgroup. Members may participate in decisions reached at Annual and Special Meetings. The North Branch validates membership under the honor system.

C. Officers. A Treasurer, Secretary and Chair are selected by the Coordinating Committee.

D. Workgroups. The following workgroups plan and carry out the North Branch's primary activities: Ecological Management, Education, Publications and Publicity, Science and Volunteer Coordination. All members and volunteers are eligible and encouraged to participate on these workgroups.

Ecological Management produces the Management Plan for North Branch sites, and plans the activities, such as seed collecting/mixing/distribution, a native plant gardening program, prescribed burns, and brush control, which are important to the restoration and management of our sites.

Education schedules various educational classes, organizes ecology tours of the North Branch sites and, with Publications, designs the North Branch flyers and brochures.

Publications and Publicity produces Brush Piles, the quarterly informational bulletin, Prairie Projections, the semiannual journal, the four-year North Branch reports, and special publications as needed. Publicity coordinates with various media groups to publicize North Branch activities.

Science maintains a library of science done on North Branch sites: this science includes plant transects and inventories, rare and endangered plant monitoring, breeding bird surveys, and butterfly monitoring. This committee encourages and coordinates new science projects.

Volunteer Development organizes the mailing of North Branch publications, maintains the North Branch mailing list, recruits and orients new volunteers, and represents the North Branch at conferences and special events.

Each Workgroup will choose its regional representative to the Volunteer Stewardship Network. The Coordinating

Committee will choose its Regional Coordinator.

Each workgroup is responsible for making all decisions that relate to its own activities, and each will determine the process to be followed for reaching decisions within that group. Meetings of the workgroups are open to all members and volunteers. Meeting schedules will be announced in North Branch publications.

E. Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee fosters communication and exchange of information among the workgroups, members and volunteers. It coordinates scheduling and planning for the North Branch; receives proposals from the workgroups for submission at Annual or Special Meetings; and serves as a central clearinghouse for information on the activities of the workgroups. From budgets submitted by the workgroups, the Coordinating Committee will prepare a basic budget to submit to The Nature Conservancy annually. Members include one representative from each workgroup, and a Treasurer, Secretary and Chair chosen by the Coordinating Committee from the North Branch membership. The members of the Coordinating Committee are the members of the Board of Directors of the corporation.

The Coordinating Committee makes all decisions which affect its own activities, but does not have authority over nor decision making powers that supersede the decisions of the workgroups.

All Coordinating Committee meetings are open to any interested member, and to nonmembers by invitation. Those who are not members of the Coordinating Committee do not have a vote at the meetings.

5. MEETINGS.

A. Semiannual Forums. The North Branch thrives on the creativity, originality, and diversity of its volunteers, who bring a wide range of skills, experiences, and knowledge to the group. Semiannual Forums will be scheduled by the Coordinating Committee to provide an ongoing opportunity for everyone involved to share ideas, explore possibilities, discuss concerns, and contribute to planning efforts for the North Branch. Ideas gathered at the forums will be taken back to the appropriate workgroups. Forums will be announced in North Branch publications and at workdays.

B. Annual and Special Meetings. There will be an Annual Meeting of the North Branch during the month of January, held in conjunction with the Annual Potluck (unless otherwise scheduled by the Coordinating Committee), for reception of the annual reports and the transaction of any other business.

Special Meetings may be called by the Coordinating Committee to resolve matters important to the membership that need to be decided before the next Annual Meeting. The purpose of any Special Meeting must be set forth in writing at the time the meeting is announced.

For any meeting of the membership which requires a vote, written notice will be sent, three (3) weeks in advance of the meeting date, to all those on the mailing list. The written notice will include an explanation of membership requirements and validation, as described in Section 4.B. above. Those volunteers who, by their own judgment, are members in good standing must return to the Secretary, by the day before the meeting date, a written statement that they are members of the North Branch. Fifty percent (50%) of the members responding within the time limit will constitute a quorum. Each member is entitled to one vote on questions requiring a vote from the membership. Decisions will be determined by two-thirds (2/3) of the members present at the meeting.

At Annual or Special Meetings, the Coordinating Committee may seek a decision by the members to approve proposals recommended by a workgroup, keeping in mind that each workgroup is responsible for making all decisions that relate to its own activities. The wording of such proposals must be approved by the workgroups. Members may ratify or reject, but not amend proposals submitted by the Coordinating Committee. Amendments to this charter may be approved as described in Section 6 (Amendments). a two-thirds (2/3) majority is needed to pass any other proposals brought to a vote.

Annual and Special Meetings not requiring a vote by the membership will be announced in North Branch publications and at workdays, at least two (2) weeks in advance of the meeting date.

