

Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 9, Number 3

Autumn 2004

Park Focus: The Natural Areas at the Airport



A Walk in the Woods by Bev Walters

It recently came to my attention that the City owns about 75 acres of woods at the south end of the airport property. I first explored the eastern edge where I found dead elms and buckthorn – not very exciting. But the flat topography reminded me of a notable site south of town called “Hickory Flats” where a number of rare plants had been historically located. (I wasn’t very optimistic, but the thought helped motivate me to continue the survey.) After a bit more thrashing around in thick underbrush, I headed toward some large oaks I spotted off to the west. This led me to a fairly open stand of large bur oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*), many of them 3-5 feet in diameter. What a delight to see these old masters of the forest rising from their huge gnarly roots to tower over the landscape! Other smaller trees were interspersed between them, including swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*) and hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*). The shrub layer was dominated by buckthorn (of course) and red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), which is much less common locally than the black elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*). The lush herba-

ceous cover was mostly yellow touch-me-not (*Impatiens pallida*) and false Solomon’s seal (*Smilacina* spp.). Further west, most of the oaks dropped out and medium-size sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*) dominated. Many common trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) and blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) were in the complement of woodland wildflowers. As I hiked through the woods, I noticed a number of dead yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*). Eventually I encountered one – mature and full of life – standing in the midst of a large glade of waist-high ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*). This is the first time I’ve seen this birch growing in Ann Arbor area woods, so I seized the rare opportunity to nibble on a wintergreen flavored twig. Most of the species mentioned above tolerate wetter conditions, and though the water table was probably close by, I saw no standing water or vernal pools, despite the wet spring.



False Solomon’s Seal (*Smilacina* sp.)

Hopefully NAP Crew and volunteers will be able to eliminate the buckthorn without much trouble, and there will be very few herbaceous invaders to control in the nicer areas of the woods. I especially look forward to walking through the restored oak woods and expect it will look very much like the open forests that greeted southeast Michigan’s first settlers.

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Coordinator's Corner

Ecological Umpires

Our family is in the middle of a huge basement-remodeling project. This follows months of careful planning, with masking tape on the basement floor delineating future walls, and multiple drafts of floor plans specifying every electrical outlet, light switch, and heat register. All this in an attempt to paint a complete, detailed picture of exactly what the final outcome of the project was going to look like.

Luckily it's not that way when managing natural areas, although many people wish it were. To do that would require a much more complete understanding of ecological processes than I am able to claim. I had enough trouble understanding City codes and building principles, trying to say where heat ducts need to run and how appliances need to be vented. But even the complexity of the International Residential Building Codes pales in comparison to the complexity of Nature's ecosystems.

For example, I can walk into a native forest fragment and tell you that we need to pull the garlic mustard, but I can't tell you what's going to come back in its place. I can recommend that fire be returned to that ecosystem as it was historically, and that doing so will discourage the woody invasives and let in more sunlight, but I can't tell you what that's going to lead to, exactly. Oh sure, I've got a general idea that this will allow more native wildflowers and grasses to flourish, and I can probably guess what some of those species will be, but that is still very different than dictating the precise location of the walls, outlets, and light switches in my basement. No, ecological restoration is not like remodeling. It's more like baseball.

In baseball, the umpire doesn't decide who is going to win (at least he's not supposed to!), or what the final score will be, or who will get on base. His job is just to make sure that all the rules are being followed, that neither team tries to sneak in a player who's not on the roster. He also tries to make sure each player gets a fair shot at hitting the ball, that no one is trying to gain an unfair advantage by doctoring up the ball or using an illegal bat. He may have a goal to finish the game in nine innings, but even that goal may need to be modified depending on how things turn out.

Same thing in ecological restoration: as "ecological umpires" our job is to make sure that no species is getting an unfair advantage that it didn't have historically, that every native species gets a fair shot at growing there, and that no "unauthorized" players are trying to sneak into the game. Beyond that, we can't predict exactly how things are going to turn out.

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NAP Haiku

a singing robin
as running through a meadow
peace flows easily here

Natural Area Preservation

is a Division of the City of Ann Arbor
Public Services Area

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.

