

Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 10, Number 4

Winter 2005

Park Focus: A Wintry Walk in Bird Hills Nature Area

by Shelley Gladwin

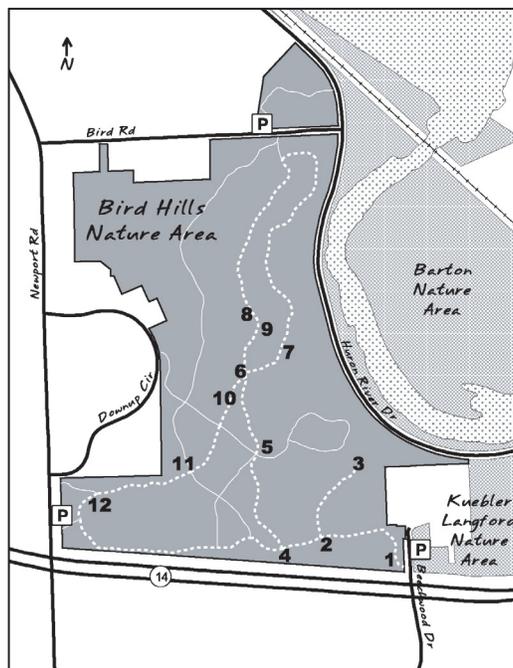
Hi there! It's a bright sunny day in January and I feel like taking a walk. Do you want to come with me? Lace up your snow boots and grab your hat and mittens as we embark on an exploration of Ann Arbor's biggest natural area, the 146 acre Bird Hills Nature Area. Over 10,000 years ago this land was shaped with steep hillsides due to the advance and retreat of the Wisconsin glacier. One main ridge runs from the south to the north, through the center of the park contributing to a variety of habitats and plant communities.

Thanks for coming to meet me on Beechwood Drive (1). Are you ready? From here let's head uphill through a pine plantation. These trees, along with hundreds of other sugar maple, white ash, American chestnut, Norway maple, douglas fir, white fir, hemlock, and other species were planted here in the 1920s by Henry Graves and Filbert Roth, the dean of the School of Forestry at the U of M. Henry Graves, a successful civic lawyer, owned much of the land that is now Bird Hills. The city acquired the Graves' property in 1968, but his legacy remains.

If we take the first right turn (2) on the trail, we'll head down past some hemlocks into Cascade Glen. Here we can see some seeps where seasonal water flows out of the sandy and gravelly hillside across less permeable soils. In the spring and summer we could see lots of water-tolerant plant species here, like skunk cabbage, wild ginger, and marsh marigold. This trail dead-ends here (3) with an overlook on the glen and the Huron

River through the trees. Please do not venture beyond this point, as the steep slippery slopes of this ravine are susceptible to erosion.

Let's head back uphill and continue on the trail to the next right turn (4). If we go straight North and veer to the right at the second intersection (6), now



we're on the George Sexton Trail. In 2002 this trail was dedicated to Sexton, a former Ann Arbor Parks Commissioner and an avid defender of natural areas. As we walk along, we will see a grove of sassafras trees (7). They have lost their variable-shaped leaves for the season, but we can recognize the gray-orange bark, and if our noses are good, smell the sweet aromatic twigs and bark. Nearby we come across the tall and straight tulip trees. Both of these species are at the northern extent of their range here in Ann Arbor, but are more common in the southern states.

