

Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 12, Number 2

Summer 2007

Park Focus: Swift Run Nature Area

by Jason Frenzel

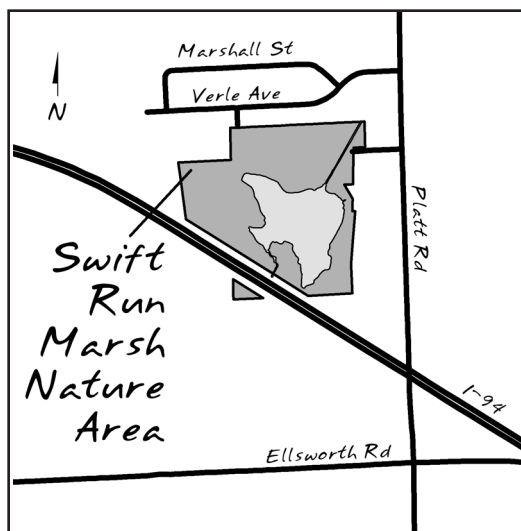
I'm a story teller. I'm always looking for a metaphor that'll carry me through a conversation – or a workday. I've long been this way, but I learned a lot about telling a GOOD story from my boss, Dave Borneman. Dave has shown me the value in the educational metaphor – show them and they will understand, or at least listen. Swift Run has many a story to tell us.

Let's get some preliminary information out of the way, then I'll tell you some stories (or just talk about Dave some more). Many folks know Swift Run as "that pond/wetland I pass along I-94, just west of 23." In actuality Swift Run consists of a large pond, a couple creeks, some prairies, and a handful of enormous oaks, all surrounded by invasive grasses and shrubs. Bev Walters, past NAP Botanist and Assistant Manager and current Botany Conservation Associate at Michigan Natural Features Inventory, notes that Swift Run is an unusually intact, high quality, and very biologically diverse native prairie.

Swift Run is owned by the Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner – one of the sites that NAP stewards through partnerships with other organizations. This cooperation brings great strengths to our community – the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems benefit from the protection that the WCDC office provides, Nature benefits from the restoration that NAP (and volunteers!) put forward, and we all benefit from the existence of this lovely, protected, functioning bit of Nature among us.

Swift Run Pond has been a favorite place for birdwatchers for well over two decades. It attracts interesting ducks, waders, and shorebirds during both spring and fall

migrations. As many as 20 Great Egrets have been seen at the site at one time, though the birds do not breed in Washtenaw County. Five (of six) species of Michigan swallows are usually present during the breeding season. Very rare birds are often among the migrants visiting as well, like the dark Ibis in the fall of 2000 that had the birding community from all over Michigan coming for a look. And a Long-billed Dowitcher even picked up the nickname "Dudley" because he was such a regular visitor there, and in nearby ponds, for so many autumns.



Another great story that comes to NAP via Swift Run is the story of "the slicing." For many years, NAP has been a proponent of helping Nature do what it does best. In nature, competition is a dominating force. When working with invasive plants we aim to give the competitive advantage back to native plants. During the 1980s native and invasive shrubs significantly reduced the size of the prairies at Swift Run. They went from multi-acre to multi-square-foot areas. Bev Walters characterizes these prairies, as of the early 1990s, as a series of room-sized pockets, with shrubs

closing in. Through prescribed burning and shrub removal there are now three prairies, each back to a few acres, with bits of connection between. We've been using a technique sometimes referred to as "peeling layers of an onion" or "slicing the edges" to enhance these prairies. By slicing, we take a strong, intact, native ecosystem and help it regain ground. After removing the invasives in the interior of the prairies, we remove a slice of invasives all the way around the outside edge. The native prairie plants – big bluestem in particular – then seed into the newly invasive-free areas. Big blue is a great plant for this process. It's a strong competitor

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Coordinator's Corner

Weather-Resistant Restoration

Long-time readers will know that the success of NAP's prescribed burn season depends heavily on what kind of weather Mother Nature sends our way. To conduct effective ecological burns in the spring, we typically need bright, sunny, dry days – before all the native wildflowers are up. Unfortunately, as you may recall, this past spring gave us very few days that matched that description. Old Man Winter re-emerged for several encores lasting through mid-April, and by the time he was finally escorted off the stage for the last time, the wildflowers were already bursting onto the scene, bringing an end to any of our woodland burning.

