

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 5, Number 6

Fall 2001

Park Focus: Argo Nature Area by Gillian Harris, Volunteer Park Steward

Look for Gillian's artwork on pages 1, 4, 6, and 10!

A walk through Argo Nature Area is a walk along the Huron River, where the water flows sedately and broadly enough to be called Argo Pond. Most folks know Argo for its canoe livery and boat ramp. To those paddling upriver, the park appears now, in late summer, as a wall of solid green. But behind the screen of foliage, a path clings to the side of the steep glacial moraine that is the eastern riverbank here, and runs north through an oak-hickory woods to the M-14 overpass.

The air is sultry as I linger by the place where kayaks and canoes put in. Small fish seek the shade of rocks; slim bluett damselflies hover inches above the water; dragonflies and swallows cruise the river further out. In the willow above me a red-winged blackbird, showing a hint of scarlet epaulet against black velvet, sends an incessant ear-piercing whistle across the Huron.

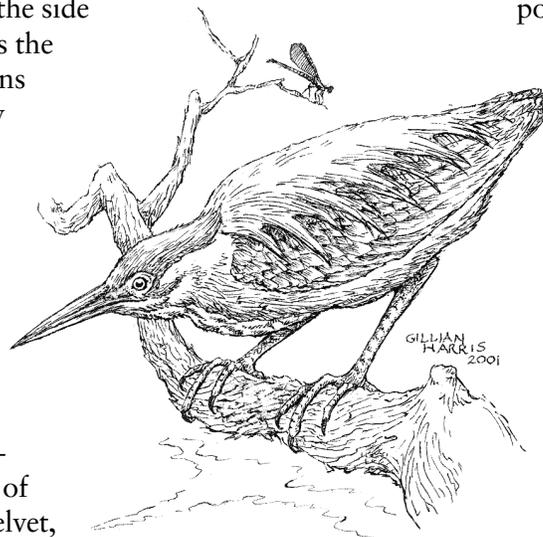
I step onto the shaded main trail and enter a wet mesic woods. Among towering cottonwoods and buttressed American elms grow the opportunistic box elder and black locust. The understory in this disturbed site is dominated by alien honeysuckle and European highbush cranberry, dame's rocket and garlic mustard. The tunnel

of overgrown greenery is quiet in these last days of summer. The Baltimore orioles, warbling vireos, and gray catbirds that nest on this thickety bank have raised their young and moved on, while other birds feed silently in the heavy foliage. Surveying Argo's breeding birds for NAP in 2000, I found the bulk of the nesting population in this area and the northern terminus of the park — also a scrubby wet area, but characterized by skunk cabbage and American hazelnut. Where the path north emerges onto an open bank of cattails below M-14, the river narrows, and Argo shares much of its riverine bird life with adjacent Barton Nature Area and Bandemer Park.

It's often in the dry middle section of Argo Nature Area, however, that the sound of my footsteps on the path scares up belted kingfishers, wood ducks and green herons from the sheltered riverbank below.

Here the dominant trees, some of them fine large specimens, are oaks and hickories, with an understory of black and choke cherry, white ash, American basswood, musclewood, and hop hornbeam. Beside the inevitable invasive shrubs, witch-hazel, arrowwood viburnum, and serviceberry hold their own. NAP-sponsored pulls have stemmed the tide of dame's rocket and

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Coordinator's Corner

Sustainability

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about "sustainability," defined by the 1987 Brundtland Commission (part of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development) as the ability "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainability is a huge topic that I can't even begin to cover in this short space, but you'll see it pop up from time to time in my articles as it is an important concept.

My thinking was prompted, in part, by the June ICLEI conference held in Ann Arbor (see related NAPpening) and by some long discussions with good friends who are really into this topic. This has led to some healthy reflection about how NAP and the entire department do business, and some serious self-reflection about my own lifestyle as well.

For example, I've been walking to work quite a bit the past few months. The two-mile trip takes me about 35 minutes, longer if I stop to eat mulberries along the way. If the weather discourages me from walking, I take the bus. Either way, I'm surprised how much better this makes me feel, physically and emotionally. It's good to slow down a little and have the time to reflect on the day without the rush of traffic. If I walk, the extra benefit is a much more direct connection to the local geography, and a more intimate view of the daily changes Mother Nature paints on her canvas. Many of you have already discovered this for yourselves, so I'm not telling you anything new. But the rest of you might want to consider parking the car for a day and finding another way to work.