1831 Traver Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Phone

734.996.3266

Fax

734.997.1072

E-mail

nap@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us

Web site

[www.ci.ann-arbor.
mi.us/framed/parks/nap.htm](http://www.ci.ann-arbor.mi.us/framed/parks/nap.htm)

Manager

David Borneman

Assistant Supervisor

Bev Walters

NAP Specialist

Maggie Hostetler

Outreach Coordinators

Jason Frenzel

Laurel Malvitz

Conservation Workers

Laurel Malvitz

Reid Parker

Tracie Rexer

Jason Tallant

Lauren Theodore

Steve Wilson

Inventory Staff

Dea Armstrong, *Ornithologist*

Barb Barton, *Entomologist*

David Mifsud, *Herpetologist*

For up-to-date information on stewardship activities, call the "hotline" at 734.996.3266.

If you would prefer to receive your next newsletter via e-mail please call NAP.

Volunteer Highlight *by Ron Zavislak*

I was on the verge of burnout when I found the parks. They became a daily refuge in which to relax, think, walk, and get back in shape physically. The programs run by Ann Arbor and Washtenaw gave me a new awareness of the importance of our relationship with natural areas and the treasures they possess. It is ironic that my first volunteer workday was at Cedar Bend – one of Ann Arbor's first parks.

I've received so much from the parks in terms of relaxation, enjoyment, and learning experiences, I wanted to give a little bit back. So I started going to various workdays. Each event has been fun and I've learned a lot about plants, animals, conservation, prescribed burns, and so much more. Each park offers something unique. Who knew about the small pond in the forest at the small, newly acquired nature area on Traver Road [Stapp Nature Area: see article on page 5]? The Paw Paws at Sugarbush? The Kentucky Coffee tree at Lakewood? Even working alone is exciting. The screech of a jay, complaints of robins, the moan of two trees brushing against each other, discovering a plant I know or one I don't know, the smell of pickled garlic mustard, and the joy of using cut buckthorn as trail liners are all quite satisfying. On workdays it is really fantastic to see the dedication of the staff, the involvement of the Stewards, and the commitment of the community to keep these fabulous parks in shape and accessible. At my last workday, there were three remarkable young workers helping out at Brown Park. This is quite heartening because the future of the parks is theirs not only to enjoy but also to maintain.

In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we have been taught. - Baba Dioum

Work is defined as something we must do. In this sense I have not done any work because, for me, being out in the parks on workdays or otherwise has always been enjoyable. I'd like to thank NAP for letting me enjoy their knowledge, sense of fun, and dedication to their job (vocation).

Editor's Note: Ron was born in Hamtramck and raised in Warren, Michigan. In 1968, he went to Okinawa in the Air Force. He has lived and worked in Japan since. Ron is currently a tenured faculty member at Seikei University, Faculty of Economics, in Musashino City, Tokyo. He returned to Michigan in September 2002 on research leave as a visiting scholar at the University of Michigan. He will return to Japan September 2, 2004. In the past year and a half, he and his wife have visited over 35 of Ann Arbor's Parks. Ron has dedicated over 100 hours in approximately 20 Natural Areas – half of these hours at 10 prescribed burns and half at 20 workdays! THANK YOU Ron.



Ron assisting at the burn in Marshall Nature Area.

Park Focus *continued from Page 1*

Airport Birds *by Dea Armstrong*

Birdwatchers have long checked the Ann Arbor airport for grassland species during the summer breeding season, and in winter for Horned Larks, Snow Buntings, and Short-eared and Snowy Owls. In the spring and summer the large areas of unmowed grass are an attractive habitat for some of Michigan's most uncommon species. Upland Sandpipers are always a rare species in southeastern Michigan, but today the Ann Arbor airport is one of the most dependable spots in the county to catch a glimpse of these interesting grassland dwellers.

This year, birdwatchers with enough luck (or patience and good optical equipment) have seen a pair of Upland Sandpipers at the Ann Arbor airport. Bobolinks and Grasshopper Sparrows were also present this year along with more common grassland species like Eastern Meadowlark and Savannah Sparrow. Previous records show that when the grass is mowed late in the season Henslow's Sparrows and Sedge Wrens may also be found (Baker, Wells, and Wykes, *A Guide to Birdfinding in Washtenaw County and Surrounding Areas*, 1982).



Henslow's Sparrow

Henslow's Sparrow (listed as Threatened in Michigan), Sedge Wren, and Bobolinks are all species listed as priority birds for conservation efforts in our area by Partners in Flight (a conservation group). These grassland species benefit from delayed mowing of large, continuous grasslands like the airport. Waiting to mow until mid-July allows the birds time to complete a nesting cycle.

In the woods at the airport, several singing Wood Thrushes are present and the wet, shrubby areas have nesting Willow Flycatchers, along with many other more common species like Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Although access to the site is still being studied, it is nice to know that the airport is providing some much-needed habitat, especially for grassland species.

Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan Public Workshop

Cobblestone Farm Barn
2781 Packard Road, Ann Arbor

Tuesday, September 28 from 5:00-8:00 pm
Stop in at any time to speak with planners

The five-year master plan for the parks system guides the development of new facilities and programs, renovation of existing parks and acquisition of parkland. Your input is crucial to help determine the future of our parks. Please come and share your ideas!

For further information,
contact Amy Kuras, Park Planner
at 734.994.1827

Coordinator's Corner

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A few examples: At Furstenberg Nature Area, we expected our prescribed burns would benefit the Pennsylvania sedge, blue-stemmed goldenrod, and Culver's root already present. But we never dreamed that these restoration efforts would also bring back broad-leafed panic grass, hoary puccoon, purple milkweed, slender bush clover, and pale vetch to the site. And years ago at the City's old landfill site (now called the Swift Run Service Center) we changed mowing patterns to give bobolinks a chance to finish their nesting cycle. We didn't anticipate that this would also attract grasshopper sparrows, sedge wrens, and Henslow's sparrows, but were thrilled when they also showed up

Yes, ecological restoration is always an exciting, unpredictable sporting adventure – not a pre-designed remodeling project. Come out and join the game!

- David Borneman, *NAP Manager*

Autumn 2004 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

NAP is located at the Leslie Science Center (1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor, 48105). Our phone number is 734.996.3266.

Workday orientations start promptly at listed times. A short nature walk will be held at the end of each workday, time permitting. Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes. Minors must either be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form.

September

September 12, Sunday

Sugarbush Park Stewardship

Workday, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

There will be lots of tasks to do today. Bring the whole family as we pick up trash, fix up the trails, and remove invasives. Meet us between the two cul-de-sacs on Yellowstone Drive, just south of Bluett Road.

September 14, Tuesday

Steward's Circle, 7:30 to 8:30 am

Bruegger's Bagels on North University

This month's topic: Trail maintenance and soil erosion. How often do groups maintain trails? What types of equipment/materials/resources are necessary? How do you manage a soil erosion problem when maintaining trails? What techniques work to control soil erosion? Are there soil erosion control methods that are more or less suited for volunteers?

September 26, Sunday

Folkstone Park Stewardship

Workday, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Help us clean up this neighborhood park. Meet us at the north end of Folkstone Court (take Larchmont Drive east from Green Road).

Many groups participate in NAP workdays or arrange special workdays for their organizations. Contact the NAP office if a group you are involved with is interested in planning a volunteer stewardship event.



October

October 2, Saturday

Furstenberg Native Plant Garden

Stewardship Workday,

10:00 am to 12:00 noon

Help put the garden to bed for the fall at NAP's final 2004 garden workday. Meet at the circle drive at Furstenberg Nature Area off Fuller Road.

October 12, Tuesday

Steward's Circle, 7:30 to 8:30 am

Bruegger's Bagels on North University

This month's topic: Yard Waste and Trash. The fall leaf season is upon us. How do groups manage yard waste and trash within their natural areas? What methods have worked to educate people about the impact of yard waste (and other dumping) on the biological diversity of a site? How have groups addressed specific problems?

October 16, Saturday

Fritz Park Stewardship Workday,

10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Help us remove invasive shrubbery. Soon we'll have this park clear of invasives, but we need your help! Park on Russett Street at the east entrance of Fritz.

October 23, Saturday

Scarlett Mitchell Nature Area

Stewardship Workday,

10:00 am to 1:00 pm

We'll be clearing more buckthorn out of this park. In the past we've had great ecological success from this work, so come be part of the progress. Meet in the Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine Street.

November

November 6, Saturday

Barton Nature Area Stewardship

Workday, 2:00 to 5:00 pm

While collecting native seed from this prairie, you will have a chance to walk through grasses taller than yourself. The seed will be distributed to other parks in coming months. Meet us at the Barton Dam parking lot off Huron River Drive.

November 9, Tuesday

Steward's Circle, 7:30 to 8:30 am

Bruegger's Bagels on North University

This month's topic: Developing a volunteer stewardship program. How does a group build a volunteer program? What methods of publicity have proved effective? How does a group recruit volunteers? Retain them? Recognize them in meaningful ways? How long is it reasonable to expect this to take? What kind of goals can you set to evaluate your program?

Please join us at our 2004

Volunteer Appreciation Potluck

Tuesday, November 9, 6:30 to 9:00 pm

Cobblestone Farm, 2781 Packard

NAP will be providing a bit of food as well as drinks, but you should too (it's a potluck after all). Also bring a place setting & a guest if you'd like.

