

# Natural Area Preservation News

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

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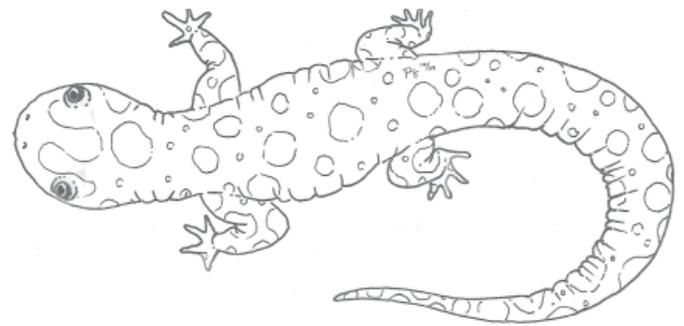
## Park Focus: The Skyline Woods

by Lara Treemore Spears and David Mifsud

The most important features of a piece of land are sometimes difficult to see. Take, for example, the forest to the north of Skyline High School. It hosts a small and often-overlooked creature called the silvery salamander. This entirely female, hybrid species is so rare that this is the only known population in Michigan. Their biology is complex (yes, we said 100 percent female and hybrid!) and not completely understood by scientists. We do understand, however, how important volunteer effort is for preserving and monitoring these animals.

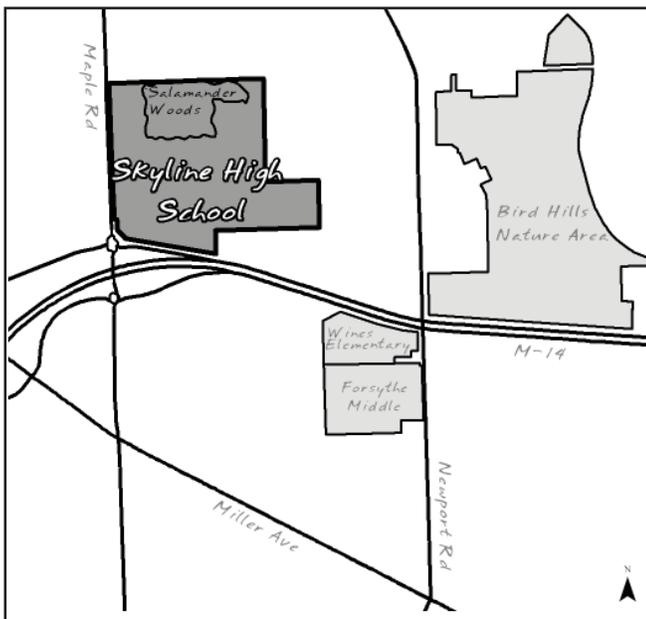
There has long been an interest in the natural areas on the Skyline High School site, possibly ever since the Ann Arbor Public Schools acquired it. Public educators, and then NAP staff and volunteers surveyed the 100-acre property for birds, butterflies, amphibians, and plants to learn more about its diverse natural history.

The diversity found in the Skyline Woods is somewhat surprising for land farmed until the mid-1960s. The keystone of the site is the northern woods, well-forested in aerial photos from the 1940s, suggesting minimal disturbance historically. It hosts a rich assortment of native wildflowers and a diverse tree canopy, in addition



to ten amphibian species (including three other species of salamander besides the silvery) and their breeding ponds. The woods to the south and southeast appear in aerial photos to have been pasture at that time, rather than being intensively row-cropped like the rest of the property. The connection of the southern woods to wetlands and a stream may have helped them revert quickly to a rich forest after being abandoned as pasture some time around 1960.

Species inventories help NAP make recommendations about important natural features, like the salamanders, when properties are developed. In the case of the Skyline woods, NAP's recommendations in 2005 during school construction resulted in amphibian relocation, phasing to improve chances for relocation success, and special wetland construction techniques to foster establishment of new habitat. The results are a local, preserved community of rare species, a restored population of



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# Coordinator's Corner

## Transitions

As a new father thirteen years ago, I received lots of suggestions from those with more parenting experience. One of the best nuggets was from my then-boss, Ron Olson, who advised, "Enjoy each stage as your kids grow and change. Don't wish them any older than they are at that moment." In essence, "Live in the present, and enjoy what it has to offer."

