

# Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 16, Number 3

Autumn 2011

## Olson Park: From Eyesore to Refuge

by Erin Dreps & Lara Treemore Spears

Mountain bikers, dog park users, cheering soccer fans and nature seekers alike are all regular visitors to Olson Park. On first glance it may appear that the many recreational features were carved into the woods and natural features already existing on this 54 acres of land. It wasn't that long ago, though, that the park site was home to a gravel mining operation and many of the natural features found today weren't even present. Extensive illegal dumping was also a problem on the property. The location is separated from adjoining habitats by M-14 to the north, the Ann Arbor Railroad to the east, and Pontiac Trail and Dhu Varren roads to the west and south, but careful planning has led to the restoration of several important ecosystems within the park.

The original park, named the Northeast Area Park, was formed in 1996 by joining city-owned and county-owned properties to provide regional park and stormwater management for the northeast area's growing population. The park was later renamed for Ron Olson, the former superintendent of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation and current chief of Parks and Recreation for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Like its namesake, Olson Park has been on an upward trajectory, with the name change just one among many transformations it has undergone.



*The pond at Olson Park was a gravel pit less than 15 years ago. Now it's thriving habitat.*

Today Olson is nearly unrecognizable from the land that was farmed and used as a gravel pit through the 1960s. With the help of water from Traver Creek that began being diverted to it in the late 1970s, the gravel-pit pond supports frogs and turtles, and provides a spring rest stop for migrant waterfowl like Common and Hooded Mergansers, and Lesser Scaup. The surrounding fields support toads and snakes that also use the water resources on site. Groundwater emerges east of the pond, providing ideal conditions for fen and sedge meadow ecosystems that provide habitat for Common Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers along with Willow Flycatchers and Baltimore Orioles.

As the park was becoming established, volunteers helping with NAP's butterfly survey in the early 2000s discovered that Olson had become home to the city's largest population of wild indigo duskywings (*Erynnis baptisiae*), a butterfly classified by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as a Special Concern Species. A specialist that prefers the extremely rare wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*) as its larval host plant, the wild indigo duskywing has adapted in the face of that plant's scarcity and has switched to using the abundant, non-native crown vetch (*Securigera varia*) as a host in Olson Park.

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# Coordinator's Corner

## It's Hard to Be Patient

I'm an impatient exerciser. Whenever I get serious about exercising, I want immediate results. I want to run faster and farther, and be stronger, right now. It is easy to focus on how far I am from my fitness goals when I don't see any tangible results from day to day. That can really be discouraging.

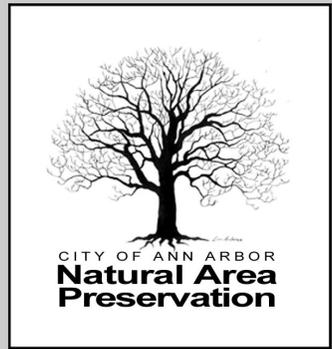
Of course, I'm not alone in this experience. And the same thing happens in other parts of our lives. Bank accounts don't grow as quickly as we'd like. Academic degrees seem to take forever to earn. Whether it is careers, or relationships, or any major life transition, it seems to take so long to get where we want to be. Sometimes it's hard to be patient.

We deal with the same thing in ecological restoration. We can visualize our natural areas as healthy native ecosystems, perhaps modeled after nearby examples. Or we may find inspiration from the historic descriptions, like this one from J.W. Wing, writing in the Ann Arbor area, in June, 1839: *"The scene was beautiful beyond description. The timber consisted of large oak trees standing several rods apart and the intermediate space between them was covered with bright green grass and beautiful flowers.... I have never seen in any of our large cities a park that was its equal."*

We so dearly want our favorite natural areas to look like we imagine they could be. But instead of mighty oaks accenting a carpet of beautiful wildflowers, we see only dense thickets of buckthorn and honeysuckle shrubs shading out anything trying to grow on the forest floor. And instead of a carpet of wildflowers, we're faced with an apparent cornucopia of newly germinating seeds from our least favorite invasives. Restoration takes a long time. It's hard to be patient.