Checking our records over the past ten years, we find that NAP's burn season started later this spring than ever before, on March 29th. And 2007 is also on track to be the year with the fewest number of spring burn days, since we were only at four by the time of this writing, with little hope of adding many more. But the good news was that this year we were able to more fully exploit those few good opportunities to burn. Thanks to an army of enthusiastic volunteers at our first three burns, we were able to split into two teams and conduct simultaneous burns at two different natural areas. Thus, we were able to return fire to many more sites than we otherwise would have been able to during that cold, wet spring.

The other point worth making is this: despite NAP's enthusiasm for prescribed burning as a powerful restoration tool in our natural areas, there are some years where we just can't deploy that tool as frequently as we'd like. Does that mean we're forced to sit back and watch the buckthorn invade those natural areas that we couldn't burn? Well, it *would* if fire were our only tool to control these exotic shrubs. But fortunately, we have another tool that is not so dependent on Mother Nature sending us good weather. They're called "volunteers," and they've proven themselves to be nearly oblivious to bad weather! So if you're one of those folks who enjoys lopping exotic shrubs and battling other invasives, know that we need your help more than ever this year, as we try to make up for the lousy burn weather we had this spring. You'll find lots of opportunities to help listed in the stewardship calendar on pages 4 & 5. Hope to see you there!

-Dave Borneman, Natural Area Preservation Manager



NAP burn volunteers at Kuebler-Langford on March 29
Photo by Tim Furstnau



City of Ann Arbor
**Natural Area
Preservation**

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

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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Spreading Dogbane

by Harold Eyster

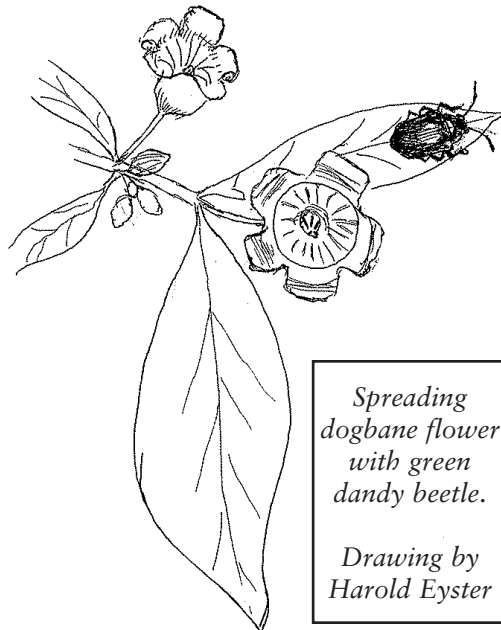
Last June, when I visited the small natural area near Barton Pond known as Foster, I encountered a blazing hill of delicate pink flowers. One-quarter of an inch long, with bell-shaped recurved lobes, white with delicate pink longitudinal veins on the inside, it was, by far, one of the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. The leaves were opposite, entire, broadly oval, paler and slightly hairy below, with milky sap.

Can you identify this native plant? Hint: it is in the Dogbane family (Apocynaceae). Sometimes called flytrap dogbane, honey bloom, wandering milkweed, or bitter-root, its most popular common name is spreading dogbane (*Apocynum androsaemifolium*). It is a perennial that grows 1 to 4 feet tall, with forking, spreading branches. The plants spread widely from horizontal rootstock, hence the common name. It grows in open woods, roadsides, thickets, stream banks, and meadows.