Or, if your job situation just doesn't make this feasible, you may want to consider another way to slow down a little, lessen your impact to the planet, and reconnect with nature. NAP can help with that! It's part of our mission. Ann Arbor has some tremendous natural areas that can really immerse you in the local ecology and help you reconnect, especially if you jump in and participate in some of the stewardship activities NAP has to offer. We can get you in up to your elbows and knee-deep as you collect native seeds or remove invasive species.

At the same time that you're working on your own reconnection to nature, you'll be helping to make sure that these natural areas are, indeed, going to be around for future generations to enjoy. Remember, setting aside a mature oak forest today doesn't ensure you'll have a mature oak forest to show your grandchildren. You may not even have a forest! It may turn into a buckthorn thicket. Of course, mature oak forests are sustainable, if other threats are properly managed. I see this as NAP's role, to make sure that our natural areas are sustainable, to make sure that past abuses and current conditions in the oak forests "do not compromise the ability of future oak forests to meet their own needs." So join us in our work toward sustainability — for yourself, your natural areas, and your planet!

David Borneman, Natural Area Preservation Manager

Natural Area Preservation

is a Division of the City of Ann Arbor
Department of Parks and Recreation.

The mission of the Natural Area Preservation Division is to protect and restore Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster an environmental ethic among its citizens.

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For up-to-date information on stewardship activities call the "hotline" at (734) 996-3266.

