

Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 7, Number 1

Spring 2002

The Buhr Park Children's Wet Meadow by Jason Frenzel

How are environmentalists born? Are we predestined to value nature, the solstice, and granola? I often wonder about this issue when meeting and getting to know people. Recently I visited with Jeannine Palms, and gained not a small bit of insight into these questions.

Jeannine's home is the Blossom Home School. She is the teacher there, working with preschoolers and a handful of older "graduates." Jeannine's backyard abuts Buhr Park, so she often takes her students there. In the short time we spent together I noticed that Jeannine has the uncommon ability to empower while teaching, creating an atmosphere for personal growth. This talent is proven in the stories she tells of her students.

Soon after Jeannine moved to Ann Arbor, she, her preschoolers, and their families became involved in the Adopt-A-Stream Program through the Huron River Watershed Council. She learned that street drains flow to nearby creeks, typically untreated. Astonished at this fact, she showed the children the relationship between the stormwater collecting on streets and the nearby creeks by using maps and following rain water on rainy days. They learned that the rain water running off the streets ends up in Malletts Creek, three-quarters of a mile away. Having already learned with Jeannine about all of the wonderful life that occurs in natural waterways, the kids became concerned about all the polluted water pouring into the creek when it rained. This led to some neighborhood education by the students. They wrote a petition and visited nearby homes door-to-door over a two-year period, getting signatures and handing out "safe lawn" signs. Many

older students began meeting regularly to discuss these issues and work on special projects. This group of graduates calls themselves the "Super Swampers."

Each spring, during the annual thaw and associated flooding in the park behind Blossom, the kids had a waterway in which to float their boats. Rainwater collected and flowed along the sidewalk before pouring into the storm drain. Realizing that in natural areas, wetlands would function to absorb this water, Jeannine began explaining this phenomenon to the preschoolers. One of the children exclaimed, "So why don't we make one here?" Others agreed, "Yeah, let's keep the water here - that will help Malletts Creek." Jeannine knew that getting the City to create a wetland would not be the easiest task, but she wanted the children to know that their ideas could make a difference.

So Jeannine initiated discussions with Park staff. The Super Swamper group came into existence and began organizing, planning and researching. They delivered their message at local fairs and talked with a variety of community groups around town. Jeannine worked with a newly formed adult team to write three grant proposals, two of which were funded. The \$100 grant from Wild Ones (a non-profit focusing on native landscaping), was seed money, literally and figuratively: it purchased seed and established credibility for the project. The \$1900 Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation grant covered the major expenses. The students also raised \$200 themselves by selling butterfly milkweed plants they had raised.

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Coordinator's Corner

A Sucker Born Every Minute

If you enter Bird Hills Nature Area from Bird Road to the north and take the first trail branching off to the left, you'll be hiking on a very special trail. It was built in the 1980s by the local chapter of the Sierra Club, thus it's been known by some as the "Sierra Club Trail." I learned this bit of history, and many other fascinating things about Bird Hills and the local environmental scene, on November 16, 1993, my second day on the job. That was the day I took my first walk with George Sexton.

For those of you who didn't know George, he was an avid defender of natural areas and a long-time leader within the local environmental community. He also served several terms on our Department's Park Advisory Commission and played a key role in creating my position and hiring me to fill it.

Sadly, George died this past fall, almost eight years to the day after I took that first walk with him down the Sierra Club Trail. In honor of all that George did for the local natural areas, the Parks Department has decided to re-name this trail after him: *the George Sexton Trail*. Let me take you on a quick trip down the George Sexton Trail to point out some of the features that make it a good memorial to George and that illustrate what a good model he was for the rest of us.