So how do we deal with this long timeframe? I think the answer is to shift our focus away from the end goal. Sure, it is good to have a target, to know in which direction we want to go. That can provide real inspiration and motivation to us. But maybe sometimes we focus too much on that end goal, which may take a lifetime to reach. Why not enjoy your natural area as it is now, and the processes that are transforming it, slowly, into something closer to your goal? Enjoy, even relish that process itself. Don't worry about where your workout will lead you, enjoy the workout itself, and know that you are taking care of yourself. And don't despair that your oaks are not ancient giants; appreciate them in their youth. Enjoy the process of providing good stewardship to your natural area, and trust that process, even if you don't see a lot of changes day-to-day. If it is a good process, then it will lead you, eventually, to that end goal. And along the way, you'll get to enjoy a great journey.

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)  
**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/ann.arbor.nap](http://www.facebook.com/ann.arbor.nap)  
**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/a2NAP](http://www.twitter.com/a2NAP)

**Manager:**

David Borneman

**Technician:**

Lara Treemore Spears

**Inventory Staff:**

Dea Armstrong, Ornithologist  
David Mifsud, Herpetologist

**Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator:**

Tina Roselle

**Volunteer Workday Coordinator:**

Jeremy Sobczak

**Park Steward Coordinator:**

Christine Chessler

**Adopt-A-Park Coordinator:**

Renée Hytinen

**Outreach Assistants:**

Sara Jackson Bonnie Wessler  
Dana Novak

**Technician:**

Jason Tallant

**Conservation Workers:**

Alex Aizenman  
Jeff Chelf  
Robb Johnston  
Billy Kirst  
Laura Mueller  
Steven Parrish  
Rob Schubert  
Jillian Sweetman

**NAP Interns:**

Erin Dreps Lindsay Hannah  
Paul Schreib Toyoko Kamada  
Stacia Simonsen

# Airport and Habitat Management for Safety

by Dea Armstrong, City Ornithologist

For the last six years, the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport has worked with NAP and Washtenaw Audubon Society to provide improved nesting habitat for grassland birds. The airport staff delay springtime mowing in areas on the airport grounds where birds are nesting, as long as leaving the area un-mowed is compatible with airport operations. Most species of grassland birds are in decline across the U.S., but the species of particular concern in our area are Bobolinks, Henslow's Sparrows, and Grasshopper Sparrows, all of which have nested there. Most of these have had the opportunity to nest and raise their young by the second week in July, when the normal mowing schedule at the airport is resumed.

One question explored was if the taller grass at the airport would attract Canada Geese. This year, the Ann Arbor General Aviation Association in



*The grasshopper sparrow is a species of particular concern in this area because of its declining population. It now successfully nests at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport due to a delay in the springtime mowing schedule.*

*photo by Dominic Sherony*

cooperation with the Federal Aviation Association's Safety Team arranged for Tom Seamans of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to come to the Ann Arbor airport to speak about potential aircraft encounters with wildlife. Seamans is a member of a USDA's National Wildlife Research Center team in Sandusky, Ohio. He helps conduct research about how to manage habitat around airports to avoid aircraft-wildlife encounters. These projects often focus on large birds, greater than 4 pounds in weight, because they are the birds that can do the most damage to aircraft. One of the studies that Seamans and his team conducted was to find out if there was any correlation between the height of grass at a site and the number of large birds that were attracted to it. In other words, would taller (or shorter) grasses attract species like Canada Geese, a common species in our area? His team found that the height of grass did not seem to matter. Un-mowed or closely mowed grasses seemed to attract Canada Geese equally. The studies found that the major attractant for Canada Geese is small stormwater ponds not grass height. See the following link for the full report: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/nwrc/research/aviation/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/nwrc/research/aviation/index.shtml)

While the approximately 4 weeks of taller grass at the Ann Arbor Airport provide safe habitat for the 10 pairs of Bobolinks that nest there, it is good to know that the tall grass doesn't encourage Canada Geese any more than short, constantly mowed grass. While the appearance of inconsistent mowing at the airport generates questions or concerns for some, most people are pleased to know that the airport is working to provide much-needed nesting habitat for grassland birds. The airport has found a successful balance between environmental stewardship and airport safety, which is always the number one priority.

This effort is a great example of how groups of various interests can work together to address habitat management while maintaining safe operations. Hats off to all involved!



# Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

## September

**September 4, Sunday**  
**Furstenberg Native Garden**  
12:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Help weed and preserve the native garden. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Rd., across from Huron High School.

**September 4, Sunday**  
**Sunset Brooks Nature Area**  
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help clear trails and spread woodchips. Please bring your plastic sleds to help with the hauling. Meet at the entrance on Sunset Rd., at the end of Brooks St.

**September 11, Sunday**  
**National Day of Service and Remembrance**  
Participate by helping us at one of the following events.