I think there is wisdom here for us restorationists too. A hundred years ago, ecologists started talking about "climax communities" in nature – a more or less "steady state" that was at equilibrium with existing environmental conditions. You may have heard the term "climax forest" and the suggestion that everything around here is eventually headed to an old-growth beech-maple forest. That whole concept fell out of favor and was abandoned by most ecologists by the 1990s. Nature is too dynamic to exist in a "steady state." Environmental conditions that determine forest characteristics are constantly changing, and influenced by unpredictable, stochastic events.

Similarly, I think our restoration projects need to be less targeted to a set "end-goal." Although we may use images of Ann Arbor's landscape in 1800 to set our restoration direction, we shouldn't view them as our final destination. First, we may never get there due to inconvenient obstacles like extinction and humans' fragmentation of the landscape. Second, that ecological condition may no longer be appropriate for the environmental conditions that exist on-site today. Restoration is a journey, not a destination.

Suppose we want a natural area to be a prairie, and we have an image in our head of what that should look like. We can remove all the woody vegetation that doesn't look like a prairie, and add the appropriate seeds. We can burn it. But nature may not want it to be a prairie. (Yes, I'm anthropomorphizing.) Environmental conditions there may be more appropriate for a forest, or a wetland, or a savanna. And if we keep pushing "prairie," we'll just be frustrated, and disappointed, with the restoration project. And we may miss the opportunity for a perfectly good forest or wetland or savanna because we were too determined to have a prairie. But it's even more difficult than that! Just because Mother Nature wants one thing today, she may want something different tomorrow, depending on the ever-changing environmental conditions!

So how do we restorationists hit this moving target? We don't. Remember, it's not a target; it's a process, and a direction. Remove the invasives as much as possible. Re-introduce as many of the natural processes as possible (fire, flooding, grazing, predators, beaver), then let Mother Nature take it where she wants. And be patient. It may take awhile to get where she's headed. And once she's there, she'll probably want to go somewhere else. So sit back and enjoy the journey, and the various stages along the way. They're all good. It's all a transition.

Dave Borneman, Manager



CITY OF ANN ARBOR  
**Natural Area  
Preservation**

A unit of the City of Ann Arbor  
Public Services, Field Operations

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

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### NAP Intern

Lynn Schroth

# Robins in Winter

by Dea Armstrong

Most folks in Michigan think of our American Robin as a harbinger of spring. With a little effort, however, one can find a few, or even many, American Robins in any month of the year in Ann Arbor's parks and natural areas. While it is true that most American Robins do migrate south for the winter, a hearty robin that can find enough food to keep warm will do fine. Their winter food is mostly berries but often, if there is minimal snow cover, you can find robins tossing dead leaves about, looking for invertebrates in and under the leaf litter. Robins will eat buckthorn and honeysuckle berries but prefer fruits from hawthorn or juniper species.

Interestingly, Christmas bird count data for the Ann Arbor area since 1955 show dramatic increases in the last ten years in the numbers of American Robins.

Whether this is a result of global climate change, or an increase of suitable wintering habitat in the Ann Arbor area, or other reasons is not clear. In any event, don't be surprised to find American Robins in winter. They are definitely around!



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## Park Focus: Skyline Woods

*Continued from page 1*

spring peepers and wood frogs at Sugarbush Park (where some of the relocated animals were taken), and a constructed wetland that provides new habitat only a few short years after its construction.

Since 2005, volunteers have dedicated over 600 hours of their time to identify species, collect and relocate the animals during construction, as well as monitor the population in the following four years. In the process we have documented over 640 spotted salamanders! Of these, we have recaptured a fair number, showing us that the same animals continue to use the site, and helping us to assess the health of the salamander population over time.

With early indications that the salamanders at Skyline are doing well, there are still challenges ahead. Smaller woodland size, invasive plants that degrade habitat quality, changes to salamander migration patterns, human proximity, and other ecological factors have the potential to destabilize salamander populations and result in their decline. Some of the influencing factors are regional, such as weather and ground water table fluctuations, genetic isolation due to surrounding development, over-population of mid-level predators like raccoons, and disease transmission from other continents. Because we can only influence these factors in minor ways, it is even more important for the preservation of these special animals, to take an active role in those things we can affect.