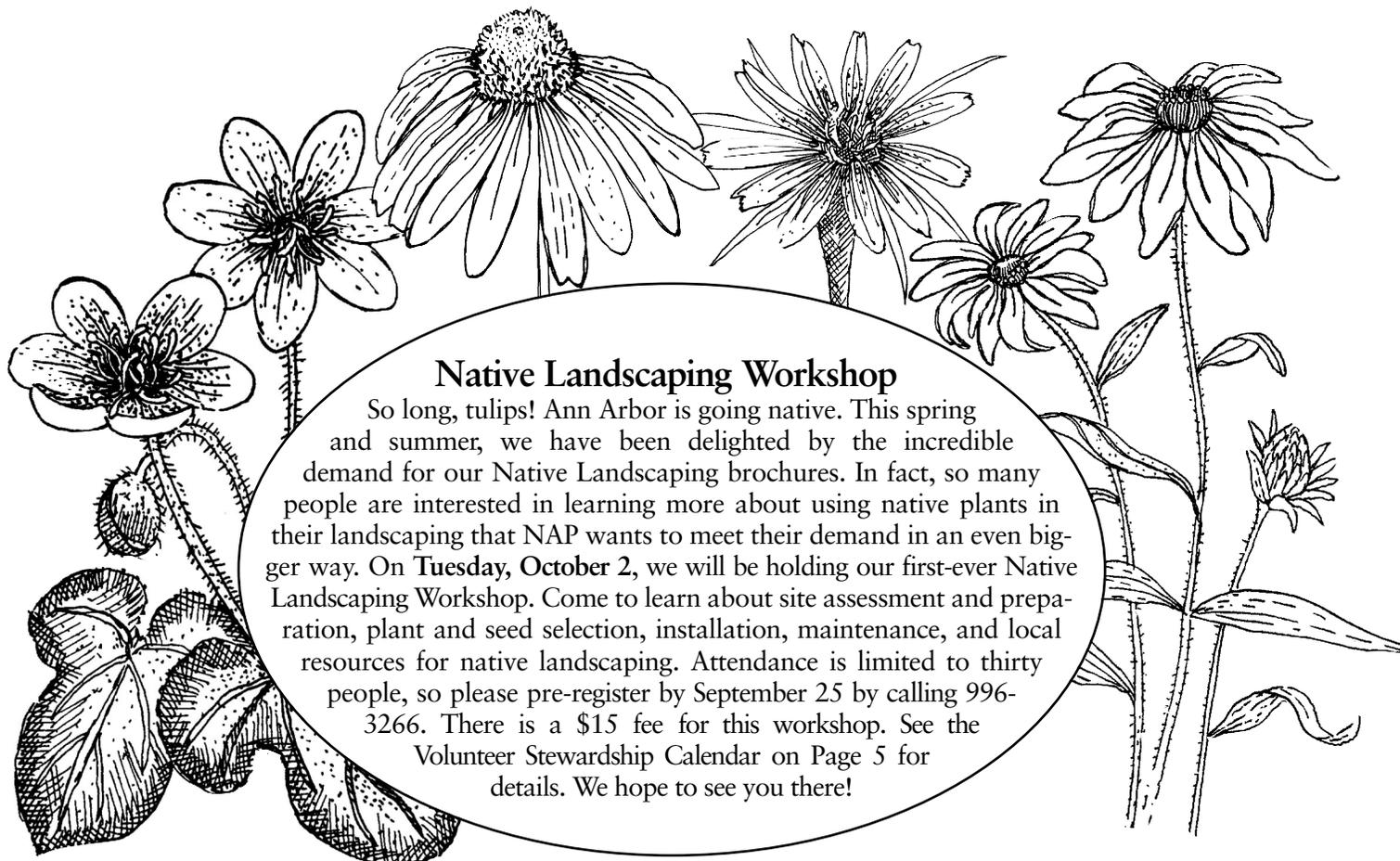
My Experience with NAP

by Heike Jaroschowitz, Summer Intern

When I arrived here two months ago I was very excited about how the work in the parks of Ann Arbor would be. In Germany, where I live, normally a city park is a small area downtown with short grass and some flowers and trees, so I was surprised about the woods and prairies and wetlands here. In Germany I am used to working or studying in an office. I am at a university of applied administrative study in Kehl. We have the chance to do a two-month internship in a foreign country. I decided to come to Ann Arbor because the University of Kehl has a partnership with this lovely town and also because I come from Tübingen, which is the sister city of Ann Arbor. I have a personal interest in nature, which is why I wanted to work with NAP. During my internship I did some office work and a lot of work outside with the crew that I liked very much. One of the first things to do was to buy some very old clothes for work from the second-hand store. At the beginning it was cool and rainy and the crew took me with them to the Dolph bog to walk through the wetland and learn some new plants. I felt a little bit clum-

sy in those rain boots and rain pants, but I enjoyed the excursion very much and was glad not to have disappeared in one of the muddy holes. Soon the heat started and we swept the woods and prairies for invasive plants. I enjoyed the bird songs while pulling dame's rocket and garlic mustard. Of course I became acquainted with mosquitoes and chiggers, as well as with animals like frogs and toads that I liked more. One day we did goose banding and I was happy that I could participate. To hold a "schnuckelige Gans" (cute goose) in my arms while the foot was banded was an unforgettable experience for me.

I think I saw and learned a lot of new things here, but the best was how warm and friendly everybody at NAP was to me. I always felt like a real member of the staff and I want to thank you — the whole NAP staff — for this great time I had with you! I never enjoyed an internship as much as this one with NAP.



Native Landscaping Workshop

So long, tulips! Ann Arbor is going native. This spring and summer, we have been delighted by the incredible demand for our Native Landscaping brochures. In fact, so many people are interested in learning more about using native plants in their landscaping that NAP wants to meet their demand in an even bigger way. On **Tuesday, October 2**, we will be holding our first-ever Native Landscaping Workshop. Come to learn about site assessment and preparation, plant and seed selection, installation, maintenance, and local resources for native landscaping. Attendance is limited to thirty people, so please pre-register by September 25 by calling 996-3266. There is a \$15 fee for this workshop. See the Volunteer Stewardship Calendar on Page 5 for details. We hope to see you there!

NAPpenings



This past June, Ann Arbor hosted a major three-day environmental conference organized by the **International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)**. This is one of six "preparatory meetings" being held around the world to prepare for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in South Africa. The focus was on local governments' roles in forwarding sustainable development. The goal of the preparatory meetings is to identify the most successful programs and policies implemented by local governments around the world. Ann Arbor was one of only 25 North American communities invited to apply to host the conference, a competition which we eventually won. NAP got in on the action by being invited to present an exhibit on our program, which was seen as a model for other communities. Although many cities recognize the need for public green space, there aren't many who are managing those areas to ensure they will be around for the future.

August 1st was our deadline for submitting a grant application to the MDNR for funds to purchase an **18.2-acre addition to Dolph Nature Area**. It includes the southern half of Second Sister Lake, and would extend the park all the way south to Liberty Rd. It would also facilitate a trail loop all the way around Second Sister Lake and into Lakewood Nature Area. The property is currently part of the Killins gravel mining operation, which pumps water out of Second Sister Lake for washing gravel, then returns it to a series of ponds on this property. This addition would really be a nice complement to the rest of Dolph, and would permanently preserve the rest of the undeveloped shoreline of Second Sister Lake. We'll find out this winter whether the grant will be awarded.

Staff Update

Tony DeFalco joined the Conservation Crew this July. He comes to NAP from the National Wildlife Federation, where he was an advocate for Lake Superior. Tony's background is in Natural Resources Planning and Interpretation and Ethnic Studies. He says he's originally from southern California where he "escaped" from and is highly unlikely to ever return to. Mostly, Tony likes to whoop it up, pull spotted knapweed to his heart's content and be real close to the earth.