Although I did not see them, the fruit grow as pods in pairs and are 3 to 8 inches long in late fall. While you might confuse this plant with the intermediate dogbane, *Apocynum medium* (a hybrid between Indian-hemp [*Apocynum cannabinum*] and spreading dogbane, therefore the name), those flowers are usually white and lack recurved lobes. The root of the dogbane, which contains the poisonous cardiac glycoside apocynamarin, has been used as a tonic by native people. They also

used the dead stalk to make string and rope.

Bees, flies, moths, and butterflies are attracted to the flowers – particularly butterflies, which are the dogbane's "first choice." If any other insect, especially a fly, attempts to drink nectar from the dogbane flower, the fly's short tongue becomes wedged in the vice-like grip of the dogbane, and there it stays until it starves to death. This is the punishment it receives for stealing the butterfly's nectar. You can often see dead insects sticking out of the flowers, hence the alternate name, flytrap dogbane.



Spreading dogbane flower with green dandy beetle.

Drawing by Harold Eyster

Also look for the distinctive insect resident, a beautiful metallic beetle called the green dandy or dogbane beetle (*Chrysochus auratus*, formerly *Eunolpus auratus*). The adult is not golden, as the species name *auratus* implies, but is instead a shiny bright green with a coppery luster. Its larvae feed on the roots, and in July the foliage of spreading dogbane is covered with these beautiful beetles. To prevent themselves from being eaten by birds and the like, they have a trick of drawing in their legs and falling off the plant and into the grass. If you go to Foster this summer, look for the spreading dogbane and its friend, the green dandy!

13-year-old Harold Eyster has been a Breeding Bird Survey Volunteer for the last 3 years.

Stewardship Workday Series

With the input of weekend warrior volunteers and Park Stewards, we have developed a plan to address various aspects of ecological restoration. It is our hope that by focusing our restoration in the same park, week after week, we will develop stronger kinship with the restoration community, allow folks to see ecological change from their work through a change in season, and in the process create lasting bonds among each other and with the land itself.

This past spring, NAP Workday Coordinator Dana Wright led the Bird Hills Neighborhood Coalition Series. This dedicated group of volunteers pulled garlic mustard, improved trails, and watched as the spring wildflowers peeked up through last year's autumn leaves. This summer, we have a couple more series for you! At Furstenberg Nature Area, NAPper Billy Kirst and Park Steward Sarah Newman will lead the "Furstenberg Stewardship Party,"

while at Redbud Nature Area, Park Steward Ron Emaus, volunteer Joanna Myers, and NAPper Jason Frenzel will lead the "Redbud Redders."

We will witness the transformative power of restoration as spring gives way to summer. The last geraniums holding on so dearly will finally be succeeded by the growing goldenrods and joe-pye weeds. Gigantic Jack-in-the-Pulpit will start setting seed as the May-apples are producing their fruit. Before our eyes, the cool, beautiful spring will be swallowed by the explosive growth in the summer's heat.

Check out our stewardship calendar on pages 4 & 5 for specifics on the Furstenberg Stewardship Party and the Redbud Redders. We look forward to seeing you all out there!



Summer 2007 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

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

Workday orientations start promptly at listed times. Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes.


Minors must either be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form.

Contact NAP if a group you are involved with is interested in planning a volunteer stewardship event.

Our website is www.a2gov.org/nap

June

June 2, Saturday

Furstenberg Native Plant Garden 

9:00 am to 12:00 noon


Park Steward and Master Gardener Aunita Erskine will lead volunteers in sprucing up this wonderful native plant garden. Meet in the Furstenberg parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School. Workday orientation begins promptly at 9:00 am. A short nature walk will be held at the end of the workday, time permitting.

June 2, Saturday
Stapp Nature Area 

9:00 am to 12:00 noon

Free Snacks! And you'll get to help your local ecosystem. We'll be sprucing up last year's trails and looking for invasives to pull. You can park in the apartment complex parking lot at the intersection of Lancashire Drive and Tuebingen Parkway. Meet us by the sign at the park entrance.