There are many possibilities for future work at Skyline that would help preserve salamanders and their habitat. Constructing a knee-high amphibian barrier along the woodland edge would encourage sustainable migration patterns. Removing garlic mustard—which contains phytochemicals harmful to amphibians—would improve habitat quality. Removing invasive shrubs along the woodland edge would improve amphibian movement to the breeding ponds. Designating the appropriate places for scientific study and minimizing foot traffic would control impacts to sensitive areas. Educating about its ecological significance would foster stewardship of the salamander woods. NAP continues to pursue these activities and others, in partnership with the schools, and throughout Ann Arbor natural areas, wherever salamanders are found.

As with so much of what NAP does, we could not have considered a project of this scale without the support of our volunteers and citizen stewards. This effort is made possible by the collective effort of many project partners and we thank them all!

*Foot traffic in the salamander woods is discouraged, particularly during the sensitive spring salamander migration season March through June. The salamander woods can be viewed from established pathways outside the temporary fabric fence barrier. The woods southeast of the baseball fields are less sensitive to foot traffic, but formal trails have not yet been developed.*

# Volunteer of the Year: Roger Wykes

**Birder:** a person who identifies and studies birds in their natural habitats; synonym: bird watcher. Roger Wykes, NAP volunteer since 1995, is certainly a birder. Asked why he does it, Roger responds that, in addition to the beauty and mystery of birds, he likes statistics and list making, and greatly enjoys the friendly competitive nature of birding.

In December 1993, John Swales (NAP volunteer and past director of the English Language Institute at UM) wrote an article in the Washtenaw Audubon Society newsletter challenging other birders to find 200 bird species in a single year in Washtenaw County. Up to that point John had reached only 192. In May 1994 Roger found himself at 180, so he took John's challenge. Stuck all summer at 196, Roger was contacted by an Ann Arbor News reporter. They went out birding from mid-day to sundown, a bit more than the reporter had anticipated. Pleased to find the resultant Sunday feature article quite accurate, Roger largely ignored its title, "Wing Nuts."

In January 1995, Roger and friends had a potluck celebrating the past birding year. Roger's bird count had reached 212. He was surprised and delighted to receive the new Wing Nut trophy, which the group agreed to give to the birder with the highest count each year. "Of course, I didn't intend to give the trophy up." Over succeeding years Roger has won the trophy seven times, and tied for it three additional times. His highest annual county record, 238 in 2005, will probably be broken this year by Bob Arthurs.

Roger came to Ann Arbor for graduate study at the University of Michigan, earning a Masters in English Literature, and becoming acquainted with the zoology professor Marston Bates, an entomologist, epidemiologist, and author of a series of popular

science books. Roger worked for Dr. Bates for ten years as a private secretary, helping care for his exotic plants and animals, during which time Roger and his wife Barbara held their wedding reception in the professor's home. (Barbara was also a NAP volunteer!)



*Volunteer of the year Roger Wykes takes notes while bird watching in Ann Arbor's natural areas.*

Roger and Barbara have had many connections throughout the Ann Arbor community. They have volunteered for the Ecology Center in various capacities, forming many lasting friendships. Barbara served as board president for five years and was chief fan for the Center's softball team, on which Roger played several positions.

As a Washtenaw Audubon member since 1974, Roger has led many local birding field trips and he often helps with bird walks in Nichols Arboretum and elsewhere – introducing new birders to this activity. Roger also leads one section of the annual Ann Arbor Audubon Christmas

Bird Count, and coordinates the International Migratory Bird Day in Washtenaw County on the second Saturday of every May. The goals of this bird census are to understand where the birds are, what they are doing at those times in the year, and to determine what we can do to assist them.

Among Roger's favorite bird species from Marshall Park, where he has been surveying breeding and migratory birds since 2001, are broad-winged hawk, blue-headed vireo, hooded warbler, and summer tanager.

NAP would like to thank Roger for his work raising awareness and understanding about our winged friends. We look forward to further improving our natural areas management with the help of Roger's surveying and knowledge.