Please RSVP to Jason and Laurel at NAP by Friday, November 5th.

Staff Updates

goodbye...

Katherine (O'Brien) Yates



For over four years NAP's Clerk has kept us all organized and in line (especially Dave). She recently decided to leave us to continue and enhance her career in education. She started the MAC program (Master of Arts

with Certification) at the University of Michigan in July and hopes to be teaching science to local junior high students in just over a year. We thank Katherine for a job well done and bid her a fond farewell.

other changes...

Technician Position

The NAP Technician position has been vacant ever since Kirstin (Kee) Condict left in August 2002. Now that the City's re-organization has taken place, NAP's been given permission to re-fill this position. In fact, we're able to hire two NAP Technicians. By the time you read this we should be well on our way to filling these two permanent positions. Look for introductions of the new staff members in the next newsletter!

NAPpenings

Thank you:

- **Stephen Zekany** for his hard work at Marshall Nature Area on his Eagle Scout project! He and volunteers he coordinated put in over 200 hours to improve the trails and remove invasives.
- **Professional Volunteer Corps** for their assistance at Sugarbush Park.
- **Youth Volunteer Corps** (Ann Arbor YMCA) for hundreds of hours at numerous parks around town.
- As always, all of the wonderful **Park Stewards**.



Professional Volunteer Corps working hard at Sugarbush

2004 Breeding Bird Survey exciting finds:

At least three Hooded Warblers, (possibly as many as five!!) are on territory in Marshall Park (Hooded Warblers are listed as species of Special Concern in Michigan). Volunteer Roger Wykes also reports a Blue-

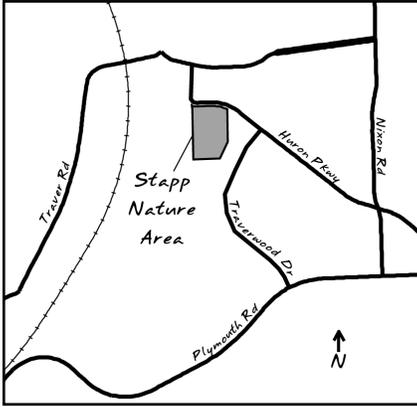
headed Vireo and several Blue-winged Warblers in Marshall. Ellie Shappirio found a singing Marsh Wren as she paddled down the Huron around the Barton Nature Area marsh. This is the first time this species has been found in an Ann Arbor park. Also in Barton, Will Weber saw a Red-headed Woodpecker, another parks first!! Dea Armstrong found a Cerulean Warbler (listed as species of Special Concern in Michigan) in a small woods at Huron Hills golf course.

Attention native landscapers! The City has begun to enforce more strictly the ordinance that requires vegetation to be below 16 inches on lawns and 6 inches on lawn extensions. The good news is that you can get a permit from NAP to exceed these height limits for native landscaping. A permit is good for the indefinite future and, for this year only, is cost free. Permit applications can be obtained by contacting NAP.

Due to high levels of ash tree decline, the **Michigan Ash Monitoring Plot System** (a cooperative program between University of Michigan, Michigan Technological University, USDA Forest Service, and Michigan DNR) has set forth to monitor and evaluate the health of ash trees in Michigan's forests. As part of this study, monitoring plots will be set up in Argo Nature Area, Bandemer, Brown and Fuller Parks. This will provide baseline data on the current condition of ash trees and of stands containing ash. More specifically, the study will help to determine the differences in stands with and without

Continued on next page

Stapp Nature Area *by Jason Frenzel*



In November 2003 the First Martin Corporation sold part of an 8.1 acre parcel to the City. (The current plans is for the remainder of the acreage to be donated at a later date.) This high-quality, mature woods contains a native forest fragment with towering oak and hickory – the type that formerly covered much of the Ann Arbor area.

William Martin, the previous owner, wished to name the new park after William B. Stapp, PhD. Dr. Stapp served as Professor at the School of Natural Resources and

Environment at the University of Michigan, where he founded and then chaired the Environmental Education program from 1970 to 1993. He is considered by many to be the founder of international environmental education because he developed education programs in 135 countries. In Ann Arbor, Dr. Stapp began a monitoring program involving high schools along the Huron River. Today, the outgrowth of that project, the Global Rivers Environmental Education Network (GREEN), is being carried out all over the world. This program brings diverse groups together to investigate and protect river water quality. Dr. Stapp's ability to serve as a global environmental diplomat brought Israelis and Palestinians together to test their shared water sources, creating a model for Middle East cooperation.

