

# Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 16, Number 4

Winter 2011

## A Winter Recitation: Dhu Varren Woods Nature Area

by Rob Schubert

My two favorite things about Ann Arbor are ice-contact topography and oaks. Dhu Varren has both.

Every landscape tells a story of what happened long ago, if only we know how to read the land. A fallen tree has exposed the soil, providing a glimpse into the geologic past. Glaciers once melted here, depositing the gravel and other rock that form these hills. Even the composition of the rocks tells a story. A cobble of quartz and potassium feldspar tells of being born in a volcano. Its rounded shape was formed through distant travel. A nearby piece of jagged sandstone was picked up a bit closer.

Gravity and water are two very influential forces. Gravity always determines that water moves downhill. Water always determines where each plant species will grow. From the well-drained hills, the land slopes downward. Oaks and hickories are replaced by other tree species better suited to being rooted in wet soil. Ash trees once grew here before they, like millions of others, were killed by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer. Young ash saplings speak of resiliency and offer the hope of future generations of ash trees.



*The rolling hills at Dhu Varren provide wonderful winter tree identification opportunities.*

A few old oaks, their lower branches twisted and dead, tell the story of when they grew alone in the open, and not amongst a thicket of upstart maples. Here down by the creek one may even find the not-so-common black maple, much coveted by maple sugarers (though please do not tap the park trees).

Moving upslope, the maples are absent. Oaks and hickories abound at the tops of the hills. Bitternut hickory, with its vertical bark stripes, is perhaps my favorite hickory. Shagbark hickory, with its curling, flaking bark is a favorite roosting place for bats.

Numerous oaks and hickories are good for squirrels and other mammals, and, the occasional wild turkeys will eat their share too. The plentiful nuts

provided by these trees ensure many have enough to eat.

Every landscape can also tell a story of what is happening now if only we know how to read the land. A winter landscape has no secrets. The secret life of a forest suddenly comes alive with the advent of snow. The lives of forest animals suddenly become apparent. Animals such as foxes, rarely seen, are readily

*Continued on page 6*

## In This Issue

A Winter Recitation: Dhu Varren Nature Areas ...1	Volunteers of the Year.....5
Coordinator's Corner.....2	NAPpenings .....6
Winter Tree Identification.....3	Staff Updates.....7
Stewardship Calendar..... 4	Queen Snake Observed in Ann Arbor .....8

# Coordinator's Corner

## Our Big Splash Got Bigger!

January 30, 1994 – NAP's first workday; poorly scheduled by me for Super Bowl Sunday. Still, a dozen people showed up on that cold winter day to help close some unwanted trails at Bird Hills Nature Area. That was a small group of highly motivated individuals, many affiliated with the Sierra Club, who were really committed to helping our fledgling organization get off the ground. They were there to lend their support to the belief that the public cared so much about their parks that citizens were willing to volunteer their time to be good stewards of those natural areas.

Workday attendance has steadily grown over the years, with actual numbers fluctuating depending on season, location, and activity. In 1999 we held our first Garlic Mustard Weed-out Day and attracted dozens of volunteers. It was our largest single-day event up to that point. It really felt like we were making a splash in the local environmental consciousness. But as more resources were made available to us, our message kept spreading through the community, and our volunteer program kept growing.

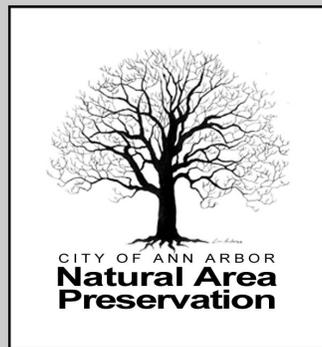
In spring 2010, it jumped to a new level when Community High School (CHS) brought 250 students to a workday we organized at a variety of parks around town. That stretched us a bit and forced us to expand our capacity to handle such large groups: more tools, more work gloves, and more workday leaders. Fortunately, by this time we've grown a very dedicated corps of volunteer s who make it possible for us to instantly up our number of "leaders" for a given workday if needed.

This is a very good thing, because large workdays like CHS became more common in 2011. CHS was back with their entire student body of 416 students. Concordia College followed suit this fall with 300 students. And the University of Michigan's Indian American Student Association sent us 200 of their members. On each of these days, we got more volunteer effort contributed to park stewardship activities than what we got in an entire year back in the early days of NAP.