**Bird Hills Nature Area**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help maintain the trails. Meet us at the Beechwood entrance off of Sunset Rd.

**Dicken Woods Nature Area**  
10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the end of Dicken Dr., off S. Maple Rd.

**Cedar Bend Nature Area**  
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the Island Park parking lot, at the end of Island Dr.

**Miller Nature Area**  
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the Arborview Blvd entrance, just east of Wildwood Ave.

**September 13, Tuesday**  
**Stewards' Circle**  
Bruegger's Bagels – 709 N University Ave  
7:30 am to 8:30 am

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. This month's topic - **Prairie Restoration**: Native prairie species and the benefits to pollinators.

*Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.*

**September 15, Thursday**  
**AADL Series: Autumn Invasive Plant Removal Walk**  
Traverwood Branch – A2 Library  
6:00 pm to 7:30 pm

*This is part of a series of talks, walks and workdays in partnership with Ann Arbor District Library to give participants a more in-depth understanding of the natural area and restoration work in the city.*

Please join NAP for a talk about techniques used to remove and manage invasive species in Ann Arbor's natural areas in the autumn. We will then walk down the block to Stapp Nature Area to see examples of the techniques used.

**September 18, Sunday**  
**Ruthven Nature Area**  
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the Gallup boat launch, located at the southeast corner of Huron Pkwy. and Geddes Rd.

**September 24, Saturday**  
**National Public Lands Day Events**  
Participate by helping remove invasive shrubs at one of these events.

**Scarlett Mitchell Woods**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Meet in the Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine St.

**Hollywood Park**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Meet on Sequoia Pkwy near the intersection of Archwood Dr.

**September 25, Sunday**  
**Hannah Nature Area**  
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the west end of Bath St., west of 7th (between Miller and Huron).

## October

**October 1, Saturday**  
**Be the Change Day Events**

*You must be the change you want to see in the world ~ Mahatma Gandhi.* Make a difference at one of these parks.

**Huron Hills Golf Course Woods**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help spread woodchips. Bring plastic sleds to help with the hauling. Meet on Hunting Valley off Provincial Dr.

**Dicken Woods Nature Area**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the end of Dicken Dr., off South Maple Rd.

**October 2, Sunday**  
**Mary Beth Doyle Nature Area**  
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help with restoration efforts. Meet at the end of Verle Ave., two blocks west of Platt Rd.

# Autumn 2011

**October 11, Tuesday**

**Stewards' Circle**

Bruegger's Bagels – 709 N University Ave

7:30 am to 8:30 am

See Sept 13. This month's topic - **Celebrations and Appreciation:** Thanking volunteers appropriately to increase their connection and involvement.

**October 12, Wednesday**

**Public Meeting – Controlled**

**Ecological Burn Program**

Leslie House, Leslie Science & Nature Center - 1831 Traver Rd

7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Fire is used as a restoration tool in many of Ann Arbor's natural areas in the spring and fall. This meeting provides information and an opportunity for discussion about the Controlled Ecological Burn Program.

**October 15, Saturday**

**Greenview Nature Area**

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs and improve trails. Meet at the Greenview Park sign, on Greenview Dr., across from Barnard Rd.

**October 22, Saturday**

**Wurster Park**

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Help spread woodchips around the community edible garden. Meet at the cul-de-sac of Edgewood Pl. off of W. Davis Ave.

**October 23, Sunday**

**National Make a Difference Day**

Celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event at one of these parks:

**Miller Nature Area**

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help woodchip the trails. Bring plastic sleds to help with the

hauling. Meet at the Arborview Blvd. entrance, just east of Wildwood Ave.

**Dicken Woods Nature Area**

10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the end of Dicken Dr., off S. Maple Rd.

**Molin Nature Area**

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the entrance near the corner of Powell Ave. and Columbia Ave.

*Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.*

**October 26, Wednesday**

**Volunteer Appreciation Potluck**

Cobblestone Farm, 2781 Packard Rd

6:30 pm to 9:30 pm

All volunteers are invited to our annual appreciation event! Awards, door prizes and fun activities for all. Please bring a dish to pass and family. Costumes are encouraged. RSVP by Oct 25<sup>th</sup>: nap@a2gov.org or 734-794-6627.

**October 29, Saturday**

**Barton Nature Area**

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Help collect native plant seeds. It's fun for all ages. Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot on the corner of Huron River Dr. and Bird Rd.