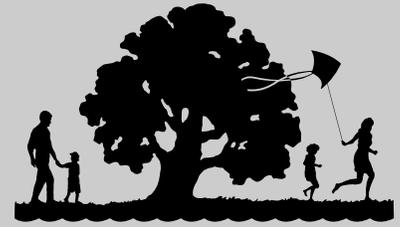
The trail runs along the eastern side of a high ridge with frequent vistas (at least in winter) of the Huron River and Barton Nature Area. It's a good place to gaze out over the landscape and enjoy the largest block of contiguous natural area in Ann Arbor. It's also a good place to ponder our role as stewards for the environment and to develop a vision for protecting these ecological jewels. George had that kind of vision, and the rest of us should work to develop it.

As you round the bend in the trail, you pass by a large rock, a glacial erratic, about the size of a doghouse. Don't try to move it; it won't budge. Once it had been set in place by the retreating glacier, it was there to stay. And if there's one thing I'll always remember about George, it was his ability to not budge on an issue that he felt strongly about. He held his ground, persisted, and usually prevailed. We can learn a lot from George, and this rock, about holding our positions on important issues.

The trail also takes you past some of the tallest trees in the park. They are tulip trees, which have a characteristic straightness as they shoot high into the sky. Stand tall, stand straight, stand proud, all you who work to protect and care for Mother Earth. George always did.

The trail continues on over hills and down valleys (the same kind of ups and downs we all face in life) and picks its way carefully, but persistently, when the way is crowded with thick brush. And finally, near the southern end of the trail loop where it rejoins the main trail, it passes through one final feature that I think is an especially fitting tribute to George: a sassafras grove. George used this clump of sassafras trees to teach me how to identify the species by its bark, which has a distinctive soft orange glow to its grayness.

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Parks & Recreation
CITY OF ANN ARBOR

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.

Ask the Technician: What is Dame's Rocket? by Kee Condict

While you're wandering in the woods this spring, an attractive, phlox-like flower may catch your eye. But don't be fooled! That lovely bloom may well be the exotic invasive *Hesperis matronalis*—Dame's rocket. Here Kee Condict, NAP Technician, answers frequently asked questions about this pretty but problematic plant.

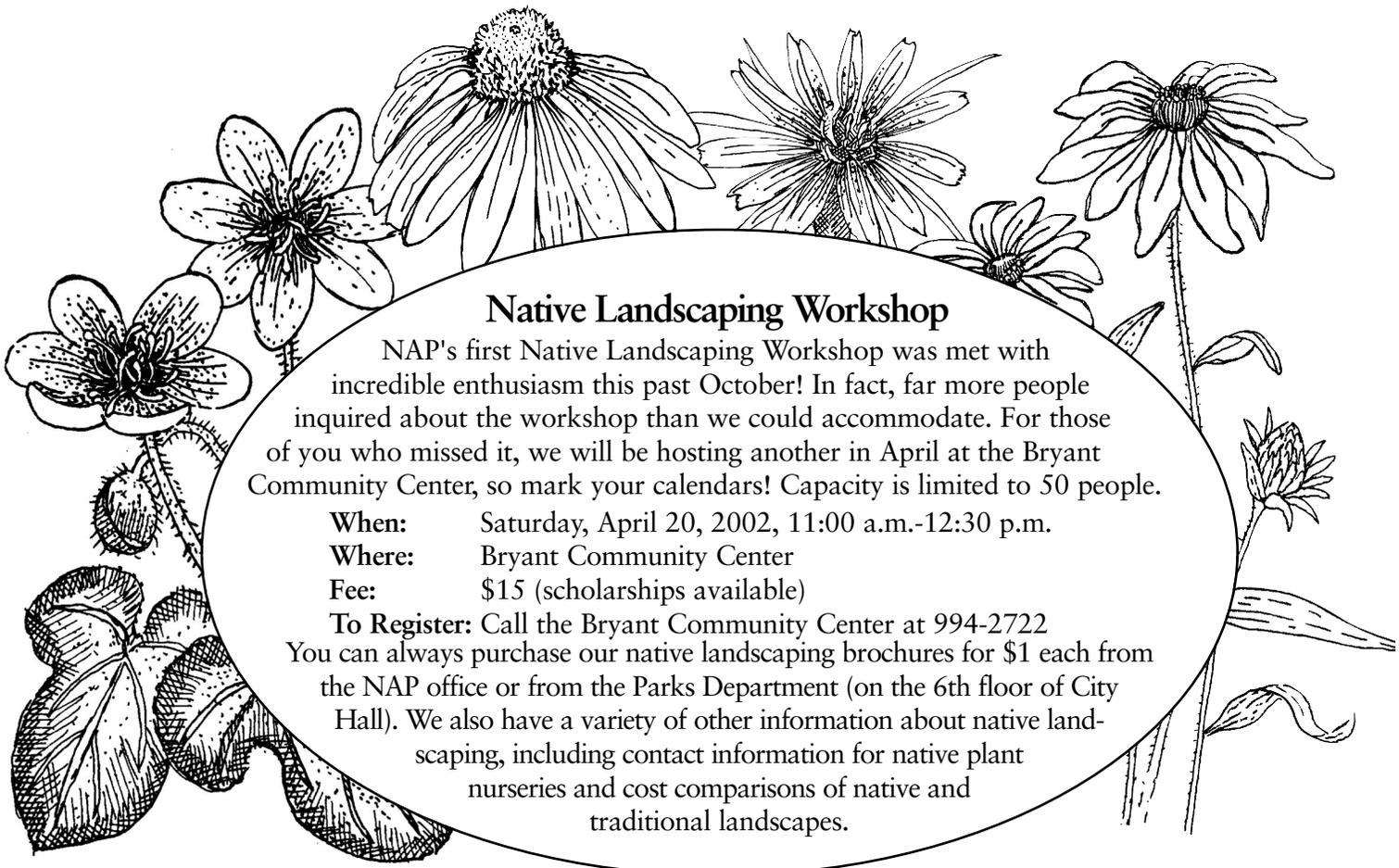
Q: How can I tell the difference between Dame's rocket and phlox?