NAP's 2001 Fall Burn Season is just around the corner! If our dry weather continues into October and November, you'll see our smoke around town.

The past two falls gave us just such a window of acceptable weather, but the previous years did not. If we do get a dry spell, most of the burning we hope to get done will be in our oak woodlands. These are the sites which "green up" fastest in the spring, rushing us to complete the burns before the spring wildflowers emerge. Fall burns are also very effective in controlling the woody invasive shrubs which threaten many of these ecosystems. Other good burn sites in the late fall, or even into winter, are cattail marshes, which are often too wet to burn in the spring. Contact the office if you want to be kept abreast of our fall burn schedule.



My name is **Beth Campbell** and I'm NAP's newest Conservation Crew member. I'm excited to get out and get dirty after working in an office as an AmeriCorps member. Before that, I volunteered for 1½ years with the Student Conservation Association at Isle Royale, Death Valley, and Big Bend National Parks doing interpretation, trail work, and invasive species removal — work I have desperately missed. I've got my boots laced in anticipation.

Autumn 2001 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

September

September 15, Saturday 
 Redbud Nature Area,
 10:00AM - 1:00 PM
 Lend a hand with trail maintenance and removal of invasive plants in one of Ann Arbor's newly acquired nature areas. Meet at the park entrance on Parkwood Ave. at Jeanne St., between Packard Rd. and Washtenaw Ave. See page 7 for more on Redbud!

September 22, Saturday 
 Brown Park,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Help remove invasive, non-native plants. Meet in the parking lot at the Packard Rd. entrance.

September 29, Saturday 
 Scarlett Mitchell
 Nature Area,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Help remove invasive, non-native plants. Meet in the Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine St.

October

October 2, Tuesday **SPECIAL EVENT!** 
 Native Landscaping
 Workshop,
 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
 Leslie Science Center
 Nature House -
 1831 Traver Rd.
 Tired of mowing?
 Interested in a more
 natural yard? Learn
 about incorporating
 the native plants of
 southeastern Michigan
 into your home landscape.
 Please pre-register by
 Sept. 25 by calling 996-3266.
 WORKSHOP FEE: \$15.00

October 7, Sunday 
 Furstenberg Native
 Plant Garden,
 10:00AM - 1:00 PM
 Help with general cleanup and
 celebrate another successful
 season in the garden!
 Meet in the Furstenberg Nature
 Area parking lot off Fuller Rd.

October 17, Wednesday 
 Public Meeting:
 Prescribed Burn Program
 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
 Leslie Science Center Nature
 House - 1831 Traver Rd.
 It's burn season again! Join us
 for an informational meeting and
 discussion about our Prescribed
 Ecological Burn Program.

October 20, Saturday 
 Barton Nature Area,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Join us in collecting seeds
 from native prairie plants.
 Meet in the Barton Dam
 parking lot off Huron River
 Drive, just north of Bird Rd.

October 28, Sunday 
 Furstenberg
 Nature Area,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Help collect seed from
 native prairie plants. Meet in the
 Furstenberg parking lot off
 Fuller Rd.

For your safety, long pants and closed-toe shoes are required at Stewardship Days. For more info, call NAP at 996-3266.

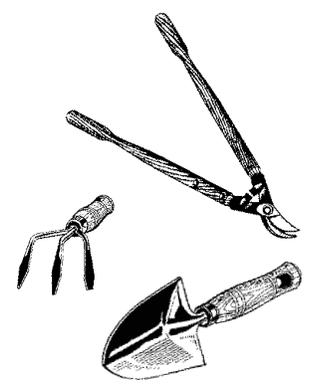
November

November 3, Saturday 
 Marshall Nature Area,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Join us in removing invasive, non-native plants from this wooded natural area. Meet in the parking lot off Dixboro Rd., north of Plymouth Rd.

November 10, Saturday 
 Brown Park,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Spruce up the trails and help
 remove invasive plants. Meet in
 the parking lot at the Packard
 Rd. entrance.

November 17, Saturday 
 Miller Nature Area,
 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
 Help remove woody invasive
 plants. Meet at the Arborview
 Blvd. entrance.

If your group is interested in arranging a stewardship day for the next field season, please contact our office this winter.



Scarlett Mitchell: Thirty Years Later

by Dea Armstrong

In June of 1972, Jeffrey Renner, then an EMU student in Advanced Ornithology under Dr. Hal Caswell, did a breeding bird survey of a "hawthorn field" in Scarlett Mitchell Nature Area. NAP obtained a copy of his methods and results and this year I surveyed the same area. Much has changed in the approximately 10-acre hawthorn field where Mr. Renner examined bird life. The field is almost completely grown in with more and larger hawthorns, black cherry, and buckthorn, so much so that today the 10 acres would never be called a field at all! The vegetation is now a highly disturbed mature shub upland with some larger trees, although not at all a true forest like the adjacent oak-hickory woods in Scarlett Mitchell. I had to modify the survey methods somewhat because of the extensive vegetation changes but the results can still be compared.