6. AMENDMENTS. This Charter can be amended by a consensus of the workgroups, or by consensus at an Annual or Special Meeting. If a consensus cannot be reached, the members present at an Annual or Special Meeting may by two-thirds (2/3) vote call for a Resolution Meeting. Notice of a Resolution Meeting with a copy of the proposed amendment to the Charter must be mailed to all members at least twenty (20) days before the meeting date. At a Resolution Meeting, the proposal at hand may be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) vote. The goal and intent of this provision is to encourage consensus and, failing that, give the opportunity for all members to become fully informed and be present to participate in a decision to amend the Charter.



Photo by K. Holland

One purpose for the crew leader training course is to get as many people as possible to feel comfortable in leading crews in specific tasks.

◆ Crew Leader Training Course Draws Interested Volunteers

By Ross Sweeney

North Branch workdays attract so many people these days that it is no longer possible for one person, the steward, to train, direct and communicate with everyone to make sure work is being carried out safely and effectively and everyone is having fun. The course is training potential workday crew leaders, thereby allowing stewards to divide up the work load on workdays, freeing them up for carrying out management tasks.

The idea is to have several crews working on a workday. The steward decides what to do ecologically and tells everyone the plan for the day. Crew leaders are directed by the steward to lead small groups of volunteers to do specific tasks. These tasks are the things that we do all of the time: cut brush, pull weeds, collect seeds, plant seeds, and so forth. The crew leader leads the volunteers in this task for as long as it takes to finish it, a few minutes to a few hours. The crew leaders also show volunteers how to use tools

properly and safely. When a group is getting bored, crabby, goofy or having anything but a terrific time, it is the crew leader's job to let the steward know that it is time to change tasks.

Another purpose for the crew leader training class is to get as many people as possible to feel comfortable in leading crews in specific tasks. Almost as important, however, is that we will be more clearly defining how we do each task. Sometimes we give mixed messages to volunteers about how to do things. We want to use this opportunity to develop a "North Branch Way" that is safe, effective and fun.

The first class was held in the spring. Topics covered included safe brush cutting, brush pile theory, herbiciding, and talking with volunteers. The second class was held in June and taught trainees effective methods of dealing with weeds, the steps to effective girdling and helping volunteers to cope with steward's jokes. The final class will be held on Sunday, September 22 from 1:30 to 3:30 pm at Somme Woods. Seed collection, seed planting and how to help volunteers enjoy raking will be discussed.

◆ Book Review:

The Shaping of America's Heartland

by R.T. Peterson. Boston: In the Naturalists America Series by Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977, 250 pages.

By M. W.

A good sourcebook for those concerned with prairie and savanna restoration.

The first few chapters of *The Shaping of America's Heartland* describe the geological past of the midwest. The balance of the book examines the natural ecosystems which were present at the beginning of European settlement and whose scant remnants can be found in the area today. Chapters 9 and 10 will be most interesting to North Branchers because they contain information about oak savannas and tall grass prairies. Other chapters, however, contain interesting information as well. The chapter on the maple-beach forest, for example, describes the mayapple, Solomon's Seal and other plants also present in the closed savanna. Another chapter deals with Midwest wetlands and lakes.

The chapter titled *Land of Oak* gives evidence that trees were encroaching on the prairie before the arrival of the European settlers. The cultivation of land merely accelerated the process. The types of soils present in an oak savanna and the development of oak root systems are also described. In places, the description of the understory vegetation anticipates Steve Packard's discovery of the oak savanna's unique ecosystem. For example, Peterson states, "An oak opening complete with its original ground cover (vegetation) is probably as totally extinct now as the passenger pigeon that once roosted there."

The chapter about the prairie begins with quotes of the impressions of the first travelers. Attention is paid to the effects of the suppression of prairie fires. Root systems and prairie soils are discussed. Also interesting is the description of the prairie's response to the persistent drought of the late 1930s.

Long-Term Study Shows Restoration Success

By Susanne Masi

Collected by North Branch volunteers beginning in 1981, the Miami plant surveys were treasure troves in waiting for a graduate student in search of a research topic. They eventually led to Prairie Restoration Management and Vegetation Change: Miami Woods Prairie. A Case Study, submitted this spring to Northeastern Illinois University as my MA thesis in Geography and Environmental Studies.

My project began in 1989 as a continuation of the vegetation survey initially established and analyzed by Prairie Project's Steve Packard, Ross Sweeny and Pete Baldo. This transect of 40 permanent, nonrandom, meter-square plots located along Miami's path network was designed to show the vegetation changes that would take place over time as a result of North Branch's management activities. I felt this valuable data shouldn't languish in the files; it needed to be pulled together and analyzed, if only to demonstrate what we already knew by looking - that Miami Prairie was making a smashing comeback.