A: Dame's rocket is a short-lived perennial with clusters of purple, pink, or white flowers that bloom from May to July. This member of the mustard family has flowers with four petals and can reach three feet in height. The leaves are oblong, sharply serrated, and alternately arranged. Dame's rocket is frequently confused with the horticulturally popular garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*). Unlike Dame's rocket, however, garden phlox has flowers with five petals, not four, and has leaves that are oppositely branched and fairly smooth along the edges. The less common native woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) also has five petals. Just remember this rhyme: *Petals four, pull some more. Petals five, leave alive!*

Q: Where did Dame's rocket come from and why should I avoid planting it?

A: Dame's rocket is native to Eurasia and was introduced into North America in the 1600s. This plant thrives in moist and mesic woodlands, along roadsides, and also in open areas. It germinates in the spring, overwinters as a green rosette (circular cluster of leaves), and flowers the following spring. Its colorful display is insidiously attractive, enticing professionals and home gardeners alike to use it as an ornamental plant in the landscape. Unfortunately, these colorful displays turn into prolific seed sets, causing this species to be a serious invader of our parks and other natural areas. Its fast growth and tremendous reproductive potential allow it to spread aggressively, outcompeting species native to the area and thereby reducing overall biodiversity. Part of its success can be attributed to its wide distribution in "wildflower" seed mixes. Be sure to check the content of these seed mixes for this species, and do not purchase those that include it.

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Native Landscaping Workshop

NAP's first Native Landscaping Workshop was met with incredible enthusiasm this past October! In fact, far more people inquired about the workshop than we could accommodate. For those of you who missed it, we will be hosting another in April at the Bryant Community Center, so mark your calendars! Capacity is limited to 50 people.

When: Saturday, April 20, 2002, 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Where: Bryant Community Center
Fee: \$15 (scholarships available)
To Register: Call the Bryant Community Center at 994-2722

You can always purchase our native landscaping brochures for \$1 each from the NAP office or from the Parks Department (on the 6th floor of City Hall). We also have a variety of other information about native landscaping, including contact information for native plant nurseries and cost comparisons of native and traditional landscapes.