This is a tremendous thing! We're now making an even bigger splash in the local environmental community by making a bigger dent in the invasive plant populations that threaten our natural areas. But don't worry, we're still continuing our small, neighborhood workdays, and always will be. No matter how many volunteers descend on another park, there is still a need for work in YOUR park. We don't get discouraged if only a dozen, or even fewer, people show up. Those committed individuals who come to the workday today may be the volunteers *leading* the workdays tomorrow.

So a big THANK YOU to all who have ever participated in any of our stewardship workdays, and an even bigger THANK YOU to those of you who have helped us lead them! Now that we have gained the capacity to work with such large groups, we look forward to organizing many more such events! Please contact us if you have a group of any size that you think might enjoy helping to care for our parks and nature areas!

Dave Borneman, Manager



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.*

**Address:** 1831 Traver Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

**Phone:** 734.794.6627

**Fax:** 734.997.1072

**Email:** [nap@a2gov.org](mailto:nap@a2gov.org)

**Website:** [www.a2gov.org/nap](http://www.a2gov.org/nap)

 [www.facebook.com/ann.arbor.nap](http://www.facebook.com/ann.arbor.nap)

 [www.twitter.com/a2NAP](http://www.twitter.com/a2NAP)

**Manager:**

David Borneman

**Technician:**

Lara Treemore Spears

**Inventory Staff:**

Dea Armstrong, Ornithologist

David Mifsud, Herpetologist

**Inventory Specialist:**

Jane Sherry

**Temporary Management Assistant:**

Tina Roselle

**Volunteer Workday Coordinator:**

Jeremy Sobczak

**Park Steward Coordinator:**

Christine Chessler

**Adopt-A-Park Coordinator:**

Renée Hytinen

**Outreach Assistants:**

Sara Jackson

Dana Novak

**Outreach Intern:**

Toyoka Kamada

**Technician:**

Jason Tallant

**Conservation Workers:**

Alex Aizenman

Robb Johnston

Laura Mueller

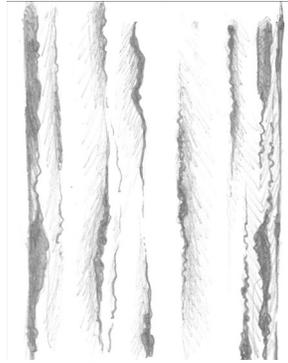
Rob Schubert

Jillian Sweetman

# Winter Tree Identification at Dhu Varren Woods Nature Area

Written and illustrated by Robb Johnston

While Dhu Varren Woods puts on a brilliant display of biodiversity throughout the warmer months with a profusion of plants and animals... winter in the woods is pretty much all about the trees. I'd like to share with



Red Oak,  
*Quercus rubra*.

you some common tree species you're likely to encounter on a winter's walk through this beautiful woodland, and some tips on how to identify them.

As you enter the park off Dhu Varren Rd., you'll notice some large trees that are common to the uplands of many of our natural areas. One fine example is the red oak (*Quercus rubra*). The easiest way to identify a red oak is by

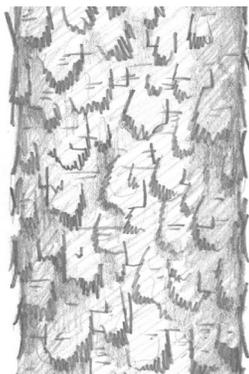
looking up at the trunk. The bark is typically grey or brownish-grey in color. Long, shallow grooves which run vertically are separated by smooth, flat ridges which appear to have been "ironed-out" or are in a criss-crossing ski pattern. Bark lower on the trunk may be more heavily furrowed.

Another upland species you may see is shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*). The grey bark of mature trees curves away from the trunk in dramatic, curling plates lending a "shaggy" appearance.



Shagbark Hickory,  
*Carya ovata*.

A third upland species easily identified by the bark is the wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina*). Older specimens have bark that is almost black in color with thick, scaly plates which resemble burnt potato chips.



Wild Black Cherry,  
*Prunus serotina*

As you transition farther downslope, you will run into lowland species like red maple (*Acer rubrum*). The bark on young trees will be smooth and light grey, becoming darker and rougher with maturity. The twigs are bright red with dark red buds.