Enjoy the last glimpses of the river now, as we get to the end of this trail and loop back along the old Boulder Road. This was a main thoroughway

for the farmers who used to work this land. Uphill a bit there is evidence of cement tracks that prevented wagon wheels from sinking in the mud. Many more landmarks along this trail give us reminders of how open this landscape used to be before disturbances allowed the non-native honeysuckle and buckthorn to invade along either side of this trail. On our right at the top of the hill (8) is the "climbing tree," a big old red oak with many outspread branches. This oak must have had lots of sunlight around it in its early growth

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Coordinator's Corner

Permanent Shelving

For years, I've been storing boxes of memorabilia, Christmas decorations, college textbooks, and other treasures on temporary shelves I'd cobbled together in the basement. Sometimes I'd stack old milk crates to maximize my use of limited floor space. Other times I'd actually nail lumber together to make something resembling a shelving unit. But I found that even if I used really good, strong, new boards for shelves, that didn't ensure a solid structure if I didn't have them assembled in a secure way. It might be a temporary solution, good enough to get by with, but nothing stable enough to pile too much onto.

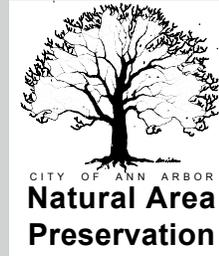
That changed last year when we fixed up the basement in our small ranch house. In addition to getting another bedroom, bathroom, and playroom (which my family was excited about), I got shelves. Not wobbly, cobbled-together shelves, but *real* shelves. These babies are overbuilt with 2x4 framing and heavy plywood shelves all glued and screwed into the concrete wall, *permanently*. They're even strong enough for me to climb on. I could store my bowling ball collection on them, if I had one, and I would rest assured knowing that the whole structure would not come crashing down sometime in the middle of the night.

Similarly, we've now got some "permanent shelving" of sorts at NAP. For most of the past 12 years, I've held the only permanent position at NAP. And despite having some really excellent individual staff members come through our program over the years, nearly all of them were in temporary positions, which meant that they typically stuck around for a few years and then moved on to something more permanent, something with benefits for example. It's been difficult trying to build a solid, long-lasting program with that kind of temporary staffing situation. Every time someone leaves there's a break in the flow, a loss of professional relationships and networking, a need for re-orienting and re-training new staff. Two steps forward and one step back.

Now, for the first time ever, we are fortunate to have four NAP staff in permanent positions. Joining me are Jason Tallant and Lara Treemore Spears, who share the title of NAP Technician, and Jason Frenzel, who is our Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. Two of these people were already at NAP in temporary positions, and one replaces another temporary position, so they do not represent an *increase* in staffing, just a "solidifying" of it. It's like reinforcing my old temporary shelving unit and rebuilding it more permanently. Some of the boards get re-used, others are new. But together, in their new assemblage, they represent a solid structure that is able to hold up quite a load.

I'm really thrilled that NAP has reached this milestone, and I thank the citizens of Ann Arbor, and especially all of NAP's supporters, for making it possible. Without your participation, there would be no volunteers to coordinate, and without your financial support there would be no natural areas to preserve and no staff to work in them. So thanks for helping us make the NAP structure a little more solid. Feel free to put us to good use and to test our strength and capacity. I think you'll find us strong and stable.

-David Borneman, *NAP Manager*.



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.

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Work Study

Sara Weathers

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

NAP's First Volunteer of the Year: Aunita Erskine

NAP is pleased to present its first volunteer of the year award to Park Steward, Master Gardener, UM Docent, and Prairie Queen, Aunita Erskine. Aunita has been a tireless proponent of native gardening, giving many presentations (including NAP's Native Gardening Workshop) and leading plant identification walks. She has spent countless hours over the past 10 years becoming a self-taught botanist and honing her knowledge of ethnobotany, landscaping, and native ecosystems (especially prairies). Due to this relentless work Aunita has been featured numerous times in local papers.



Over the past 5 years Aunita has co-taught NAP's Native Landscaping Workshop. This year we all decided that Aunita should teach this class on her own and in her own way, thus was born the Native Gardening

Workshop. Aunita's review of local plantings was speckled with ethnobotanical information, beautiful color combinations, and good humor. She spent hundreds of hours visiting homes in the area to photograph other people's use of native plants in their garden. She then spent a week in the NAP office putting together the presentation. In her spare time, or rather as her occupation, Aunita works at the Mott Children's Hospital! These are some of the many reasons why NAP would like to celebrate Aunita as our 2005 Volunteer of the Year!