June 2, Saturday

**Global Warming & Our Natural Areas
Matthaei Botanical Gardens,** 
1800 N Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor
10:00 am to 2:30 pm

While scientists agree that the climate is changing, there is still considerable uncertainty about the precise ecological impacts. This workshop features lectures by University of Michigan faculty, followed by a hike to consider issues in the field. Bring a brown bag lunch. Cost: \$10 for Stewardship Network or Matthaei Botanical Gardens members; \$15 for non-members. Register at www.stewardshipnetwork.org/register or call 734.996.3190.

June 2, Saturday

Leslie Woods Nature Area 

1:00 to 4:00 pm

Dame's rocket is an invasive that out-competes our native spring wildflowers. Help us tip the scales back in favor of natives! Meet us at the park entrance at the north end of Upland Drive, north of Plymouth Road.


June 9, Saturday

Early Bird Walk 

7:30 to 9:30 am

Free for all ages. Join City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong as she leads a walk to look for birds in Gallup Park and Furstenberg Nature Area. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at the paddleboat dock in Gallup, near the canoe livery.

June 9, Saturday

Furstenberg Stewardship Party 

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

We'll start with Furstenberg...and when we're finished with that- who knows? We may take on every park in town! Join this group of dedicated individuals. Each workday will include a botanically and ecologically informative hike. Bring a sack lunch and meet us in the parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School.

June 10, Sunday

Redbud Redders 

11:00 am to 1:00 pm

Want to meet your neighbors, enjoy the outdoors, and learn about prairie and woodland habitats? Come help us remove invasive herbs—dame's rocket and Canada thistle—so the natives can expand their hold. Meet at the entrance near Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street. Afterwards, we'll walk around to see some of the unique features of the park.

June 10, Sunday

Sunset Brooks Nature Area 

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

If you are looking for great folks to work with, this park has them! Join us in keeping up the trails in this little secluded getaway. Meet at the park entrance on Sunset Road, at the end of Brooks Street.


June 12, Tuesday

Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
Brueggers Bagels on N University Ave

7:30 to 8:30 am

Land restoration efforts often focus on returning areas to a pre-European settlement condition. Is this always the best goal? Does a changing global climate leave us with a moving target for restoration?

June 16, Saturday

Furstenberg Stewardship Party 

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

See June 9 calendar listing.

June 17, Sunday

Marshall Bird Walk 

7:30 to 9:30 am

City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong will lead a walk to look for woodland birds at Marshall Nature Area. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet in the parking lot off of Dixboro Road, north of Plymouth Road.


June 21, Thursday

Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
NEW Center, 1100 N Main St

12:00 noon to 1:00 pm

See June 12 Stewards' Circle.

June 23, Saturday


Furstenberg Stewardship Party 

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

See June 9 calendar listing.


August

June 30, Saturday

Lakeshore Ecology by Kayak 
106 Blind Lake Road, Gregory MI
9:00 am to 12:00 noon

Bring your own kayak or canoe and join botanist Ellen Elliott Weatherbee for a morning of gentle paddling at Blind Lake, Pinckney Recreation Area. We will learn about the plants and animals of lake edge ecosystems and discuss habitat management techniques. Bring a life jacket and a sack lunch. Cost: \$10 for Stewardship Network, Michigan Lakes and Streams Association, or Watershed Council members; \$15 for non-members. Register at www.stewardshipnetwork.org/register or call 734.996.3190.

June 30, Saturday


Furstenberg Stewardship Party 
10:00 am to 2:00 pm
See June 9 calendar listing or page 3 for more information.

July

July 1, Sunday


Redbud Redders 
11:00 am to 1:00 pm
Our baby plants need some TLC! We'll be weeding around our plantings from last year and adding a few more. Meet at the entrance near Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.

July 10, Tuesday


Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
Brueggers Bagels on N University Ave
7:30 to 8:30 am

How can we take care of our lakes and streams? If you own, or know someone who owns lakeside property, what plants should you encourage and which should you discourage? Can we mitigate damage done by jet skis and motor boats?