## November

**November 5, Saturday**

**Stewardship Network Workshop:**

**Low-Tech Tool Maintenance**

Field Operations Bldg, County Farm Park - 2210 Platt Rd.

9:00 am to 1:00 pm

**\$10 members /\$15 non-members**

Learn how to extend the life of your tools. www.stewardshipnetwork.org

**November 6, Sunday**

**Foxfire South Nature Area**

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet in the cul-de-sac at the end of South Foxridge Ct, off of Dhu Varren Rd.

**November 8, Tuesday**

**Stewards' Circle**

Bruegger's Bagels – 709 N University Ave  
7:30 am to 8:30 am

See Sept 13. This month's topic - **Woody Invasives:** Successful approaches to controlling woody invasive plants and monitoring for new threats.

**November 13, Sunday**

**Mary Beth Doyle Nature Area**

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help remove invasive shrubs. Meet at the end of Verle Ave., two blocks west of Platt Rd.

**November 19, Saturday**

**Family Volunteer Day Event**

**Barton Nature Area**

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Volunteer outdoors as a family! (Individuals welcome, too!) Help clear trails and spread woodchips. Bring plastic sleds to help with the hauling. Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot on the corner of Huron River Dr. and Bird Rd.

# Staff Updates

hello...



## Alex Aizenman

This spring I had the good fortune to join NAP's conservation crew. Originally from Pittsburgh, PA, I graduated from U of M's Program in the Environment in 2009. Though it can be hard work out in the field, I always love the opportunity to learn as much as I can while contributing to the health of our natural areas. I am especially interested in the role of fire in our native ecosystems and I have enjoyed helping with many burns over the last couple years. I am excited to continue to get to know the flora and fauna of this region and help them thrive.



## Jeff Chelf

Having the opportunity to work at NAP this summer, I tried to learn as much about native plants as possible. This was in hopes to be more effective someday in the field of historical preservation to not just maintain cultural heritage, but overall natural heritage as well.



## Lindsay Hanna

I'm a master's student at U of M in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment. My concentration is in Terrestrial Ecosystems and I hope to combine botanical sciences and remote sensing skills into a career. I'm currently interning with NAP helping to create a process that will help update the city's current vegetation classification system to the national standard.



## Paul Schreib

I'm passionate about fair and local food systems, as well as gaining inclusivity in the environmental movement, so I'm a student at U of M in both the Program in the Environment, and Social Theory and Practice. These interests led me to the Community-Based Research Fellowship, where I was partnered with NAP to work on increasing volunteer diversity. These past 10 weeks have gone by much quicker than anticipated, but have been extremely rewarding!



## Stacia Simonsen

I will be graduating from U of M with my Civil/Environmental Engineering degree in Spring 2012. I sought out a summer internship at NAP to diversify my internship experiences, to learn more about nature and to gain a better perspective of the environment. Since working with NAP, I have discovered a passion for preservation and restoration. My goal has always been to find ways for humans to live more cohesively with nature, instead of destroying it, but was never quite sure how to do that. I am really excited for the opportunities that I will have to better this bond between humanity and nature once I graduate.

special thanks...

... to Otho Ulrich and Jenny Knight for volunteering on the field crew this summer!

## Mark Your Calendar!

# NAP's Annual Volunteer Appreciation Potluck!

Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>  
6:30pm - 9:30pm  
Cobblestone Farm - 2781 Packard Rd.

- Learn about NAP's 2011 accomplishments!
- Meet fellow NAP volunteers & staff!
- Enjoy great food & fun activities!
- Bring a dish to pass & your family!

Please RSVP by Oct 25<sup>th</sup> at [nap@a2gov.org](mailto:nap@a2gov.org)

*Editor's Note: In the previous newsletter's article, "Wurster Park: A Taste of Nature in the Old West Side," it was incorrectly stated that there were blackberries in the edible garden. Instead there are black raspberries. We apologize for the error.*

# NAPpenings

## thank you...

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

Boy Scout Troop 111  
Christ Our King Church  
Circle K  
Emerson Middle School  
Friends of Dicken Woods  
Girl Scout Troop 40551  
Jacob Gray, Eagle Scout Project at Miller Park  
Mitchell Elementary  
Peace Neighborhood Center  
REI  
River Day Camp  
Rotary Club  
UM Association of Women in Science  
Yoga Serves  
YMCA Teen Adventure Camp  
YMCA Youth Volunteer Corp - Ann Arbor  
YMCA Youth Volunteer Corp - Plymouth/  
Canton  
Zeta Phi Beta

## Adopt-A-Park Kick-off

On Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, over 100 volunteers came out to 13 parks in every corner of the city and made a huge effort in caring for their neighborhood's community spaces. Over 500 plants were put in the ground, including no less than 300 native plants! Invasive plants like garlic mustard, Dame's rocket, and buckthorn were also removed from three of the parks. This was a great showing for Adopt-A-Park's fifth Kick-off event!