I learned that this project was particularly significant because it is one of the longest term data records on one of the oldest restorations of its type. Miami, along with other North Branch sites, was among the earliest restorations in this region to be attempted directly on an old field/degraded prairie remnant. Most previous restorations involved reconstructing prairie from the bare earth of formerly plowed fields.

Early on, I knew I wanted to learn as much as possible about Miami, so I also worked on piecing together its natural and human history for the introductory chapters. I researched landforms, especially in relation to glacial action in this area; got help taking and interpreting soil samples; and surveyed the elevation - on a very cold December 26 - with Northeastern Illinois University's Bob Easton. The 1839 Public Land Survey (PLS) notes and plat, interviews with older residents, Morton Grove Historical Society

records, Forest Preserve District real estate files, old aerial photos - all yielded threads of Miami's history. Steve Packard's notebooks and personal accounts were invaluable sources for the management history, as were discussions with other longtime North Branch volunteers like Preston Spinks, Ross Sweeny and Jane and John Balaban.

Such was the unwieldy scope of my project. It is impossible to summarize it here, but some interesting historical and statistical highlights are worth telling about.

Miami's Past

Historical accounts suggest the Morton Grove area was very wooded, with substantial groves on both sides of the Chicago River. One reference describes the township in the 1860s as "one grand primeval forest of fine, stately old trees." The lumber industry, which supplied the

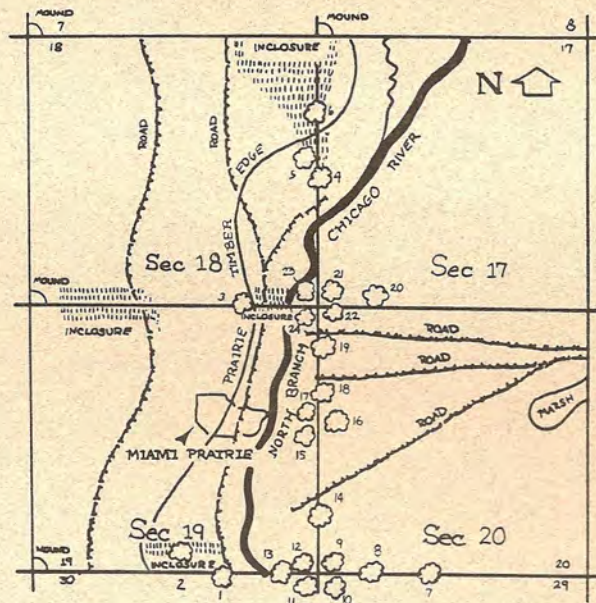
plus the stream-cut nature of the west bank which would have favored tree growth, the fact that the soil samples east of the bike trail were more similar in color, horizon, and pH levels to soil formed under woodland in nearby Indigo rather than to the prairie soil west of the bike trail, the presence of pits formed by tree stumps, and evidence of tree clearing on the 1938 aerial photo, led me to conclude that Miami's east section was originally savanna.

In 1938, the northern and eastern sections of Miami were used as a pasture. In the 1938 aerial, a large oval horse track, connected to a bridal trail by a path that we still use, is visible in the prairie, just south of stable buildings located where Monogram Plastics now stands. Local residents also remember the stables and horses during the 1930s. Although the Forest Preserve District owned the land at this time, leasing for farming and pasturage was not uncommon. The mountain mint and hawthorn we found so much of in this section are typical survivors of grazed land.

The northeast section of Miami was reforested primarily with cottonwood in the late 1950s by the Forest Preserve District. The southern edge of Miami was also reforested, and the section between the wooded areas was mowed by the Forest Preserve District until the North Branch started managing in 1977.

The most interesting detail about the site to me is the likelihood that the soil at Miami was mined for its topsoil resource. Soil cores showed an exceptionally shallow topsoil - a 3- to 5-inch A horizon where 10-14 inches might be expected.

Additionally, the elevation survey revealed an elevation two feet lower in the west central prairie than appears on the USGS topographic maps. There is historical evidence, though not absolutely conclusive, that soil scraping caused these phenomena. The Poehlmann brothers, who until the 1929 crash operated a large floral business in Morton Grove, owned a parcel in what is now southeast Miami. They used a soil-scraping machine and were known for their local soil-mining activities,



Map by Eric Masi
Niles Township 1839, Sections 17-20. Shows Miami Prairie location, selected natural and cultural features and trees.

growing Chicago metropolis and the railroad industry, was fed by Miller's Mill at Dempster Street. The earlier PLS notes and plat also suggest a very open oak-hickory savanna grading into prairie on the river's west side and a denser, mixed woodland east of the river. The PLS plat shows the prairie-savanna border at Miami to be roughly .3 miles west of the river, perhaps very close the present bike trail.