Keep an eye out for Aunita's upcoming walks and presentations this spring. **Thanks Aunita!!!**

Editor's note: at NAP's 2005 Volunteer Appreciation Potluck Aunita was awarded with a proclamation from Major Hieftje in honor of her work.

Volunteer Year in Review *by Jason Frenzel*

Well, it's been another amazing volunteer year at NAP and we would like to thank you for your support in 2005. We had 600 volunteers donate 5000 hours of service this year—an amazing gift to the parks system. Thank you for your continued help. It's each and every individual act that contributes to the greater good—we must all be actors in our continued positive evolution.

I'd like to focus on two specific individuals this year, both Eagle Scout candidates who worked with us. **Allen Eyler** installed a boardwalk on the north side of the woods in Brown Park. He had help from over 50 friends, family, and troop members—all said, they created a wonderful boardwalk, putting in over 400 hours to get it done! **Don McNair** also installed a boardwalk, at one of our newest parks—Dicken Woods. Don, troop members, and folks from Friends of Dicken Woods put in a couple hundred hours! Jeff Dehring, City of Ann Arbor Park Planner, said that these were two of the most successful boardwalks he's seen installed—after years of perfecting the design we've finally got it right ☺. Join me in congratulating Don and Allen as they achieve their Eagle rank!

In previous years I've used this article to describe "The Amazing Volunteer Database" and show you the enormity of its knowledge. But alas, The Database and I are currently not on good speaking terms, so I am unable to deliver the barrage of statistics I have in past years. So I asked The Database if It would provide

me with only one, really cool, statistic. After a few sacrifices here it is: **NAP has had a total of 33,000 volunteer hours in the past 10 years!** I estimate that was worth \$430,000 to NAP!!! (Thank you oh great Database.) The 5000 volunteer hours I mentioned earlier represents \$65,000 to NAP this year alone. The nonprofit Independent Sector estimates that 83.9 million American adults volunteer, representing the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion. This is a great statistic to show that our combined efforts create enormous influence.



Allen Eyler installing a boardwalk at Brown Park

We'd like to thank all of the volunteers who worked with NAP this year—Photomonitors; Frog, Toad, Salamander, Bird, and Butterfly Inventories; Burners; Park Stewards; Workday Participants; Court-Ordered volunteers; and Eagle Scouts!!! In the past year approximately 40% of our restoration hours was done by volunteers—obviously we would never be able to accomplish our goals without you. So, thank you very, very much.

The Stewardship Network

Huron Arbor Cluster Stewards' Circle

Are you interested in learning more about care and monitoring of natural areas—woods, creeks, prairies, etc? Then join the Huron Arbor Cluster of the Stewardship Network from 7:30 to 8:30 am on the second Tuesday of each month for an informal conversation with volunteer and professional stewards about various topics. We meet at Bruegger's Bagels on North University Avenue, in Ann Arbor.

January 10, Tuesday 2006

Management Planning. How do you establish goals and objectives? Are management plans helpful? Crucial? How do you update them? What are the considerations that go into developing a plan?

February 14, Tuesday 2006

Working with Volunteers. How does the Network's cluster structure effect volunteers and volunteering within an area?

WAM

The Stewardship Network and its partners are working with the Wildflower Association of Michigan to present a full array of natural areas stewardship topics at their conference on Sunday, March 5th and Monday, March 6th so SAVE THE DATE and stay tuned for more details.