# Winners of NAP's Photo Contest



Photos clockwise from upper left: "Dead Tamaracks," by Michael Seabrook, *Native Trees and Shrubs*, adult category; "Burr Oak Flowers," by Harold Eyster, *Native Trees and Shrubs*, teen category; "Sweet Gum Trio," by Louisa Stoll, *Native Trees and Shrubs*, youth category; "Mark Collecting Seeds," by Florian VanKampen-Wright, *Stewardship*, teen category

Thank you to all who submitted photos to NAP's 2009 photo contest. Visit the NAP web site to see all of the winning photos in color. Also, don't forget to visit NAP's photo contest exhibit at the Ann Arbor District Library, December 2nd to January 14th.

## Volunteer Diversity at NAP

by Nancy T. L. Stoll

Promoting native plant and animal diversity in Ann Arbor's parks is one of NAP's primary goals. We know that a variety of plant species creates a healthier and more resilient ecosystem. What about us—the human membership of NAP? Does human diversity create a more secure organization? We would say yes! When NAPpers come from different backgrounds, it broadens our organizational perspective. Also, as pressure for development increases, broad public support for land preservation is critical.

NAPpers have long felt that volunteer participation in NAP does not fully represent the demographics of Ann Arbor. We were fortunate to have Omatara Kufeji with us over the summer, who researched this complex topic. Her results were preliminary, but interesting. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Ann Arbor is comprised of about 25 percent non-white residents, including almost 9 percent African-American. Omatara's sample volunteer survey of NAP volunteers showed 30 percent non-white participation, but only .025 percent African American. The median income in Ann Arbor in 2000 was about \$46,000, while our volunteers' was

around \$70,000. The education level of Ann Arbor residents in 2000 was 69 percent college or higher, while survey respondents came in at 89 percent for the same. Omatara looked at how NAP recruits volunteers and found that we reach out to groups in Ann Arbor who are most likely to respond favorably: ecological non-profits, university natural resources and biological science departments, and green groups. This may give the greatest response, but it is "preaching to the choir" and may limit our volunteer pool. As the human population increases, and issues like climate change and water resources become more urgent, NAP and other ecological organizations must find ways to engage residents who are not currently involved with nature and its preservation and restoration.

We welcome our readership's ideas about volunteer engagement. If you can suggest a group or community in Ann Arbor that you think might be interested in learning about NAP, let us know. We can give presentations, provide information and resources, or put the group on NAP's mailing list. There is strength in diversity, whether it is plants or people!

# NAPpenings

Thank you . . .

- Community service workers from the Thirteenth District Court for their help pulling spotted Knapweed in Furstenberg Nature Area in July
- Argo Day Campers for removing invasives and doing trail work in Bandemer Nature Area in July
- Jewish Family Services for joining our field crew in August
- UM Law students for cutting shrubs in Cedar Bend Nature Area in August
- UM students for working in Gallup Nature Area in August
- UM Community Scholars for cutting shrubs in Furstenberg Nature Area in September
- EMU Community Plunge participants for shrub cutting in Parker Mill Park in September
- Greenhills students for trail chipping in Barton Nature Area in September

## NAP Manager Honored

David Borneman was recently honored by the Natural Areas Association for six years of service as a member of the board of directors. Good work, and congratulations, Dave!

## Many Ways to Visit NAP

There are many places on the web to stay current with what NAP is doing. Visit our blog at [www.a2nap.blogspot.com](http://www.a2nap.blogspot.com), friend us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/a2nap](http://www.facebook.com/a2nap), follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/a2NAP](http://www.twitter.com/a2NAP), and see our pictures on Flickr at [www.flickr.com/photos/a2nap](http://www.flickr.com/photos/a2nap). Of course we have a web site too at [www.a2gov.org/nap](http://www.a2gov.org/nap).

# Staff Updates

hello & goodbye . . .

## Lynn Schroth

I graduated from Michigan State in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, specializing in environmental studies. After moving back to the Ann Arbor area this summer, I started my internship with NAP. I have spent time gathering information about local rain gardens, drawing park maps, and doing invasive species removal with the crew. It has been a rewarding experience, and I have learned a great deal about the ecosystems and amenities that can be found in the Ann Arbor park system.