Ask the Technician: *Continued from page 3*

Q: What can I do to help? Are there alternatives to planting this invasive species?

A: When choosing what to plant in your garden this spring, consider using native plants, or at least non-invasive horticultural species. NAP has a series of brochures on native landscaping for sale to assist you in choosing plants for your garden. You can also check out abridged lists of native wildflowers, trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, sedges, and ferns on the NAP web site (www.ci.ann-arbor.mi.us/framed/parks/nap.htm). To learn more about the process of landscaping with native plants, sign up for NAP's second Native Landscaping Workshop. See page 3 for more details.

If you discover Dame's rocket growing on your property, the best way to prevent its spread is to manually remove plants before they develop seed heads. Hand pull from ground level or below the



Dame's rocket, *Hesperis matronalis* © 1998 Mike Haddock

soil surface to ensure that the stem does not separate from the roots. In Ann Arbor, plants can be placed with other marked compostables for free curbside compost collection. All patches should be monitored each spring for signs of recurrence until the seed bank is exhausted. Another way you can help is by volunteering this spring to help NAP control the spread of Dame's rocket in our natural areas. On the Stewardship Calendar on page 5, look for any workday to remove garlic mustard or Dame's rocket.

NAPpenings

It's **Natural Features Inventory** season again! NAP's ongoing surveys help us identify areas of critical habitat and monitor our restoration progress within the park system. Want to join a survey? Check the Stewardship Calendar for information about **Breeding Bird** and **Butterfly** Survey Kickoffs. You can still join the **Frog and Toad** Survey as well. And don't forget the field walks open to survey volunteers and the general public: four Butterfly walks, four Frog and Toad walks (two on Earth Day), and six Bird walks, including two during **Woodcock Week**. For further information, call the NAP office.

Huron River Clean-Up Day is a good excuse for some canoeing! This annual event will be held on Saturday, April 13. Volunteers will travel by canoe in teams to collect trash from the river. The planner of this event, David Fanslow, is a local scientist, canoeist, and fisherman. He has been cleaning up the Huron and helping others do so for the past nine years. See the Stewardship Calendar on page 5 for more details.

Matthew Naud is the new **Environmental Coordinator** for the City of Ann Arbor. He and David Konkle, the Energy Coordinator, make up the new Environmental Coordination Services group under the City Administrator. Matt supports and facilitates incorporating sustainability into the City government. NAP looks forward to collaborating with Matt on a variety of environmental issues.

Thanks

- A special thank-you to **Stan and Robin Mendenhall** for your continued generous support. Your recent contribution will fund a seed purchase to enhance Cedar Bend Park!
- There are many reasons we could thank **Ralph and Barbara Powell**. Today we would like to thank you for your ongoing donations of film and processing for our photomonitoring program!
- A large blanket thanks to **all volunteers** who have worked with NAP. Give yourselves a well-deserved pat on the back between April 22 and 28, which is **Volunteer Appreciation Week!**

Spring 2002 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar



NAP is located in the Leslie Science Center (1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor). The phone number is 734.996.3266.

If your group is interested in arranging a workday, call the NAP office!

Workday orientation starts promptly at 10:00 AM. Please wear pants and close-toed shoes.

Minors must either be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form.

March

March 13, Wednesday Frog & Toad Walk

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM



Meet at the Leslie Science Center, 1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor. Hear the calls of some wonderful nightlife with NAP Herpetologist David Mifsud. This tour is to help inventory volunteers with identification. Join us if you are interested in our survey. The van leaves promptly at 7:04, so don't be late!

March 16, Saturday Cranbrook Park

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM



Spring has sprung! Get out of the house and help clean up the park by removing garlic mustard and buckthorn and picking up trash. Meet in the Church of Christ parking lot at 2530 S. Main.

March 23, Saturday Brown Park

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM



Remove dame's rocket and buckthorn and maintain trails. Meet in the parking lot at the Packard Road entrance.