For These Birds, Ann Arbor is South!

by Dea Armstrong

While many birds that we see regularly during the spring and summer months fly south for the winter, there are a few birds that think of Ann Arbor as "south



Dark-eyed Junco

enough". The Dark-eyed Junco (Snowbird to some) and the American Tree Sparrow are common birds in Ann Arbor park fields and at area feeders from mid-October until mid-April. These winter seed-eaters are easy to recognize: the Dark-eyed Junco looks like a gray bird whose belly has been dipped in white paint, and the

American Tree Sparrow sports a rusty cap, white wing bars and an un-striped gray chest with a single dark spot. Juncos are a common feeder bird, and when snow cover is deep, American Tree Sparrows can easily be seen at feeders or working the taller grasses in snow-covered fields. Enjoy them while they are here and keep those feeders full for the birds this winter!

Park Focus: Bird Hills Nature Area *Continued from Page 1*

stages to spread out in the way it has. Continuing south on the top of the ridge we come upon Cherry Rock (9) to our left, a boulder deposited by the glacier 10,000 years ago. The ridge we are on is part of the Fort Wayne moraine, the landform created when the glacier stalled during its retreat to the north. Cherry rock is named not for a cherry tree nearby, but because it has small reddish quartz pieces in the boulder.

When we get back to where the George Sexton trail begins (6), let's take a seat on this lovely rustic bench, one of two memorials donated by Sujit Pandit in September 2005. Let's stop and see what we can see. If we were warm enough to sit here a while we would probably see or hear many bird species, like the Northern Cardinal, Cedar Waxwings, or Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Although Bird Hills provides great

habitat for lots of bird species, the park was probably not named for the feathered friends, but instead might have been named for the family of farmers who lived north of the park along what is now Bird Road.

From here let's hike downhill towards the southwest across a valley of Norway maple (10), continuing down and up across the ridge and past the dark hemlock grove (11). We'll loop around now on the west side of the park, near the Newport Road entrance (12). As we leave the park I'd like to thank you for joining me! I had lots of fun, and enjoyed sharing the many interesting sights that Bird Hills Nature Area provides. I hope to see you again in another season! Now, who wants some hot cocoa?

SALAMANDER SURVEY KICKOFF

Sunday, February 26, 2006
10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Leslie Science Center Nature House
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor

Join us for the third year of Michigan's first Salamander Survey! If you're not afraid to get a little muddy and you know a bit about salamanders, please join us!



FROG & TOAD SURVEY KICKOFF

This is our 12th Annual
Frog & Toad Survey!

Sunday, February 26, 2006
1:30 - 3:00 p.m.
Leslie Science Center Nature House

Prescribed Ecological Burn Public Meeting & Prescribed Ecological Burn Crew Training

Burn Crew Training
Wednesday, March 8, 2006

12:00 noon - 5:00 pm

Pre-registration is required
by March 3.

This is the required training session for all volunteers interested in assisting with the prescribed burns to be held this spring and fall. Burns typically take place Monday through Friday between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM.

Please call the NAP office at 734.996.3266 to register or for more information.



Public Meeting
Tuesday, March 2, 2006
7:30 - 9:00 pm

Fire is used as a restoration tool in some of Ann Arbor's Natural Areas. This meeting will provide information and an opportunity for discussion about the Prescribed Ecological Burn Program conducted by Natural Area Preservation. Burns will be conducted in City Parks throughout the spring and fall.

Staff Updates

hello...



Tamara Convertino

For the last several months, I have been splitting my time between working on the NAP crew and teaching at the Leslie Science Center. Last year, I graduated from U of M with my MS in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Having been stuck in a laboratory setting for several years, I am enjoying my time outdoors, as well as interacting with real people. I have spent most of my life in warm, happy California, so moving to Michigan has been full of difficult adjustments. However, I have found that Ann Arbor is filled with lots of Ultimate Frisbee (my favorite sport) and pirates (my favorite demographic). So, I am glad to stay for a while.



Erica Uramkin

As the newest addition to the NAP Conservation Crew I am trying to ease into life in Ann Arbor. As a graduate of MSU it's tough to see maize and blue everyday. I'm originally from the west side of Michigan, but once I had my degree I promptly fled the state for sunnier days and shorter winters. After stints with the U.S. Forest

Service and The Nature Conservancy around the country I returned home to continue work in land management and conservation. When I'm not at work, you can find me wandering up and down the streets of my new city with a handful of maps.