These accounts of extensive woodland,

although I found no documentation that they actually scraped Miami. One elderly resident said "they were always looking for topsoil for their nurseries." The Miami areas they may have scraped were later converted to pasture and, incredibly, some fine prairie plants actually survived there.

The Hypothesis: Management and Vegetation Change

The main thrust of my thesis, however, was the hypothesis that the survey data and the overall species inventory of Miami would show a significant improvement in the natural quality of the site as a result of restoration management activities and natural succession. This improvement would be measured by an increase in the number of species, particularly high quality native species, and by the decrease in abundance of alien and native weed species. Quantitatively, these changes can be measured by the site's Natural Area Rating Index (NARI - a numerical rating system used in the Chicago region based on rankings of individual species in a natural area) and by the Importance Values (IV) of desirable native species in relation to weedy species (IV is based on the relative frequency and abundance of a species and shows its influence among other species).

Numbers are sometimes misleading, but they can be significant if carefully interpreted. I believe the data supported my



Photo by K. Holland

Miami, along with other North Branch sites, was among the earliest restorations in this region to be attempted directly on an old field/degraded prairie remnant.

hypothesis. Here are some items I find meaningful.

◆ The transect NARI increased by 43% (from 30 to 43) and the site inventory NARI by 21.8% (from 60 to 73). These substantial increases are largely due to the introduction of relatively high ranking native species. A site with a rating of 50 is considered very high quality. (See graph)

◆ The combined Importance Values of alien species decreased by 27% and those of native weedy species by 15.8%, showing a decline in the influence of these undesirables.

◆ Of the 236 species on the 1990 inventory, 39 had been reintroduced through restoration, among them leadplant, little bluestem, butterfly weed, Kalm's brome, cream wild indigo, and five gentian species. Nine of the introduced species appeared in the transect. This year the list was quickly outdated as wild hyacinth appeared for the first time and the endangered

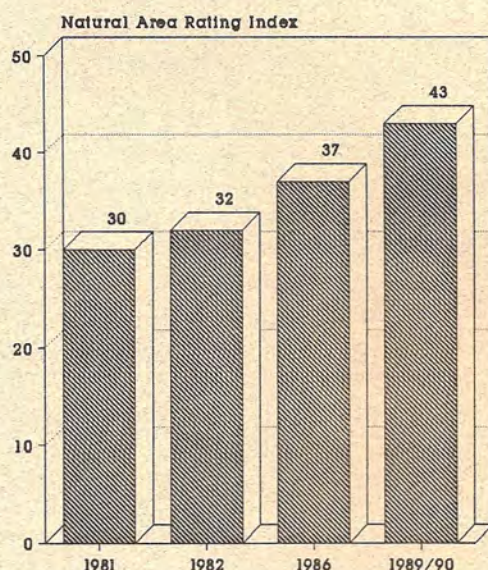
prairie white fringed orchid was seen for the first time in five years.

◆ A net increase of 40 species in the transect and of 30 species in the inventory - most of them natives - reflects a significant increase of diversity.

◆ Miami's most dominant plant was mountain mint in 1981 and grey dogwood in 1990. Dogwood appears to have increased significantly in cover and frequency. This dominance is a concern, but the numbers alone do not adequately show that the biomass of the dogwood is much reduced as a result of fire and cutting.

Management Impacts

The relation of management practices to vegetation change is qualitative rather than quantitative. Restoration on North Branch and many other sites is not a controlled experiment in a laboratory setting in which each variable is isolated for study. It is a new and growing applied science being understood as it is being implemented. It is, therefore, difficult to link a given technique with a specific result. But it is valid to theorize that diverse management methods worked together synergistically, along with such natural processes as succession, rainfall levels and germination, to create the vastly improved prairie we see



Graph by Jane Balaban and John Balaban
Miami Woods Prairie Transect
Natural Area Rating Index Change: 1981-1990

Continued on page 9

◆ Highlights of 1991 North Branch Bird and Butterfly Surveys

By Laurel Ross

It's too early for in-depth analysis, but with only a few precincts reporting it's abundantly clear that North Branch bird and butterfly monitors are collecting important data and having a great time.

A favorite moment of several butterfly watchers was observing the beautiful coral hairstreak, described as "addicted to butterfly weed" in one field guide. This species lived up to its fiendish reputation, flying aggressively at black swallowtails and butterfly monitors alike, protecting its favorite nectar plant, the flower of which perfectly matches the orange on its wing.