March 26, Tuesday Butterfly Survey Kick-off

7:30 PM - 9:00 PM



Leslie Science Center Nature House - 1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor
Would you like to spend some time watching butterflies this year? If so, join us for our annual field survey! This required training will provide information about the survey, park assignments, and training walks. Registration by March 22 is required. Please call the NAP office at 734.996.3266 to register or for more information.

April

April 3, Wednesday Frog & Toad Walk

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM



Meet at the Leslie Science Center, 1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor. Take a ride with NAP Herpetologist David Mifsud. This tour is to help inventory volunteers with identification. Join us if you are interested in our survey. The van leaves promptly at 7:04, so don't be late!

April 6, Saturday Dolph Nature Area

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM



To aid in bird watching and improve park access to the public, we will be maintaining trails and removing invasive shrubs. Meet at the parking lot off Wagner Road.

April 8, 11, and 14. Woodcock Week

Barton Nature Area

7:30 PM - 8:30 PM



Watch the dance of the Woodcock with NAP Ornithologist Dea Armstrong. Woodcock numbers in the state have been decreasing due to limited habitat. Barton Nature Area is one of few breeding areas for these ground-nesting birds. Meet on the bridge closest to the Barton Dam parking lot off Huron River Drive. Dress warmly!

April 9, Tuesday Breeding Bird Survey Kick-off

7:30 PM - 9:00 PM



Leslie Science Center Nature House - 1831 Traver Road Ann Arbor

This is the night you may sign up to cover your favorite park and pick up maps and instructions. NAP Ornithologist

Dea Armstrong will also report on the 2001 data and survey highlights. Registration by March 22 is required. Please call the NAP office to register or for more information.

April 13, Saturday Huron River Cleanup by Canoe

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM



Help the Huron River by removing trash while canoeing. Please register with the coordinator of this event, David Fanslow, at 734.741.2353 or fanslow@glrl.noaa.gov. Space is limited.

April 20, Saturday Native Landscaping Workshop

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM



Bryant Community Center
Interested in native plants? Would you like to learn how to establish them in your yard? Then this workshop is for you! Topics will include site assessment and preparation, seed and plant selection, installation, and maintenance. Please register at 734.994.2722. Program fee: \$15. Scholarships are available. (For program information call the NAP office.)

April 21, Sunday Earth Day Celebrations

(first day of Volunteer Week 2002)



The Leslie Science Center will be holding its annual Earth Day Festival from 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM. In conjunction with this event, NAP is sponsoring three events. **Due to the festival, parking will be limited! Please park on Traver Road or on the lower lawn of the Science Center.

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM, Trail maintenance and removal of dame's rocket and garlic mustard in Black Pond Woods!

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Volunteer Stewardship Calendar Continued

10:00 AM - 12:00 Noon, Frog and Toad walk at Scarlett Mitchell Nature Area. Meet in the Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine Street.
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM, Frog and Toad walk in Black Pond Woods.

April 27, Saturday
Marshall Nature Area
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

(last day of Volunteer Week 2002)
 Come help remove invasive garlic mustard from this wonderfully wooded park. Meet us in the parking lot off Dixboro Road, north of Plymouth Road.

April 28, Sunday
Furstenberg Native Plant Garden
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Help out with this spring cleaning workday and learn a bit about native landscaping. Botanical tour will be provided, time permitting. Meet at the Furstenberg Nature Area circle drive off Fuller Road.

May

May 4, Saturday
4th Annual Garlic Mustard Weed-Out

Three great locations!
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Join this citywide effort to stop invasive garlic mustard from taking over our natural areas! Young garlic mustard is easy to pull so this is a great activity for all ages. Last year over a ton of garlic mustard was pulled. Choose from one of these locations:

Argo Nature Area - Meet in the parking lot north of the Argo Canoe Livery, off Longshore Drive.

Bird Hills Nature Area - Meet at the park entrance on Bird Road, west of Huron River Drive. Additional parking is available in the Barton Dam parking lot.