July 14, Saturday


Cranbrook Nature Area 
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
This neighborhood park needs some attention! We'll be sprucing up the trails for a few hours, and afterwards we'll go for a little nature hike. Meet in the Church of Christ parking lot at 2530 South Main Street.

July 15, Sunday


Huron River Day at Gallup Park 
9:00 am to 4:00 pm

The day will begin with a 5K run and one-mile fun run, followed by a dog walk. FREE festivities for the whole family include children's activities, river exhibits, live animals, live music, refreshments, and more! There will also be discounted canoe rentals. Don't miss this wonderful day of fun and celebration!


July 19, Thursday

Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
NEW Center, 1100 N Main St
12:00 noon to 1:00 pm
See July 10 Stewards' Circle.

July 21, Saturday

Hannah Nature Area 
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
Help us get rid of the invasives in this cute park! We'll be sprucing up the trails as well. Meet at the end of Bath Street, west of 7th Street (between Miller and Huron).


July 22, Sunday

Furstenberg Native Plant Garden 
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
Park Steward and Master Gardener, Aunita Erskine, will lead volunteers in sprucing up this wonderful native plant garden. Meet in the Furstenberg parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School. Workday orientation starts promptly at 9:00 am. A short nature walk will be held at the end of the workday, time permitting.

July 22, Sunday


Invasive Phragmites Management 
SE MI Land Conservancy Farm, 
8383 Vreeland Road, Superior Twp, MI
1:00 to 3:00 pm
Phragmites australis (common reed) increasingly threatens wetlands in our region. Presentations and discussion will help participants prevent Phragmites invasion through monitoring, planning, and safe application of herbicide. Cost: \$10 for Stewardship Network or Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy members; \$15 for non-members. Register at www.stewardshipnetwork.org/register or call 734.484.6565.

August 4, Saturday


Herbicide Wand Workshop 
Leslie Science Center,
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor
9:00 am to 12:00 noon

Ever wonder about the wands used by stewardship organizations to apply herbicide to those pesky stumps? We'll show you how to build one and supply you with the parts to build your own. Led by Jason Tallant, NAP Technician, and Jason Frenzel, NAP Outreach Coordinator. Cost: \$25 for Stewardship Network members; \$30 for non-members. Register at www.stewardshipnetwork.org/register or call 734.996.3266.


August 11, Saturday

Hollywood Nature Area 
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
These trails always need more chips! Help us spread them and also cut back the remaining invasive shrubs. Meet us on Sequoia Parkway near the intersection of Archwood Drive.


August 14, Tuesday

Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
Brueggers Bagels on N University Ave
7:30 to 8:30 am
What is a Natural Area? We all use the term, but do we actually agree on what it really means?


August 16, Thursday

Huron Arbor Stewards' Circle 
NEW Center, 1100 N Main St
12:00 noon to 1:00 pm
See August 14 Stewards' Circle

August 18, Saturday

Redbud Redders 
9:00 am to 12:00 noon
More plants!!! Help us plant more natives in a new area. Meet at the entrance near Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.

August 26, Sunday

Eberwhite Woods 
1:00 to 4:00 pm
Help spread the word; we need to keep our parks nice by cleaning up after our dogs and keeping them on leash! Meet us in the Eberwhite Elementary parking lot to help us post signs about forest ecology and dogs and also to pull up some invasives.

Park Focus: Swift Run Nature Area *Continued from page 1*

and it burns well – aiding in subsequent prescribed burns, which in turn help add strength to the ecosystem. This method has worked exceedingly well at Swift Run. Species such as prairie dock, Culver's-root, and ironweed have greatly increased. The number and density of aster species have also grown. This combination of shrub removal and prescribed fire has certainly saved these prairies and the species in them.

One of Dave's favorite stories to tell (I said I'd get back to Dave) is the story of a very rare orchid at Swift Run. This State-Threatened Species is one of the "poster children" for NAP's prescribed burn program. Prior to the shrub-in that happened over the 1980s, this orchid was spotted by botanists Mike Penskar and Tony Reznicek in Swift Run. But NAP was unable to re-locate it until we started

burning the site and removing shrubs. Now, thanks to NAP's restoration efforts, this itsy plant is no longer in immediate threat of competition from the shrub-dominated system which was taking over the orchid's ecosystem.