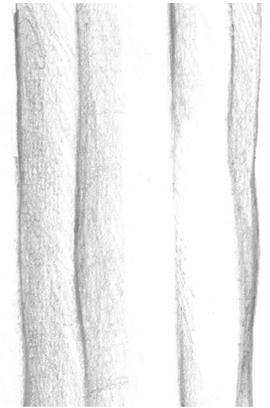


Red Maple,  
*Acer rubrum*

Lastly, you may be fortunate to see an American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*) during your visit to our woodlands in winter. Although there is no record of this diminutive tree at Dhu Varren specifically, it is one of my favorites, and can be found at several other sites. The smooth, grey bark is pulled taught over the undulating, sinewy ridges of the trunk, giving this small tree

another common name: muscle-wood.

As you continue your walk through Dhu Varren Woods, you'll see many, many other tree species representing both upland and lowland communities. Winter is an excellent time to appreciate the forms and characteristics of trees that are perhaps less apparent during the growing season. Michigan winters can be brutal, but the dramatic scenery and eerie silence of our natural areas after a heavy snowfall is truly something worth experiencing.



American Hornbeam,  
*Carpinus caroliniana*.



## Bittersweet Wreaths

The orange-berried wreaths and sprays that you can buy at many local stores this time of year sure are pretty, but did you know they are generally made with an invasive vine, Asiatic Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)? If you do buy these decorations, please dispose of them by either burning them in your fireplace, or placing them in a sealed plastic bag and putting them in the trash. Do not put the berries in your compost or in the woods. NAP has been working with the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market and other local merchants to spread the word about proper disposal. Thank you for your help in controlling this invasive plant!

# Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

## Winter 2011 - 2012

### January

**January 16, Monday**

**Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service**

**Bluffs Nature Area**

**1:00 pm to 3:00 pm**

MLK Day of Service is a chance to make your day "off" a day "on" for community service. Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at Crawford Elks Lodge, 220 Sunset Rd. where we will warm-up with hot tea or cocoa. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance for a release form if you would like older children to participate on their own. Tools, snacks, and know-how provided. Free.

**January 28, Saturday**

**Citizen Pruner Training**

**Wheeler Service Center**

**4251 Stone School Rd.**

**9:00 am to 1:00 pm**

Join in this fun new city volunteer program. Learn from experts how to prune young trees for shape and health. Help with long-term upkeep of city trees. Minimal time commitment. Training includes both indoor and outdoor time, so come prepared to be in both settings. Please register by January 20.

### February

**February 28, Tuesday**

**Controlled Burn Public Meeting**

**Leslie Science and Nature Center**

**Leslie House - 1831 Traver Rd.**

**7:30 pm to 9:00 pm**

Learn about why we conduct controlled burns and bring your questions. If you plan on joining our burn crew for the first time this season, it is recommended that you attend this meeting. Open for all interested in learning why we burn.

**February 29, Wednesday**

**Controlled Burn Crew Training**

**Cobblestone Farm—2781 Packard Rd.**

**12:00 pm to 5:00 pm**

Always wanted to participate in a controlled burn? Here is your chance! This training is required for new volunteers. Experienced folks also welcome for refresher training. Please register by February 15.

### March

**March 10, Saturday**

**Salamander Survey Kickoff**

**Leslie Science and Nature Center**

**Nature House - 1831 Traver Rd.**

**10:00 am to 12:00 pm**

New and returning volunteers are welcome to participate in animal surveys that monitor their populations and the health of habitats. No previous experience required. Please register by March 8.

**March 10, Saturday**

**Frog and Toad Survey Kickoff**

**Leslie Science and Nature Center**

**Nature House - 1831 Traver Rd.**

**1:30 to 3:00 pm**

Help us monitor frogs and toads in the parks. You will learn their calls, then go out to listen! No previous experience required. Please register by March 8.

**March 17, Saturday**

**Photo Monitoring Kickoff**

**Leslie Science and Nature Center**

**Leslie House - 1831 Traver Rd.**

**10:00 am to 11:30 noon**

Whether you are returning or a new photo volunteer, please join us to get ready for the upcoming season recording restoration progress. All you need to participate is a digital camera. Register by March 15.

**March 17, Saturday**

**Workday Leader Training**

**Leslie Science and Nature Center**

**Leslie House - 1831 Traver Rd.**

**12:00 to 5:30 pm**

If you are leading a workday, how do you make it a safe, fun, and productive event? This meeting is strongly encouraged for anyone interested in leading or helping NAP staff to lead workdays this season.