Of the 16 different species of birds seen in 1972, six are gone: Field Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Baltimore Oriole, Song Sparrow, Empidonax Flycatcher, and Indigo Bunting. Most are species of an open field or edge habitat and would not find the tall shrubs suitable. Seven new species, some more likely to be found in the nearby oak-hickory woods but definitely using the shrubland resources, have been added to the list: Downy Woodpecker, American Crow, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-eyed Vireo, and Wood Thrush. An eighth species not found on Renner's survey, House Wren, is using wren houses that appear to have been present for quite some time, though probably not at the time of his survey.

Only the numbers of Brown-headed Cowbird, Northern Flicker, Yellow Warbler, Brown Thrasher, and Mourning Dove remained somewhat consistent with the 1972 survey numbers. While Gray Catbirds, American Robins, and Northern Cardinals were present in both 1972 and 2001, the numbers have increased substantially, all by 300% or more! The only species still present but showing a substantial decline was American Goldfinch.

While these data are not rigorous, they do for the most part reflect the 30 year population trends for each individual species as seen in our part of the country. The outstanding exceptions are Wood Thrush and Brown Thrasher, which the Michigan data show to be in decline. These species are newly present in the survey area, although only a single pair of each.

These changes in avifauna after 30 years of uncontrolled growth in old field habitat would not surprise most birders, but they do give some perspective to the restoration and maintenance work that is done by the NAP crew and volunteers. Grasslands, old fields, prairies, and savannas are very susceptible to invasive shrubs, especially in an urban environment. Without active maintenance of these more open habitats, we would see them all change in the way the flora and fauna at the Scarlett Mitchell "hawthorn field" changed, especially in our small, park-sized habitats. So thanks, NAP crew and volunteers, for keeping some of our old fields and savannas "as is" (and "as were").

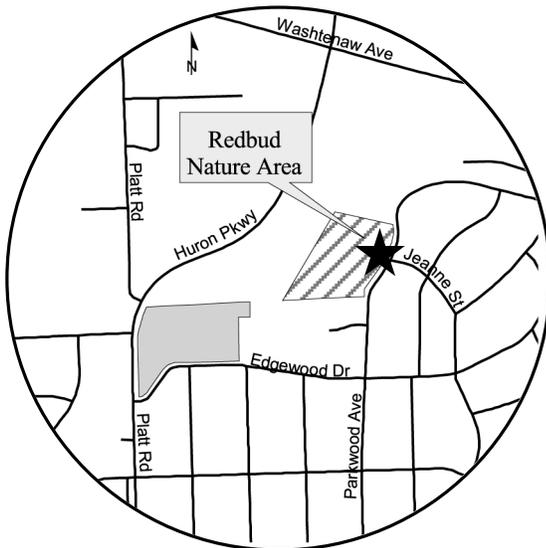
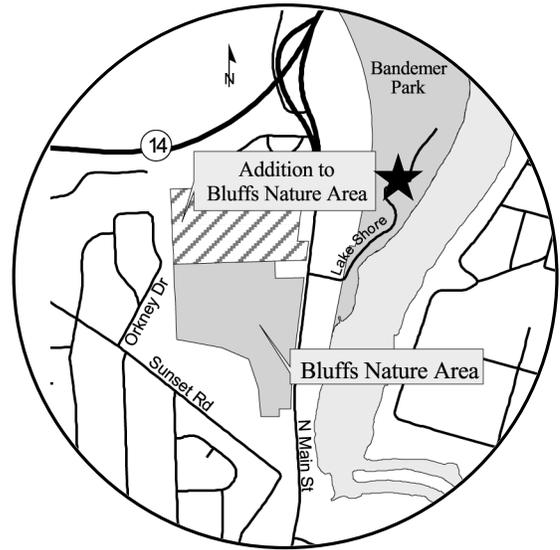


147 Strong and Growing by Bev Walters and Nancy Novitski

In an urban area where open space becomes ever rarer, it is exciting that the Ann Arbor park system continues to grow. On May 31, three new park areas officially joined our park system. Check them out for yourself!