Sara Weathers

I'm enthusiastic to be working with Natural Area Preservation as a work-study student for the 2005-2006 academic year. I am currently a freshman at the University of Michigan, and though I am undecided on my major, I have always had an interest in ecology. I hope that this position will provide

valuable work experience for me as I further develop my interests and decide a future career.

farewell...



Laurel Malvitz

I've accepted a new job with the MI DNR starting volunteer steward groups in Southeast MI for the State Parks Stewardship Program. I'm sad I won't be working as closely with all the great folks I've met in my tenure at NAP, but I'm really excited to embark of this new journey!

I've learned so much at NAP and I'll use all of that experience to make this new program a success. It's been a pleasure working with all of you!

Take care, Laurel



Amanda Sprader

Good-bye Ann Arborites! I officially ended my Conservation Crew stint here at NAP at the end of August. I am now pursuing a career in Nursing. I value the time that I have spent at NAP and what I have learned. And how I will miss pulling Garlic Mustard! Thanks for the memorable workdays and great experiences!

other...



Jason Frenzel

After four years working at NAP, I've been given a promotion—I'm now overseeing NAP's volunteer and outreach activities (OK, not so different from what I had been doing), as well as taking on the new, non-NAP, Adopt-A-Park program. This will foster neighbors' involvement and volunteerism in the non-

nature area parks (think Vets, Fuller, Gallup, West Park or any other mowed park). Please give me a call for more information!

A Mowing Experiment *by Jim Rogers, Park Steward*

Greenview Park is 25 acres of woods, meadow, pond, plus a Project Grow garden, located at Scio Church Road, west of South Seventh Street. The large meadow is dotted with clumps of hawthorn, ash, and buckthorn, but is mostly open because it is mowed once a year in the fall. Since the mowing went from a biweekly schedule to an annual mowing about a dozen years ago, the meadow has become a diverse mix of herbaceous plants and invasive woody shrubs. These shrubs have been gaining ground ever since. Each spring and summer new growth of the woody invasives strengthens their root systems and new plants get established. Each fall a city crew cuts the meadow to about six inches tall.

I did a small experiment in a test area last summer to see how alternative mowing frequencies might reduce the vigor of the woody invasives, without turning this diverse habitat into turf grass. I marked off an area into a block of 16 squares, each 10 feet on a side. Each square received a different treatment, varying from weekly mowing to two times per year. For the areas that were mowed only a few times, different schedules were used so that the mowing hit the vegetation at different stages of growth.

By mid-summer the initial results began to emerge. A mowing between mid-May and early June had the biggest impact on retarding that season's growth of the woody shrubs. Mowing earlier resulted in new shoots coming up strongly. Mowing later was not only very tough with my regular lawnmower, but allowed the plants to grow most of the season. Mowing frequency had some effect, but the timing had the most impact. Now, a year later, the May-June areas have relatively more herbaceous plants, with more overall variety.

Because this result is consistent with the literature that Dave Borneman has seen about the efficacy of spring versus fall mowing, I don't plan to experiment further at this time. I do plan to ask the city to switch the annual mowing to May-June.

In the coming years City mowers will cut half of the Greenview field in the spring and the other half in the fall. With this experiment we hope to decrease the shrubs as well as ensure the survival of the amazing butterfly community in the park, which could be impacted by spring mowing.

NAPpennings

Thank you...