Stapp Nature Area will remain a high quality woods with natural trails. The official dedication is September 17, 2004.

NAPpenings *continued from previous page*

high levels of ash decline based on stand variables and it will look at the impacts of ash decline on hardwood stands containing ash. The emerald ash borer (see Spring 2004 NAP Newsletter or www.emeraldashborer.org) has killed over 6 million ash trees in SE Michigan alone, but may not be the only contributor to ash decline. For additional information see www.michiganash.org.

To Mow or Not to Mow?

Several years ago NAP asked the City mowers to stop mowing part of Hollywood Nature Area where spring wildflowers were popping up in the lawn under some large oaks. We've been very pleased with the diversity of plants that came up, and Hollywood is now home to the City's largest population of the locally uncommon woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*). Maintaining a lawn isn't particularly good for the environment – mowing equipment creates pollutants and fertilizers and weed-killers can find their way off site. Recently, NAP has been identifying additional areas where City mowing can be reduced or eliminated. While we don't expect most of these places to result in a success story like Hollywood, in the long run the environmental health of our city will benefit.

Buhr II

The Buhr Park Children's Wet Meadow provides a habitat for native plants and animals; an attractive educational site for children, neighbors and other visitors; and an

environmental filter for stormwater runoff from the park grounds. The wet meadow team just completed the installation of a second wet meadow, west of the pool area. The half-acre, three tiered pond system is designed to capture a 100-year storm event. Students from numerous local schools participated throughout the past year to help plan, design, and install the new wet meadow, while learning about watersheds and water quality issues. Over 175 volunteers participated in the June 5th, 2004 planting to install more than 5,000 native plants grown by local students. Numerous local businesses and volunteers made this large group effort possible. Stop by and watch the flowers bloom!

The 5th annual **Michigan Prescribed Fire Council** workshop will be held Friday and Saturday, September 10-11, 2004 near Lansing. Friday's presentations will be at the Hannah Community Center in East Lansing and will feature a variety of speakers addressing topics such as *Impacts of Rx Fire to Insects, Smoke Management, and Cost-share Programs for Private Landowners Interested in Rx Burning*. Saturday's format will be very different – we'll be outside all day, discussing burn plans at various sites in the morning, then observing an actual prescribed burn in the afternoon. Participants are welcome to attend either or both days. For more information contact the NAP office or surf over to www.firecouncil.org.

2004 Huron River Day *by Jason Frenzel*



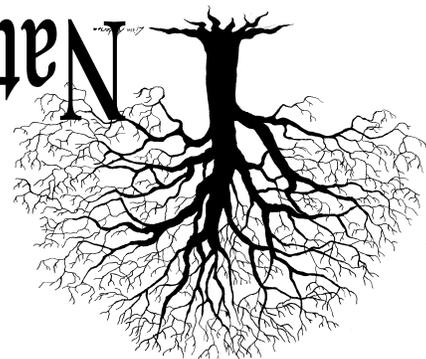
This year's Huron River Day (HRD) was a great success! Hundreds of families visited Gallup Park in the beautiful (albeit warm) weather of Sunday, July 11. Visitors took kayaks and canoes out from the livery (for free!), made lots of fun toys (a la the Scrap Box, Hands on Museum, Ecology Center, Metro Parent Magazine, and Ann Arbor District Library), talked to loads of local environmental organizations (think NAP and friends), learned to fly-cast, watched a magic show, ate food from the People's Food Co-op, and played with bubbles (amongst other activities).

You may not know that NAP has participated in the planning of HRD for the past ten years - primarily by coordinating the environmental organization tent. Others

on the HRD Steering Committee: Gallup Park, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation, Metro Parent Magazine, DTE, and a few wonderful volunteers. If you ever look on the information bar on page two of this newsletter, you'll notice NAP's mission: to protect and restore Ann Arbor's natural areas and foster an environmental ethic among its citizens. HRD obviously falls into the second portion of that mission. NAP tries in all of its activities to reach this goal - from our stewardship work-days to the natural features inventories (and associated public walks), from all of our temporary signage to various intra-City cooperation. So participating in HRD is a natural: we combine education of the natural world with outreach to the community, a wonderful fit for NAP.

I'm very glad that this year's celebration of the Huron was successful - and that Laurel and I had a chance to be a part of it. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped on the docks, the bands that donated their time, the organizations who came, and everyone else who made the day a success. A special thanks to DTE and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation for the grants that made HRD possible.

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