Bluffs Nature Area Addition

As one enters Ann Arbor along North Main Street, the high slopes of Bluffs Nature Area mark the western edge of the Huron River valley. The 17.2 acres of this addition increase the total acreage of protected land in Bluffs Nature Area to 39.3 acres. These high uplands are recharge areas for the groundwater that feeds the sedge meadow wetlands along the river in Bandemer Nature Area. This addition extends to the north of the existing Bluffs acreage, which is accessible from Main Street.

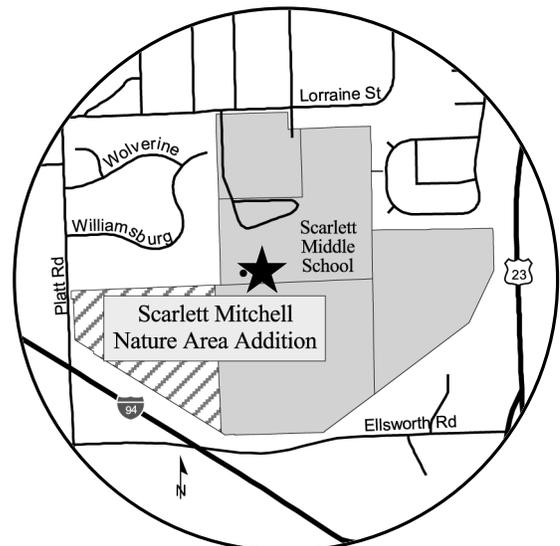


Redbud Nature Area

This acquisition has the city's largest population of redbud trees, whose deep pink blossoms decorate the woods in early spring. From the entrance the trail gradually descends toward Malletts Creek, which flows along the parcel's western border. Although only 5.1 acres in size, this site is packed with a diverse array of trees and wildflowers typical of rich floodplain forests, a habitat that is quite rare within the city of Ann Arbor. The entrance is located on Parkwood Street near Jeanne Street, between Packard and Washtenaw.

Scarlett Mitchell Nature Area Addition

The gently rolling terrain of this 24.6-acre parcel supports an upland forest in the northern portion and a lowland forest in the lower, wetter central area. The southern part is mostly shrubby old field growth, which provides an excellent habitat for deer, fox, and other wildlife. This site is a vital link between City and Ann Arbor Public Schools natural areas immediately to the east and the expanse of publicly owned wetland, prairie, and woods to the west of Platt Road. It is currently accessible from the trail system in Mitchell Scarlett Woods.



Botanical Update

by Bev Walters

After researching historical records of rare plants at the U of M Herbarium, I've been on the lookout for some of these gems that occurred in the Ann Arbor area in the past. This summer, some botanically alert folks have located several species that I've been hoping to see.

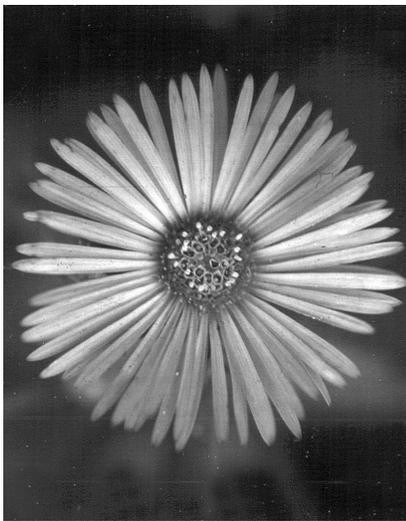
NAP's Outreach Coordinator Tara Griffith was walking in Black Pond Woods Nature Area with Wolfgang Hauer when they came across one-flowered cancer root (*Orobanche uniflora*) in an area NAP had burned this spring. This plant is unusual because it's a pale, almost translucent lavender color, and rather than make its own food, it parasitizes goldenrod roots. It was last collected in Ann Arbor 1938 and is one I've been on the watch for — good find!

This summer in Furstenberg Nature Area, another plant appeared that was around Ann Arbor in the early 1900's but hasn't been collected in the county since. NAP volunteer Pauline Nagara spotted purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) growing in an area that NAP has burned several times. Several spheres of dark purple flowers sprout from the very top of the plant and are quite striking. This is a new species for the NAP plant inventory and is State-listed as Special Concern.

NAP volunteer Don Botsford located an additional population of wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpurea*), also State-listed as Special Concern, at his Botsford Recreational Preserve just west of town. This small tree has tiny maroon flowers that come out in midsummer. It has only been located in Washtenaw County a few times, so it's good to know it's still around.

Several rare sedges have been collected in the past from the ravines in Bird Hills Nature Area. A few years ago I found *Carex careyana* but was unable to re-locate it this spring. I was also on the lookout for *Carex prasi-na*, which has only been collected once in the county, at Bird Hills. During an excursion there in June with sedge expert Dr. Tony Reznicek, he was able to locate both species. Though certainly not strikingly beautiful plants, they're charmingly tucked away in these cool ravines.