**Stewardship Network's**

### **Stewards' Circle**

**Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave**

**7:30 am to 8:30 am**

Are you interested in learning more about how to care for our natural areas - woods, creeks, prairies, wetlands? Then join the Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor cluster for an informal discussion on a monthly topic with volunteer and professional land stewards, plus others interested in nature. Free and open to anyone interested.

**December 13, Tuesday**

**New Invasives:** The latest species to watch for and resources to learn more.

**January 10, Tuesday**

**Wetland Restoration:** What are the opportunities and techniques for wetland restoration in the winter?

**February 14, Tuesday**

**Controlled Burns:** How and when to use controlled burns.

**March 13, Tuesday**

**Herbaceous Invasives:** Successful approaches to controlling herbaceous invasive plants and monitoring for new threats.

# Volunteers of the Year: Drew Lathin and Sarah Newman

by Sara E. Jackson

“I brag all of the time to my friends out-of-state about the nature areas in Ann Arbor. I think they are such an incredibly valuable asset to the city.” It’s a slightly overcast early autumn day and rain is threatening, but Sarah Newman and Drew Lathin, this year’s Volunteers of the Year, are all smiles when we meet at Miller Park to talk about their involvement with NAP as park stewards over the past several years. “This park is great for my personal goal of making more citizens aware of our parks and showing people Drew’s restoration contributions,” Sarah adds. Drew quickly and jokingly chimes in, “The very fact that I picked Miller to work in should disqualify me for this award.”

Miller, a significantly sized nature area in Ann Arbor, had historically been low on NAP’s list of restoration priorities. Most of the plants in the area are invasive and there really wasn’t an easy place to begin restoration work or the man power to do it. Perhaps Drew *was* a bit crazy to pick Miller to work in, but the efforts he has coordinated have truly been outstanding. Shortly after moving to a nearby house in 2005, he contacted NAP and adopted an area with a stand of oak and hickory trees being choked by buckthorn and honeysuckle, proclaiming it “The Beachhead.” A reference to one of the pivotal strongholds established during the storming of Normandy during WWII, it’s an aptly fitting name and set the stage for Drew’s mission.

Drew, who is the General Manager at Great Lakes Native Plants, has an active interest in learning more about native plants and experimenting with introducing them to restoration sites. The process of first removing the invasive shrubs from “The Beachhead” and then addressing the garlic mustard and dame’s rocket which emerged the following year, has now opened-up the site to allow for the

introduction of native plants. Seeds introduced which have taken root include Tall Bell Flower, Bottlebrush Grass, Wild Rye, Wild Bergamot, Blue-stemmed Goldenrod, Wild Geranium, Joe Pye Weed and many others. Some additional oaks have been planted, as well as some plugs of native flowering plants.

Restoration work isn’t the only goal for improving Miller, though. After several years of volunteering at Furstenberg Nature Area, Sarah became a Steward at

Miller in 2008 with a goal to improve the trail system and the mapping of the park for increased user enjoyment. A retired faculty member from the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology at the University of Michigan, Sarah has a wealth of knowledge and passion in the arena of education. “I think it’s important to get kids outside and show them the work that goes into maintaining our parks. I care a lot about involving community.”



*Volunteers of the Year, Drew Lathin and Sarah Newman, are co-stewards at Miller Park.*

Sarah’s commitment to community involvement extends to being on the Board of Directors for the Peace Neighborhood Center, an organization that offers a summer day camp program. In 2010 she suggested including the work NAP does as part of the campers’ experience. She developed a presentation to teach the kids about restoration in the parks, the difference between native and invasive plants, and the work being done in Miller Park specifically. The following week the children were brought to the park to assist with woodchipping and trimming back overgrown trails. “The kids clearly love it and this past summer they came out twice as part of their standard day camp program.”

The pairing of Sarah and Drew as Stewards at Miller is a success story of NAP’s recent initiative to develop