Other species sighted were (selected list from Sauganash, Miami, Somme, and Wayside): spring azures and eastern tailed blues, Peck's, Hobomok, dusky wing, and silver spotted skippers, black and tiger swallowtails, great spangled fritillaries, the silvery checkerspot, eyed browns, little wood satyrs, blue eyed graylings, question marks, commas, mourning cloaks, American painted ladies, snouts, buckeyes, red spotted purples, viceroys, striped or banded hairstreaks (we're waiting for confirmation), and, of course, monarchs.

On a low note, there is a man who appears to be illegally collecting butterflies for profit. He has been seen at Miami more than once in July. If you see someone with a butterfly net, ask a friendly question or two to find out if it's legitimate. Tell a suspicious person you will report him to the Forest Preserve District police. Our presence deters criminal collecting.

Fans of Jerry Sullivan's Field and Street column in the Reader know that he has found the nests of red-tailed hawks, blue winged warblers, northern orioles, catbirds, song sparrows, field sparrows, yellow warblers, and indigo buntings at Somme. We need to convince Jerry to teach us his secrets. Although no other North Branch birders have come close to matching this list, a pair of meadowlarks has been seen regularly at Wayside, and bird news from Harms, Sauganash and Miami is not in yet.

For animal studies to increase at North Branch sites, more participants are needed.

Interested people of all levels of experience should call me at 312-281-4676 to volunteer. Training will be provided, much of it "on the job". ◆

Internships, from page 1

Plant Community Ecology Intern. The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Chapter

Like northeastern Illinois, northern Missouri is blasted by agriculture and development. The Nature Conservancy's preserves there are few, tattered, and tiny. They have plenty of the problems familiar to North Branch volunteers. For example, quadrats along the transects in these preserves often captured garlic mustard, which has recently invaded Missouri. Other groundlayer species were less abundant, less diverse, and less prized than those found elsewhere in the state.

In southwest Missouri, soil is thin. There are no glacial deposits to enrich harvests, so some patches of prairie are hayed rather than tilled. The Conservancy has purchased some of these patches. Though he knew I was accustomed to seeing it, my boss, Doug Ladd, was unsettled by the profusion of white sweet clover on the perimeter of one of the patches. "The soil here isn't as rich as it is in northeastern Illinois, so we don't have as much of a problem with Eurasian weeds," he explained. "One of our biggest problems is woody invasion, especially by cedars. Our main problem is lack of regular fire."

In the Ozarks, the thin soil and hilly terrain have produced numerous glades, fen complexes and savannas. The land's agricultural marginality has been a factor in The Conservancy's acquisition of some fairly large parcels. Because some Ozark inhabitants burn the land for various reasons, some of these parcels are in spectacularly good shape. Because of this, and because The Conservancy's Missouri preserves are mostly remote from urban areas and their concentrations of potential volunteers, work important to the North Branch, such as seed gathering and reintroduction of species, are low priorities here.

Burn Crew Intern. The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Chapter

In spring, a six member burn crew tackled the few exotic species and the woody invaders. From languid repose we shot into vigorous action; from shivering on the firelines we raced to contain searing flames. Talking about the weather went from idle chatter to passionate discourse. We lived for spectacle, longing to see cedars catch and hurl flames to their tops, passing them to other cedars and leaving the stand skeletonized and shimmering in ash.

In six weeks we burned twelve units, cleared miles of fireline, sunk chainsaws into countless cedars. This was a wilder, more athletic internship than the previous one, and it was less analytical. Still, huddled together in our mittens and hats at dinner, or sprawled out in our Nomex fire-resistant suits at lunch, we, like North Branch volunteers, bandied questions about preserve management and the effects of fire on all classes of organisms.

Rare Plant Program Intern. The Morton Arboretum, Illinois

Here is a finer focus. From listing hundreds of plants and setting acres ablaze, I am concentrating on a few of the quirkiest, most elusive, puzzling species. Marlin Bowles, originator of the program, often takes me to local preserves to assist in his monitoring of rare plants, but my major responsibility is for a 1/3-acre dry gravel and dolomite prairie restoration on the Arboretum's grounds. With North Branch determination, I yank weeds and take in seeds. I also transplant seedlings tenderly germinated and raised in the greenhouse. Most of these species are endangered, threatened or rare in Illinois. The habitat constructed for them was once excavated for gravel, then used to display cactus and yucca, then regraded and designated a prairie. It is a consciously stylized representation of the presettlement Des Plaines River Valley. The austere gravel and dolomite prairies were always uncommon here, and are now greatly reduced. This restoration will aid in the preservation and study of many of the species requiring this habitat. Eventually, it might serve as a seed source for other local restorations. ◆

today, with its dramatic increase in prairie grasses, diversity of forbs, and reduced alien species.