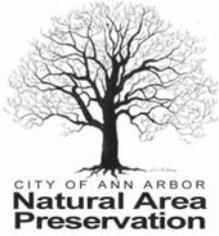
## Stewards in the Spotlight

Tom Kussurelis is the new park steward for Molin Nature Area. A lifelong resident of Ann Arbor, as was his father (his grandfather moved here in 1926), Tom has a real interest in the quality of life and sense of community that make Ann Arbor special. Molin has a great story to tell, dating back to a neighborhood organization in 1974, and later as the first park land acquired through the 1988 Park Acquisition Millage with matching funds from the neighborhood. Tom is hoping that NAP, neighbors, and a little elbow grease can create a pleasant path for walkers and birdwatchers in Molin Park.

## NAP Photo Display in the District Library

Be sure to visit the downtown Ann Arbor District Library to see an exhibit of nature photos submitted to NAP's photo contest. The photos will be on display from December 2nd to January 14th. The exhibit also features information about ecological restoration, invasive plants, controlled burns, the Adopt-A-Park program and volunteering at NAP.





# Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

## WINTER 2009

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### January

January 12, Tuesday  
Steward's Circle  
Bruegger's Bagels  
709 N University Ave  
7:30 to 8:30 am

We often use plant diversity as an indicator of restoration success. How do we create restoration goals for our avian friends? What stewardship is helpful for birds and what should we be careful doing?

### February

February 9th, Tuesday  
Steward's Circle  
Bruegger's Bagels  
709 N University Ave  
7:30 to 8:30 am

Prescribed fire is our most historically accurate restoration tool. How and when do we use prescribed fire? Is it right for your location? What results have you had from prescribed fire?

February 20, Saturday  
Nature Area Hike  
Stapp Nature Area  
2:00 to 3:30 pm

Join us for a winter walk in Stapp Nature area, led by a NAP staff naturalist. Meet up outside the entrance to the Traverwood Library at Traverwood Drive and Huron Parkway.

February 28th, Sunday  
Salamander Survey Kickoff  
Leslie Science & Nature Center  
1831 Traver Road

10:00 am to 12:00 noon  
NAP's animal surveys are a wonderful way to get hands-on experience with monitoring and learning about the ecology and wild life of Ann Arbor's Parks. New and returning volunteers are welcome to participate. No previous experience required. Please register by February 22nd.

February 28th, Sunday  
Frog and Toad Survey Kickoff  
Leslie Science & Nature Center  
1831 Traver Road

1:30 to 3:00 pm  
Do you enjoy going out in the evening to hear the sounds of nature? Then you will love NAP's frog and toad survey. Learn about these fascinating creatures while helping us monitor them in the wetlands. No previous experience needed. Please register by February 22nd.



### March

March 2, Tuesday  
Controlled Burn Public Meeting  
Leslie Science & Nature Center  
1831 Traver Road  
7:30 to 9:00 pm

Burns are at the heart of the work NAP does. Come find out more about why and bring any questions or concerns you have about burns in a park near you. If you plan to join our burn crew this season, it is also recommended that you attend this meeting.

March 3, Wednesday  
Controlled Burn Crew Training  
Leslie Science & Nature Center  
1831 Traver Road  
12:00 to 5:00 pm

You can be one of those folks in the yellow suits, setting the woods ablaze! If you would like to be a part of NAP's burn crew this season, this meeting is required. Please register by February 24th.

March 9th, Tuesday  
Steward's Circle  
Bruegger's Bagels  
709 N University Ave  
7:30 to 8:30 am

We're great at preserving and restoring lands – as long as we have the money. Where do we find our funding? What are additional sources to augment our work?

# New Friends\*

by Susan Miller, Park Steward, Dolph Nature Area

Coming down the hill, I saw

a bird so big

it made my heart stop just to see him standing there

so tall and still.

Spotting him, I held my breath

I squeezed my hands inside my vest

and made a wish that he not fly away

but stay and let me watch him through the day.

*\*Exerpt. For the whole text of Susan's poem, see our blog at [www.a2nap.blogspot.com](http://www.a2nap.blogspot.com). Readers are welcome to submit poems, photos, or short articles to Natural Area Preservation News, which we will print at the editors' discretion, and as space allows.*



*Drawing courtesy of the Florida Center for Instructional Technology.*

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