Although it's exciting to locate plant rarities known from past records, I also try to stay alert to alien newcomers. Cut-leaved teasel (*Dipsacus laciniatus*) is lurking on the outskirts of Ann Arbor in old fields and roadsides but has not yet been seen in our local natural areas. This teasel has deeply lobed leaves and is more robust and aggressive than its better-behaved cousin, wild teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), so NAPpers are watching out for it, especially in our prairie areas and savannas.



Aster novae-angliae
New England aster

One-flowered cancer root has long since faded, but asters and goldenrods are still going strong. Look for these two species and others in prairies and along woodland edges this fall!



Solidago juncea
Early goldenrod

Breeding Bird Survey Comes in for a Landing

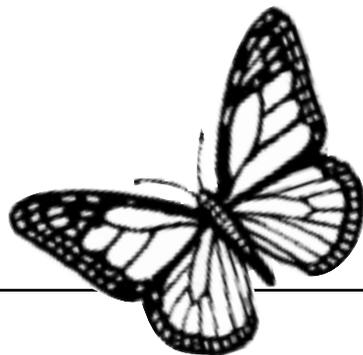
by Dea Armstrong

This year's Breeding Bird Survey was one of the easiest I've ever had, with more than 23 excellent volunteers. Here are a few interesting tidbits to note from the data collected by our surveyors.

For the second year in a row, Marshall Park has had a **Blue-headed Vireo** singing throughout the nesting season. Volunteer Roger Wykes also found this bird carrying food, a sure sign of nesting. Roger's other great find in Marshall was an on-territory **Chestnut-sided Warbler**. While the Chestnut-sided Warbler is a common migrant in the county, it is uncommon as a breeder. Roger's sighting of this bird is a first for our Breeding Bird Survey records.

The biggest news comes this year from the Ann Arbor Landfill grasslands on Platt Road. On the morning of June 29, I found a singing **Henslow's Sparrow** on Phase I (the area closest to Platt). The bird was still present and singing as of July 5. Henslow's Sparrow is listed in Michigan as a Threatened species (one step below Endangered) and is a priority species for the Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for the Upper Great Lakes region, which includes Ann Arbor.* Henslow's Sparrow is a quiet and secretive grassland species. Its song is a soft hiccup, described as "tsi-lick," which can be difficult to hear. This year was a good one for Henslow's, with several reports in Washtenaw and surrounding counties. It prefers large, undisturbed grassland sites with a substantial litter layer. The delayed mowing regimen at the landfill should provide more and more of this type of grassland as well as an opportunity for undisturbed nesting. I am keeping my fingers crossed for next year!

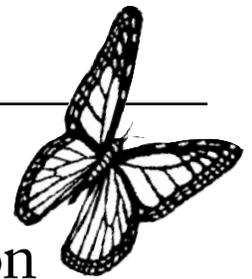
**Partners In Flight (PIF) was launched in 1990 in response to growing concerns about declines in the populations of many land bird species, and in order to emphasize the conservation of birds not covered by existing conservation initiatives. Go to www.pwrc.nbs.gov/pif for more information about PIF.*



Volunteer Update

What do get when you mix a group of ninth grade students from Community High School, Girl Scout Troop #732, and **800 lbs.** of garlic mustard and dame's rocket? You get a very successful **River Day 2001!** Twenty-seven volunteers braved the rain and mud to help stop these invasive, non-native plants from taking over Argo Nature Area. Some folks also helped to control erosion along the banks of the Huron by installing water bars. And at the **3rd Annual Garlic Mustard Weed-Out Day**, volunteers working at Argo, Cedar Bend, Bird Hills, and Marshall Nature Areas collectively pulled just over **one ton** of the pungent plant! Thank you to everyone who joined in the effort to keep these natural areas looking great!

Two **Eagle Scout candidates** are currently working with NAP to fulfill their requirements. With help from Troop #4, **Wes Weaver** has taken on the ambitious task of blazing a new trail and constructing a foot bridge along the western edge of Dolph Nature Area. The trail and bridge are part of the City's master plan to provide better access to Dolph by creating a trail that will skirt the edge of the pond and eventually lead to a scenic overlook of the area. **Dan Andersen** will be working with Troop #88 to construct Wood Duck and Eastern Bluebird nest boxes, install them in designated parks throughout the city, and monitor them for nests. Not only will the birdhouses help remedy the decreasing availability of nest sites due to urban sprawl and habitat destruction, they will also serve as an opportunity for the public to observe and enjoy nature.