However, having said this, some specific management impacts are worth discussing:

◆ Successional restoration (a method pioneered by Packard and North Branch that refers to seeding or planting native species into an existing weedy matrix of alien and native plants, such as an old field or former pasture, rather than reconstructing a prairie on plowed earth) was successfully implemented. Conservative species - least tolerant of disturbance, like prairie dropseed, prairie betony and many gentians - have been established by this method much earlier than in other types of restoration.

◆ Since 1982, fire, our single most important management tool, has helped control woody species and enhanced flower and seed production. In a favorite area, which I call the "Fire Circle", an August 1980 vandal-started fire weakened dense mountain mint, stimulated several clumps of little bluestem grass, and gave North Branch an opportunity to introduce a rich variety of grasses and forbs. Today, dropseed, leadplant, purple prairie clover, the indigos, butterfly weed, Indiangrass, big and little bluestem and many others thrive and are spreading in this area which is managed solely by continued burning.

◆ Control efforts have significantly reduced white sweet clover and wild parsnip. This year our annual white sweet clover pull barely yielded a plastic bagful.

◆ Some failures must be noted. When brush and trees were removed but the stumps not herbicided, resprouts became a serious problem; areas cleared but not seeded resulted in weed patches. Persistent problems like reed canary grass and brush clones need ongoing attention.

As a result of all this effort in cooperation with nature, Miami's landscape has visibly changed, and the data confirm this. The prairie's edge has been pushed back by acres and most of the brush islands



Photo by K. Holland

A plant identification class conducted this spring provided field experience in "keying in" savanna plants at Harms Woods.

are gone. Tall prairie grasses, hardly visible in 1977, wave in the autumn wind among the goldenrods, asters and gentians. We've seen meadowlarks on the site, birds which need large areas of open grassland. Still, to restore a prairie is a long process. Another survey in five years should show even more dramatic results.

This project should not sound like a one-person achievement. Credit and hearty thanks must go to those, in addition to those already mentioned, whose input was invaluable to me: the volunteers who sampled the plots since 1981, particularly Laurel Ross who helped throughout the 89-90 surveys; John and Jane Balaban, who resolved many tough identifications and designed the computer program for the data; Pat Togher, who created the management map based on Larry Hodak's excellent earlier map; and David Painter, keeper of the early computer and field files.

Those interested in the more technical aspects of the research methodology and data compilations are welcome to read the thesis. There is a copy in the North Branch science file at the Chicago Botanic Garden. My personal copy is available for a brief loan. ◆

◆ Registration Begins for Fall Classes

By Barbara Rose

The opportunity to increase knowledge of local flora and fauna is only one of the rewards in store for participants in this fall's classes. Birds, burns, bark, blossoms, and butterflies are all on the agenda. So are visits to some of the most beautiful sites in Northern Illinois. Experts and enthusiasts alike can study and learn together this autumn.

Sponsored by the North Branch Prairie Project and the Volunteer Stewardship Network of The Nature Conservancy, classes are offered free or for a fee of \$3.00. All require advance registration. Details are described in the current issue of *Brush Piles*.

If you have just discovered the prairies, you will broaden your vision and enjoyment. If you are an active volunteer, you can increase your expertise. Prairie stewards and work leaders will hone their skills. In other words, there is a course(s) for everyone. ◆

Herbarium, from page 1

and butterflies. She'll even tell a story or two about herps on occasion. Margaret has been a supporter of the North Branch and of many other conservation groups. She is one of our wild seed gardeners, growing dozens of rare plants on a narrow strip of ground between her Evanston home and the alley. Her interest in the herbarium is easy to understand since her doctorate from Northwestern University is in the field of plant taxonomy.

The idea for the North Branch herbarium project was conceived in the spring of 1990 by Ross Sweeny, who suggested that volunteers needed a tool to help learn to identify the plants they work so hard to restore (or eradicate). This past spring Jane and John Balaban utilized the herbarium sheets in the goldenrods and grass classes they taught.

The herbarium also serves a second important function, a permanent, scientific and historical record of North Branch flora. Individual plants are chosen which illustrate typical form and structure as well as the characteristics which distinguish families, genera and species. The record will include leaves, roots, stems, fruits and flowers, all of which botanical keys may use for identification. Eventually, the herbarium will hold examples of every species of plant that grows along the North Branch, or about 500 different plants!

Acquisitive people please take note: before removing any plant, collecting permits were negotiated with the Cook County Forest Preserve District. The law is very clear. Plant pilfering is a serious matter—unethical as well as illegal. By mutual agreement, no threatened or endangered species will be collected for the North Branch herbarium.