*Continued on page 7*

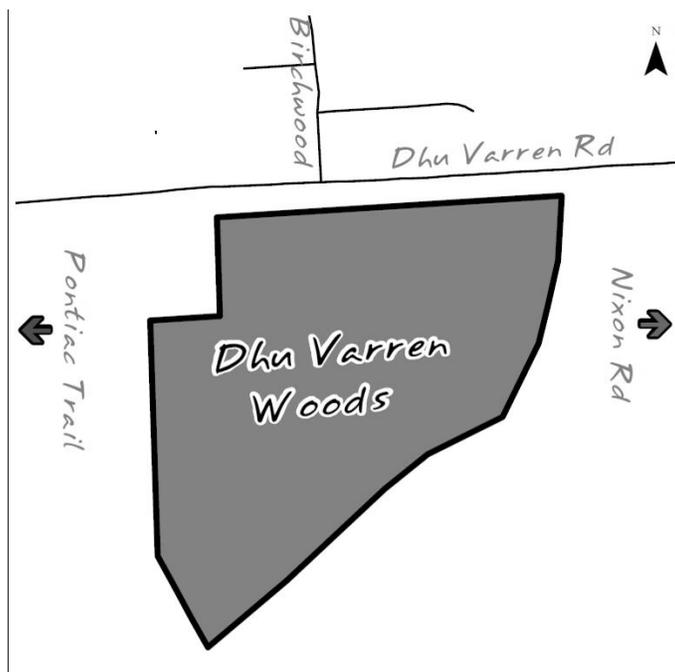
# Dhu Varren

*Continued from page 1*

observable through their tracks. Take the time to follow freshly laid tracks, and with luck and patience, one may find the creatures that left them.

Winter is the time to learn tree identification. Identification of trees can be made difficult by the presence of leaves. Species of close leaf resemblance, such as sugar and Norway maple can be easily distinguished in winter. One may become skilled enough at identifying dormant trees to experience a brief period in early spring after the buds have opened but the leaves have not yet fully developed when tree identification suddenly becomes difficult.

Winter is a perfect time to explore a local natural area. Go outside, follow animal tracks, look at birds, learn to identify dormant trees. One may even find oneself in an area never before visited. With the ground frozen and the plants dormant, it's okay to wander off trail a little bit to get a better look at that Chinquapin oak or imagine you're a glacier as you break trail on your skis.



*Dhu Varren Woods Nature Area can be accessed via a trailhead located on the south side of Dhu Varren Rd. Park on Birchwood Dr. between Pontiac Trail and Nixon Rd.*

*Foxfire South Nature Area is connected to Dhu Varren Woods Nature Area on the south side, but an extensive wetlands area generally keeps visitors from crossing between the two nature areas.*

# NAPpennings

**thank you...**

Many thanks to the following groups who volunteered with NAP recently. We could not make such a difference without you!

Community High School  
Concordia University  
EMU Alpha Phi Omega, Lambda Phi Chapter  
EMU Circle K  
EMU Vision  
Friends of Dicken Woods  
Friends of Greenview  
Greenhills School - 7th Grade Class  
Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice  
Lutheran Church Jr High Youth Gathering  
St Luke Lutheran Church—In His Service  
Program  
REI  
River Day Camp  
UM Alpha Phi Omega, Gamma Pi Chapter  
UM Circle K  
UM Computer Science and Engineering Scholars  
UM Econ Class  
UM Greek Councils  
UM Indian American Student Association  
UM Law School  
UM M-Bio  
UM Michigan Community Scholars  
UM SEEDs  
YMCA Youth Volunteer Corp - Ann Arbor  
YMCA Youth Volunteer Corp - Plymouth/  
Canton

Thank you also to Barbara Lucas for becoming a new steward at Argo Nature Area!

NAP's 13th annual Volunteer Appreciation Potluck was a success! Many thanks to Trader Joe's, Arbor Brewing Company, REI and the Children's Hands-On Science Museum for their generous door prize donations!

**Congratulations to current NAP staff...**

Jason Tallant for completing his Master's Degree in Geographic Information Systems at Eastern Michigan University, and for also welcoming his third child into the world.

Dana Novak for welcoming her third child, too.

Jeremy Sobczak for welcoming his first born.

Lara Treemore Spears for getting married.

It's been an exciting few months here at NAP!

# Staff Updates

hello...



## Jane Sherry

Born in Ann Arbor, I graduated from Indiana University in May 2011 with a B.S. in Environmental Management. Before working for NAP, I was an intern for the Sycamore Land Trust, an environmental non-profit in Bloomington, IN. As the Project Specialist at NAP, I work to

document, update and map data using Microsoft Access and GIS software. I also get to join the field crew occasionally, which allows me to connect with nature amongst like-minded people! I thoroughly enjoy being a part of an organization that shares my passion of keeping my hometown beautiful for future generations.

farewell...