- ~Sujit Pandit for donating the memorial benches in Bird Hills
- ~Concordia University and the junior high students who helped at Sugarbush
- ~Ave Marie Law School for the 100 hours of work at Furstenberg
- ~UM Business School Significant Others and Spouses for help at Brown
- ~UM Community Plunge volunteers' work at Argo on Labor Day
- ~Greenhills 7th Graders who wood-chipped the trails at Leslie Science Center
- ~2005 Leadership Ann Arbor for removing shrubs along the Huron River
- ~Professional Volunteer Corps for attending our Swift Run workday
- ~Students from the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise at UM for helping at the workday at Argo
- ~6th graders from Saint Francis school for wood-chipping the trails at Greenview
- ~Students from the UM Ecumenical Center for removing shrubs at Cedar Bend
- ~Scouts from troop 420 for wood-chipping at Miller
- ~Pioneer High Key Club for ongoing support at so many workdays

National Invasive Weed Awareness Week is February 26March—3, 2006. To learn how to get involved check out www.nawma.org or volunteer with your favorite invasives removal group!

A bit of help?

NAP would love to get a hand on a couple new projects.

Project one: we need to create and update our volunteer job descriptions, handbooks, etc. If you have any experience with human resources, volunteer management, or would like to learn, we could really use your help!

Project two: if you or anyone you know would be interested in the city's new Adopt-A-Park program, please give Jason Frenzel a call.

Invasive Alert: Honeysuckle *by Lara Treemore-Spears*

Bush honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.) are one of the most common invasive shrubs in Ann Arbor's natural areas, and controlling them is a major fall and winter activity. Like other invasive shrubs such as buckthorn, their leaves become green earlier in the spring and stay green later in the fall, after our native shrubs have dropped their leaves. They are identifiable by their opposite leaves, multiple stems that bend and slump over, and in the fall by their paired red or yellow berries. Although native honeysuckles are also present in our parks, their petite and vine-like stature makes them unlikely to be mistaken for the serious invaders.

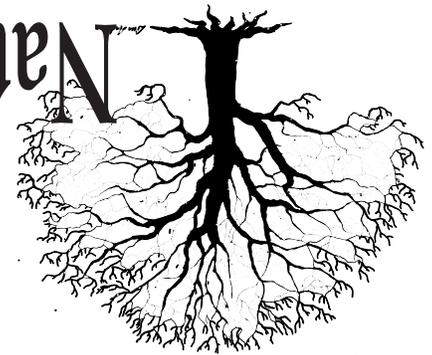
The bird-dispersed berries of these invasive shrubs provide a constant influx of new seedlings that crowd out native wildflowers. For this reason, the removal of honeysuckle by park neighbors on their own property is an important part of the long-term control of invasive shrubs in public natural areas. Seedlings may be hand-pulled, but larger plants would create excessive soil disturbance if pulled out. Because disturbed soil provides ideal conditions for weed seed germination, this should be avoided in natural areas. Homeowners may need to repeatedly cut larger honeysuckle plants, because of the vigorous re-sprouting that occurs. To minimize this, the optimal time to kill shrubs via

cutting alone is from mid-May to mid-June (see "A Mowing Experiment" on page 7). Another option is dabbing herbicide onto the cut stump to kill the plant root. This works best in autumn and winter, as the plant's resources are pulled into the roots for storage. (If you use herbicide make sure to follow all safety precautions and the labeled instructions.) In the parks, NAP also uses prescribed burns to keep honeysuckle in check.

Although birds consume bush honeysuckle berries, they prefer the berries of native shrubs, as evidenced by the way honeysuckle berries can be seen in the fall long after the berries of native shrubs such as dogwood, spicebush, and viburnum have been eaten. Some researchers have noted that native shrubs produce berries much higher in lipids, providing superior energy and nutrition.

Editor's note: you can help NAP and the local flora and fauna—remove honeysuckle and other invasives from your yard (and replace them with native shrubs) and of course, come to some of our workdays to remove honeysuckle from our parks. For more information check out our brochures and factsheet on our webpage.

Natural Area Preservation News



Printed on Recycled Paper with Soy-Based Ink 

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1831 Traver Rd.
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