The Science Committee is coordinating this important undertaking, with Jane Balaban and Joanne Softcheck doing most of the actual work of collecting, mounting and recordkeeping. Jane and Joanne report that it has been a wonderful learning experience. Jane was trained at the Morton Arboretum by Beth Schimp and is passing along the learned skills to Joanne, Susanne Masi, myself, and others who might volunteer (hint).

The many students who will use the herbarium to increase their knowledge of local flora owe the Fort Dearborn Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, Dr. Margaret Murley and participating North Branch volunteers many thanks for helping to make the project a reality. The herbarium is housed at the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe and is available for use by making arrangements with Joanne Softcheck at 312-878-3877. ♦

♦ Forming a Core Neighbor Group at Harms Woods

By Jane Balaban and John Balaban

As stewards for Harms Woods, we decided that restoration and management of such a beautiful place should involve the neighbors. A core group of people who live in the vicinity could be a part of the restoration work at the site and also watch the site, be aware of problems and take responsibility for protecting it.

Hopefully, some of the individuals from the core group would become leaders who would help with site management and gain an understanding of ecology, restoration goals and management principles. As

many of the core group as possible would be involved in other North Branch activities.

A meeting was set up with a small group of neighbors to ask for help. The outcome of the meeting was an enthusiastic plan to conduct tours of Harms Woods on a spring Sunday afternoon. The Nature Conservancy provided a mailing list of over 700 people, primarily Nature Conservancy members, living in areas with zip codes bordering Harms Woods, as well as funds to produce the invitational flyer. Over 100 people toured the woodland on May 5th and May 12th. Another mailing invited those who took the tour to a regular North Branch workday and a seed collecting day.

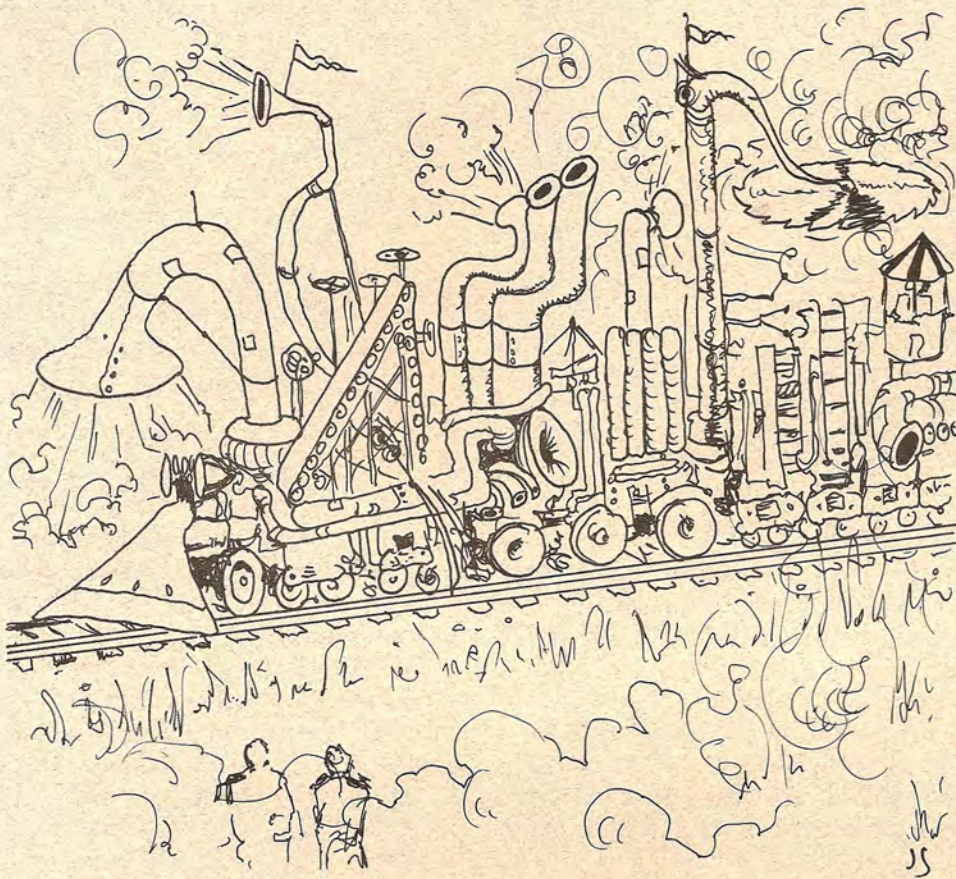
Neighbors Mary May and Laura Stanley have been wonderful in helping to plan the tours and followup activities. Brian Seinfeld, who took one of the tours, is now a brush cutting leader on North Branch workdays. The development of a core group for Harms Woods, however, is going to be slow going. More events, such as slide presentations and educational walks will have to be planned.