## Billy Kirst

After weeks of constant nagging by my dear friend Kyle, I found myself two stories in the air, on a ladder, with a hammer in my hand building a deck on Spring St. There's nothing like practicing a new trade at 30ft to reinvigorate the learner inside. So I say goodbye to the NAP family and

community after 5 & 1/2 amazing years to apprentice as a carpenter and green home builder. I will also be working with local contractors to incorporate native plants into the home landscape. I feel blessed to have learned so much over the years and I hope that I have given back equally. Keep up the good work everyone!



## Bonnie Wessler

Bonnie started with NAP in the winter of 2006. Her primary role was assisting with database management, but she also helped with many other office outreach tasks over the years, including organizing private volunteer events. She's moved on from NAP,

though, and is now a Planner for the City of Ypsilanti. Thanks for being a wonderful part of the NAP team and for all of your contributions over the years Bonnie!



## Steven Parrish

After nearly four years at NAP I have moved on to the UM's Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum to manage an Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake habitat restoration project. I've gained invaluable leadership skills while working at NAP and feel prepared for

this new venture where we're doing important restoration work with weekly community service projects, work-study students and public volunteer workdays. I am responsible for a 'seek-and-steward' mission of removing all invasive plants in the Fleming Creek floodplain and adjacent uplands totaling over 200 acres. In addition to the rattlesnake, the mission will also include considerations for state-threatened butterflies, fish, frogs and plants. Management will include prescribed fire so I will not be retiring my drip torch just yet. With this project I feel I will be following my father's footsteps in providing community education. I'll still be around attending NAP events. Peace, love and insects.

---

## Volunteers of the Year

*Continued from page 5*

Stewardship Teams - finding individuals with unique and complementary skills and interests, and matching them up. While Drew brings a knowledge of restoration and plants to the park, Sarah seeks to build a sense of community surrounding the park. "It's a very complementary and great pairing," says Sarah.

As for future goals for the park, Sarah is working on finalizing a new map of the trails and would like to have weatherproof maps placed at the entrances and key trail intersections, as well as keeping the trail well-maintained and fostering community connections. Drew humorously comments his wish is for "helicopters with fire bombs to combat the invasives... I mean seed bombs... yea." He's also working on expanding "The Beachhead" in a new area he calls "Paris" continuing his invasion stronghold theme.

NAP is extremely appreciative of all of the expertise and dedication both Drew and Sarah bring to Miller. Congratulations to them both for being Volunteers of the Year 2011!

# Queen Snakes Observed in Ann Arbor

by Jim Bardwell, Park Steward

While fishing for bluegills in the Huron late September, my son Adrian noticed a snake swimming towards us. Then another and another. Over the next hour we saw at least six of these unusual-looking snakes swarming towards us. Wondering what was going on we captured one, got some photos and sent the photos off to herpetologist David Mifsud who definitively identified it as a Queen Snake (*Regina septemvittata*). "This is a significant find for the city" David said, "The Queen Snake is listed by Michigan Natural Features Inventory as a Species of Special Concern. It is good to see that the city ecosystem supports these rare animals." According to Mifsud, given the time of year and number of snakes observed, they were likely headed for their hibernacula (a place to overwinter for snakes). Queen Snake's numbers are declining in part because of habitat destruction and their habit of feeding almost exclusively on freshly molted crayfish. If you see this species or other rare herpetofauna please contact NAP and the Michigan Herp Atlas program. Information such as this observation help NAP and other agencies better manage natural areas.

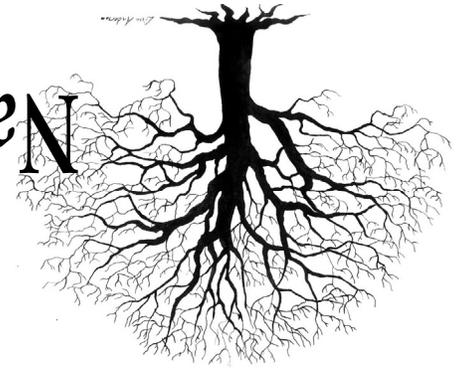


*The Queen Snake (Regina septemvittata), a Species of Special Concern in Michigan, was sighted along the Huron River this autumn.*

*photo by Patrick Coin*

Winter 2011

## Natural Area Preservation News



Printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink.  If you would prefer to receive your next newsletter via email, please let us know!

Natural Area Preservation  
City of Ann Arbor  
1831 Traver Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
Return Service Requested

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
ANN ARBOR, MI  
PERMIT NO. 178