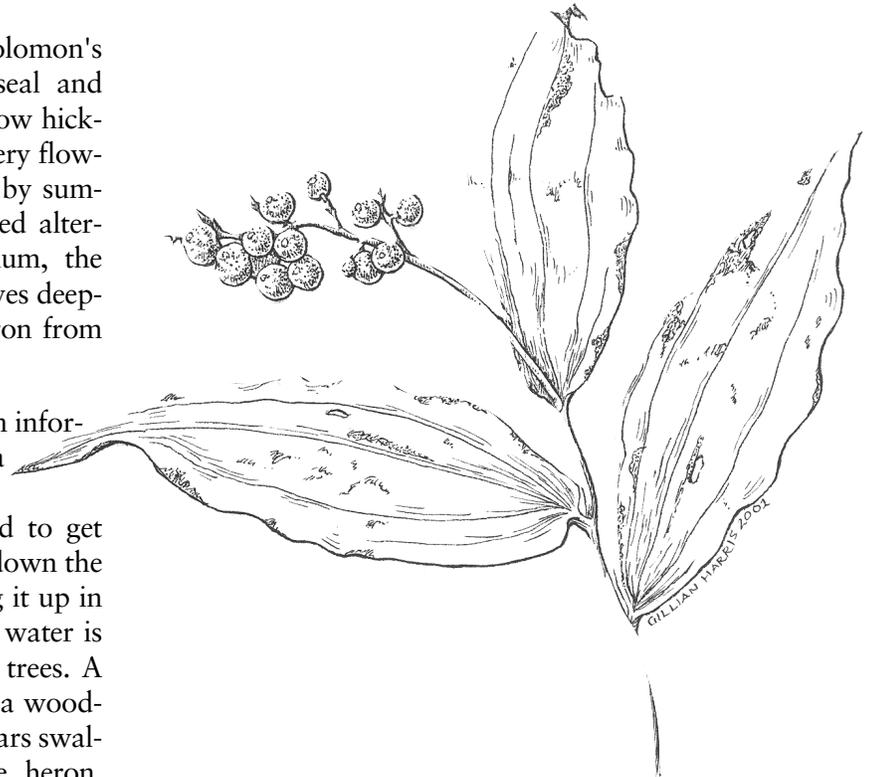
Monarch Migration

Most people are familiar with bird migration, but they are not the only winged ones to fly south for the winter! This is the time of year for the annual flight of the monarchs to their wintering sites in Mexico. Along the way they will feed on and pollinate milkweed and a variety of other flowers, fattening up for their winter home. Watch for them nectaring on flowers in your gardens, or take a walk at Gallup along the bike path and look at the milkweed stands. Be sure to wish them well on their long journey!

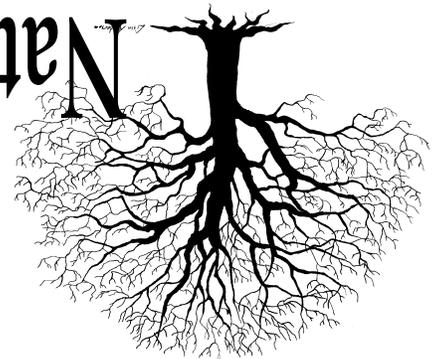
Park Focus: Argo Nature Area *continued from Page 1*

autumn, fruits of jack-in-the-pulpit and false Solomon's seal blush scarlet; elderberry, true Solomon's seal and viburnum blue-black. Against a backdrop of yellow hickory, elm, hornbeam, and witch-hazel (whose spidery flowers bloom in fall), other plants that were veiled by summer's uniform green will emerge: the rose-colored alternate-leaved dogwood and maple-leaved viburnum, the apricot-pink arrowwood. By the time the oak leaves deepen into sienna and maroon, the view to the Huron from this trail will have opened.

But now I catch only silvery glimpses. I come to an informal path that goes down to the river. Erosion is a constant concern for NAP in this steep natural area. But like people everywhere, I have a need to get down to the water, so I gingerly, guiltily sidestep down the bank, making a mental note to see about shoring it up in the future. The river view opens before me. The water is still and bright past the overhanging shadow of trees. A damselfly flits by-an ebony jewelwing. A man in a wooden rowboat glides past, the circular eddies of his oars swallowed up by the boat's v-wake. A great blue heron, wingtips nearly touching the glassy surface of the water, effortlessly passes the boat by. Argo Pond throws back a perfect mirror image as the heron wings its way downriver.



Natural Area Preservation News



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