Cedar Bend Nature Area - Meet at the park entrance near the perennial gardens on Cedar Bend Drive, off Broadway.



May 11, Saturday
Fritz Park

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Lend a hand pulling invasives, maintaining trails, and cleaning up trash. This great park is mere blocks from downtown, off Pauline. Park on Russett Street at the east entrance of Fritz. We will meet at the park shelter.

May 17, Friday
Breeding Bird Walk

Gallup Park/Furstenberg Nature Area
6:00 PM

This walk is for all levels of birders but beginners are especially welcome. Efforts will contribute to NAP's survey. Binoculars are nice but not essential. Led by Dea Armstrong. Meet at the Gallup Canoe Livery.

May 18, Saturday
Butterfly Survey Walk

Northeast Area Park, 9:30 AM

Join NAP Entomologist Barb Barton to survey our natural areas for, and learn more about, our local butterflies. Meet at the park entrance on Dhu Varren Road, just east of Pontiac Trail.

May 18, Saturday
Redbud Nature Area
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Join us to help remove invasive garlic mustard and dame's rocket from this new park, acquired last year. The wildflowers should be exceptionally beautiful for this workday. Meet at the park entrance on Parkwood Avenue at Jeanne Street.

May 23, Thursday
Breeding Bird Walk

Barton Nature Area, 7:30 AM

This walk is for all levels of birders but beginners are especially welcome. Binoculars are nice but not essential. Led by Dea Armstrong. Meet in the at Barton Dam parking lot near the intersection of Bird Road and Huron River Drive.

June

June 1, Saturday
Breeding Bird Walk

Gallup Park/Furstenberg Nature Area
7:30 AM

This walk is for all levels of birders but beginners are especially welcome. Binoculars are nice but not essential. Led by Dea Armstrong. Meet at the Gallup Canoe Livery.

June 1, Saturday
National Trails Day and National Rivers Day

Two great locations
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Help protect the Huron River by maintaining trails and removing invasive, non-native dame's rocket and buckthorn from two wonderful parks. This will slow erosion and help native plants to flourish.

Argo Nature Area - Meet in the parking lot north of the Argo Canoe Livery, off Longshore Drive.

Cedar Bend Nature Area - Meet at the park entrance near the perennial gardens on Cedar Bend Drive, off of Broadway.

June 1, Saturday
Bird Hills Trail Rededication
2:00PM

The "Sierra Club Trail" will be rededicated as the "George Sexton Trail" in honor of this great advocate of natural areas in Ann Arbor. All are invited to this event and the following hike. Meet at the Bird Road entrance to Bird Hills (additional parking in Barton Dam parking lot).



When joining our stewardship events, please keep an eye on the weather and dress appropriately. Long pants and close toed shoes are required for your safety

An Aster by Any Other Name is Still an Aster

by Bev Walters

Have you ever puzzled about wetland asters? Former NAPper Dr. Dave Warners recently co-authored an article in *Michigan Botanist* that could help you unravel their mysteries. Dave, now on the faculty of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, was a botanist with me during NAP's early days, and he often commented on the difficulties of aster identification. Part of the inspiration for this article came while he worked in the wetlands of Barton, Gallup and Furstenberg Natural Areas while doing plant inventories for NAP and checking plots for his own doctoral research. In the article Dave thanks the Ann Arbor Parks Department for allowing him to conduct research at these sites. For the full story see the following reference.



Warners, D. P. & Laughlin, D. C. 1999. Evidence for a species-level distinction of two co-occurring Asters: *Aster puniceus* L. and *Aster firmus* Nees. *Michigan Botanist* 38:19-31

A Sucker Born Every Minute

Continued from page 2

Sassafras trees, like many plant species, have the ability to spread by underground shoots, or *suckers*, creating new stems--and eventually new individual trees--that are genetically identical to the parent tree. These new stems are all considered *clones*, from the Greek word *klon*, meaning *twig*. This particular clump of sassafras trees is the largest I have ever seen, with forty to fifty trunks each about ten inches in diameter. And right in the middle of it is an old sassafras log, from a tree larger than any of the others standing there, and one known now only by a dead cylinder of outer bark standing about eight feet tall. This was probably the parent tree that gave rise to all the others in the grove, all clones of this once-magnificent tree.