## Great American Backyard Campout

NAP was invited to participate in National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout on June 25<sup>th</sup> hosted at the Leslie Science and Nature Center. This annual event is a wonderful opportunity for families, particularly those with younger children, to try out camping without traveling too far from home. Many fun activities were planned for participants including NAP-lead nature hikes about native and invasive plants.

## Ash Seed Collection Effort in Michigan and Ohio

Help the USDA Forest Service preserve various ash tree species by collecting ash seeds in September and October. For more information and to sign-up, contact Kathleen Knight, [ksknight@fs.fed.us](mailto:ksknight@fs.fed.us) or 740-368-0063.

# Olson Park

Continued from page 1



*The wild indigo duskywing is a species of Special Concern in Michigan. The largest population of them in Ann Arbor thrives at Olson Park.  
photo by Anita Gould*

While seeking to encourage the population of wild indigo duskywings, natural area managers are simultaneously confronted with the dilemma that crown vetch is an invasive species. Therefore, restoration efforts in Olson Park have focused on re-establishing a healthy native habitat consisting of wild indigo (along with the various

plant species the duskywing uses as nectar sources), while maintaining enough crown vetch that the population of wild indigo duskywings is sustained throughout the transition. The butterfly is generally active from late May through the end of September, so be sure to check it out.

The transformations in Olson Park's features over time are visible in aerial photographs, and closer observation reveals details about the changes in the composition of the plant and animal life within it. That natural habitats are thriving where gravel mining dominated for decades is a testament to nature's ability to recover and to blossom despite disturbance in the past.



# Geocaching: Treasure at the End of the Satellite Rainbow

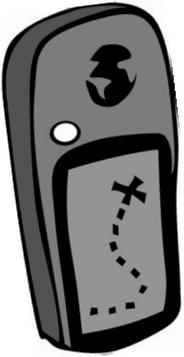
by Jason Tallant

Geocaching, as defined by geocaching.com, is ‘a real world, outdoor treasure hunting game using GPS-enabled devices. Participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and they attempt to find the geocache hidden at the location.’ This game, invented in May of 2000, utilizes the satellites-based Global Positioning System (GPS) to triangulate one’s location in a gridded pattern draped upon the globe for the purposes of geo-location. Just over a decade old, this phenomenon has become a major recreation activity with estimates of 3-4 million active geocachers worldwide.

of invasive species or pathogens via participants’ shoes are off-limits areas. In less sensitive areas, off-the-trail placement of geocaches is acceptable and allows for cryptic placement of caches. This often leads to the discovery of much more than what was originally intended and hones the nature discovery of children and adults alike.

If you have an interest in geocaching in Ann Arbor, it’s easiest to go online to geocaching.com to find the coordinates of local caches. Specifically, Washtenaw County Parks has a 2011 geocaching tour of many of their natural areas. If you have an interest in placing a geocache in the Ann Arbor parks, please contact our office for an application. We’ll help make sure you’re placing the cache appropriately and get you out in the field as quickly as possible.

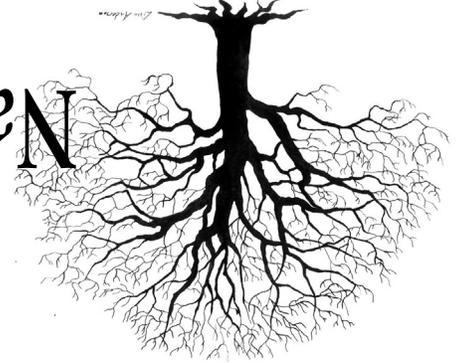
Geocaching is an excellent opportunity for anyone, from a middle school student to a retired computer programmer or nature enthusiast, to be active outdoors while utilizing modern technology in pursuit of hidden treasure.



Many geocaching opportunities exist here in Ann Arbor with over 330 caches placed in parks, open spaces, and nature areas. While geocaching has a small footprint, some restrictions for the placement of physical geocaches exist. In particular, remnant ecological communities that could be negatively impacted by repeated foot traffic and introduction

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