Thanks to volunteers from Youth Volunteer Corps (Ann Arbor YMCA), Girl Scouts, and two Park Stewards – AC Tanner and Rob Ackerly – for their help over the past few years. These folks have all spent numerous (if not countless) hours restoring Swift Run. The YVC and Park Stewards have all helped to remove invasives – protecting the prairies and the pockets of oak woodland. The Girl Scouts have assisted NAP in collecting native seed which was then spread at other nature areas – to help those ecosystems gain strength. Without the help of all these folks, Swift Run surely wouldn't be as healthy.

Staff Updates

hello...

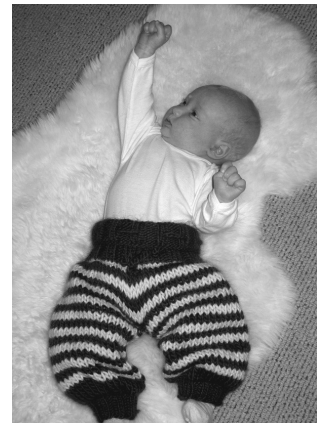
Sheara Cohen

New to the NAP crew, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to take a break from grad school to work outside, along knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers and staff, and to get to know Ann Arbor's natural areas. I just completed a master's degree in natural resource planning at University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment and am continuing with my Landscape Architecture degree. In school, I had the opportunity to study restoration ecology, plants, wetlands, and soils and am excited to continue to learn in the field. I discovered my love for restoration and field work while volunteering in riparian watershed restoration and apprenticing in organic agriculture in the Pacific Northwest while working as a community organizer. Long term, my interests are in riparian restoration, greenway planning, educational parks design, and water-sensitive development. In the meanwhile, I can't wait to meet many more NAPpers, participate in more prescribed burns, tear out invasives, and see the positive changes we can make to restore native plant communities.



A little bundle of NAPpy Joy

Adeline Reynolds-Tallant, born February 9th, 2007, is the newest addition to the NAP family. Daughter to Kim Reynolds, NAP volunteer, and Jason Tallant, NAP conservation crew leader, Adeline persevered through an epic delivery arriving at just over 8 lbs and a with head of a strawberry blonde hair (not sure where that came from). Soon you may see her attached to the hip or back of one of these two parental units out in the parks or around the town in Ypsilanti or Ann Arbor.



NAP Alumna



Kee Conduct

Kirstin "Kee" Conduct, NAP Technician from 1999-2001, is back from Tennessee and has just started working as an Environmental Scientist for Limno-Tech here in Ann Arbor. We'll try to recruit her back as a volunteer, so don't be surprised if you run into her smiling face at an upcoming NAP burn or workday!

NAPennings

Thank you...

- ♥ Big George's Camera for your donation
- ♥ U of M Engineering students for cutting shrubs and pulling garlic mustard at Fuller Park
- ♥ U of M EnAct members for pulling garlic mustard at Cedar Bend as part of Hands on the Planet

Workday Leader Training

In March, eight of NAP's Park Stewards joined our staff in our annual workday leader training. Some of these wonderful Stewards will be hosting their own stewardship workdays, and some will be co-leading workdays with NAP staff, thus greatly increasing our ability to "staff" workdays. This will lead to more restoration work being done and an increase in the sustainability of the work that NAP volunteers and staff are doing.

What is a Silvery Salamander?

This unusual all-female species is a hybrid between the Blue-spotted and Jefferson Salamanders. Sperm from related salamander species stimulates development of the eggs laid by females, but the male genes do not transfer to the offspring. This past spring, the single known population of Silvery Salamanders in Ann Arbor (discovered in 2005) successfully bred for the second year in a row! This unique and rare species will continue to be monitored and studied, so check back to learn more!