I like to think that George was just such a "parent tree" within the Ann Arbor community. He stood guard over our natural areas but always sent out new shoots in hopes that some of them would grow into mature individuals who would perpetuate his work to save our forests. He sent out shoots as a teacher with the Ann Arbor Public Schools Environmental Education Program. He sent out shoots as an active member of the Sierra Club, which honored his considerable efforts toward their cause in 1994 when they created the *George Sexton Public Servant of the Year Award*. It is presented annually to a public servant who supports the kind of local environmental protection for which George always fought. I was honored to receive one of those awards in 1994 and

I guess that marked my official christening as one of George's "suckers."

As NAP's roots have taken hold, we've begun to send out some of our own suckers, and thus our circle of influence and our level of impact continue to expand. Our restoration efforts are multiplied hundred-fold by the volunteers who attend our workdays, and by the growing corps of dedicated Park Stewards who are beginning to put down their own roots in parks where they take on additional stewardship responsibilities. And so our grove of environmental protectors and ecological stewards continues to grow outward with each generation of new recruits, even after the passing of our parent tree.

This spring, go walk the George Sexton Trail. Sit on a rock and ponder being immovable. Stand proud and tall among the tulip trees reaching for the sky. Stroll through the sassafras grove. Find the parent tree and marvel at the many suckers that have themselves turned into mature trees. Consider becoming a new shoot yourself to carry on the work of the parent tree. Then go out and save the planet.

—David Borneman, *NAP Manager*

Anyone who would like to help us honor George is welcome to attend the official rededication of the "George Sexton Trail" on Saturday, June 1. See the Stewardship Calendar for details.



The Buhr Park Children's Wet Meadow *Continued from page 1*

In the fall of 1997 the wet meadow was planted. Former NAP Botanist Dave Warners, who was studying native seed germination at the time, donated 1,600 native plant seedlings. The Super Swampers and their parents transplanted and cared for them the following year. Although the original planting date was rained out, 70 volunteers showed up the following day. Thirty returned the next week to finish planting the plugs and to sow over a pound of seed on this quarter-acre site. With a cover crop of annual rye (to minimize weed growth and slow erosion) and other erosion control measures, the planting was a huge success.

To enhance the Wet Meadow's development and appearance, the Blossom school and other volunteers annually collect and scatter seed and do minimal weeding. To help maintain the site, NAP burns there every spring.

Now that the Wet Meadow has been created, it collects rainwater from the park that used to flow through storm drains into Mallets Creek. Of the water absorbed by soil in the Wet Meadow, the plants take in some, and some slowly percolates into the groundwater and, in turn, the creek. This diminishes the negative impacts on the creek by reducing the amount of runoff water and associated nutrients that reach

it, as well as lowering peak flows during rain storms to reduce scouring of the creek bed. The meadow also serves as a habitat for birds, bees, and butterflies; is a showcase for native plants; serves as a teaching tool for adults and children alike; and is a wonderful sight to behold.

But Jeannine and her students are not finished. In the past few years, working closely with Parks staff and neighbors, they have initiated a Stormwater Management Plan for all of Buhr Park. When implemented, the anticipated result will be zero surface water discharge from the park. Tilton and Associates have developed this plan with the input of many stakeholders.

Many people have helped plan, create, and maintain the Children's Wet Meadow. Jeannine is very thankful to all of these individuals and groups. She also told me this has been, and continues to be, a wonderful learning experience for her and her students. Above all, Jeannine has been excited and amazed by the ability of her students to see connections that occur in nature and point out what needs to be done. And I say, with a teacher like Jeannine, it's not surprising that they do.



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