If other stewards are contemplating a similar project to include neighbors, we would recommend the development of a one-year plan. All committees should be asked to participate because this kind of project requires a significant commitment of resources. ♦



Photo by J. Garber

The outcome of the meeting was an enthusiastic plan to conduct tours of Harms Woods on a spring Sunday afternoon.



Railroad Prairie, from page 1

Branch calls Railroad Prairie. At that time the railroad company had erected "DO NOT MOW OR SPRAY" signs. Although the signs are still in place, Poeschel believed the workers may not have been able to read English. Jane Balaban, John Balaban, Hy Bryer and I placed temporary signs in Spanish on the same poles holding the English signs.

Poeschel also told me that the roadbed on the eastern tracks was about to be removed and replaced. This would entail spewing the old stones and dirt out onto the right of way to the east of the tracks. After pointing out that the right of way was our precious prairie, Poeschel said that he could have the crew direct the roadbed material to the west of the tracks at that point. The problem was, how would the crew know the location of the prairie?

Jane had the yellow ribbon solution. Jane, John, Hy and I again went out to the prairie, this time with yellow ribbon and stakes. We stuck the stakes in a north-south line along the western edge of the

prairie, the now mowed area just at the embankment. To these thin, green stakes we strung a 2" yellow ribbon.

The first weekend after being told of the roadbed repairs, I located the track repair crew in the suburbs to the north of Morton Grove. It was clear that they would not reach Dempster Street that weekend. During the week I once again spoke to Mr. Poeschel, who confirmed that the crew would deposit the stones and dirt to the west of our ribbon-marked prairie. He thought the crew would arrive at Dempster Street on the following Saturday.

That week, various checks were made to see if the stakes were still in place. After a rain, about a third of the line needed to be reinstated.

On Saturday morning, I approached the track repair crew. Larry Powell, the project engineer from METRA, drove me south so that I could show him the prairie's exact location. Seeing it through his eyes, I realized that our yellow ribbons were hardly visible.

Hy and I took up a post about three telephone poles to the north of our ribbon

and northern signs. We waited while this incredible monster machine, the length of three railroad cars and covered with projecting wheels, gears, conveyor belts and funnels, came inexorably inching southward along the track. Nothing - not ribbon, signs or people - was going to be noticed from inside that machine. From its spout, the entire right of way on the east side of the tracks was being covered with rock and dirt. We stood and waited.

Finally, while being covered with dust and wind-blown debris and deafened by the noise, the first workman reached us. I stepped up and shouted over the roar that he had to direct the dirt to the other side of the track. It took him a moment to understand what I was saying, but then he remembered he had received instructions. He did not know where to begin to rerout the debris. "Here, starting right here!" I yelled over the machine.

The workman looked at me, turned, went up to the control section of the machine and spoke to someone on the walkie talkie. Within a minute the machine stopped. The funnel was swung over to the west side of the tracks and the machine started again. The debris began blowing away from the prairie. Hy and I looked at each other, our hearts pounding.

We stayed the entire evening and watched until the machine had passed the prairie. A short time after the funnel was swung to the west, several Morton Grove police cars drove up to talk to the crew. There was a lot of pointing and gesticulating, but the machine just kept inching its way southward and avoiding the prairie.

At one point, when I was standing near the track, a pickup truck pulled alongside. The driver honked the horn and called out, "Are you Mrs. Bryer?" It was Pat Poeschel. He figured the person by the tracks could only be the woman who had been calling him. He was pleased to have been able to help.

The next day I rechecked the area. The debris had been directed to the western right of way all the way to Dempster Street. A tractor had gone over and smoothed and spread out the debris.

Meanwhile, to the east of the tracks, Railroad Prairie remained undisturbed. In the section that had been mowed, prairie dock plants were peeking up through the fallen stalks. ♦



Photo from The Nature Conservancy

Who are these handsome people and why are they smiling?

The North Branchers are (from left to right): Susanne Masi, Steve Packard, Ross Sweeny, Laurel Ross, Alice Thompson, Robert Lonsdorf and Lindsay McGee. They participated in the Third Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon, co-sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and the Cook County Forest Preserve District, on February 23rd. Laurel Ross received an award for her role in coordinating the recruitment of over 400 volunteers to save Healy Road Prairie in the summer of 1990. Alice Thompson received an award for planning and coordinating Earth Day 1990 activities for the North Branch. Robert Lonsdorf received an award for his excellent work as the volunteer steward for Miami Woods Prairie. Tom Murphy, not pictured, received an award for forming the North Branch's Science Committee.

Prairie Projections

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***The North Branch
Prairie Project is a
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involving The
Nature Conservancy,
the Chicago Audubon
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