Silvery Salamander migrating to breeding pond.
Photo by David A. Mifsud

Woodcocks Breeding at Scarlett Mitchell

While preparing to burn in the old field at Scarlett Mitchell this past spring, the NAP Burn Crew came upon an American Woodcock on her nest. Park Stewards Manfred and Judy Schmidt, with help from volunteers, have worked hard to restore the formerly overgrown shrub thicket here to a more meadow-like habitat that Woodcocks obviously approve of! The crew adjusted their burn to provide the Woodcock plenty of room to carry on with her nesting.

Birds and Windpower

City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong is working with the Washtenaw County Wind Project group to provide them with information about the impacts of wind turbines on birds. This project is an effort to examine the feasibility of providing wind-generated electricity for city and county residents and businesses. For more information, visit www.ewashtenaw.org/wind.

Huron River Drive Improvement Alternatives

The City of Ann Arbor is studying alternatives for improving Huron River Drive from North Main Street to Bird Road. In April, the City held a public meeting and closed the drive for a morning of guided tours and discussion with the project team. Visit www.a2gov.org/PublicServices/ProjectManagement/eng.html for project updates and a summary of public comments.

Onder Acquisition

The City has acquired a 4.25-acre park property between M-14 and Hilldale Drive. It is adjacent to the non-developed Huron Parkway right-of-way that runs east-west between Pontiac Trail and M-14, and via this route connects directly to Leslie Park. Small natural areas such as this have greater ecological value when they connect to a larger system. NAP looks forward to getting to know this property more intimately and hopes you can do the same.

Mayor's Greenfair

The 7th Annual Ann Arbor Green Fair is fast approaching! This year's fair will be held on Friday, June 15th, from 6:00 to 9:00 pm. This is a great opportunity to learn about local environmental groups and activities. Four blocks downtown around the intersection of Main and Washington are closed for the event, with one block devoted to alternative fuel vehicles.

Huron River Day

Kicking off at Gallup Park with a 5K run, a one-mile fun run, a dog walk, the Mayor's Cup Canoe Race, and the Community Canoe Challenge, Huron River Day will be Sunday, July 15. Other activities include free canoe and kayak rentals, children's activities, river exhibits, a Classic Small Boat Show, fishing, birds of prey, music, food, and ice cream. For more information, visit www.a2gov.org/hrd.

Natural Areas Conference

The 34th Annual Natural Areas Conference will be held at the Cleveland Marriott at Key Center, October 9–12. The theme is *Some Assembly Required: Preserving Nature in a Fragmented Landscape*. Symposia, contributed oral and poster presentations, and field trips will explore this theme, as well as other topics related to ecosystem conservation, ranging from invasive species to fire ecology to global climate change. For more information, visit www.naturalarea.org/07conference.

So Why Study Mudpuppies?

by David Mifsud

This winter, NAP is planning to kick off our newest monitoring program. Designed to study our misunderstood and underappreciated aquatic salamander, the Mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus*), the “Mudpuppy Monitoring Program” (MPMP) will identify locations within the City of Ann Arbor that potentially support this species. We'll work with trained volunteers to assess sites for species presence, distribution, and health. This data is invaluable in measuring water quality and ecosystem health, assessing species richness of City Natural Areas, and developing effective and appropriate restoration and maintenance plans.

So why are we studying Mudpuppies? Well, although the Mudpuppy is historically known to occur within Ann Arbor, no recent studies have been conducted to assess this species' status and distribution within the City. Because the Mudpuppy is fully aquatic, active year round, and a gill breather, it is susceptible to both long-term and short-term changes in the environment. Thus, it can serve as an important indicator of ecosystem health. The recent die-offs of this species along Lake Erie (believed to be linked to Botulism E), as well as its known sensitivity to environmental pollutants, make it an excellent candidate to study in Ann Arbor.

Mudpuppies are found in medium to large rivers and lakes. They take refuge under sunken objects such as rocks, logs, and other debris. They have been found at depths of 70 feet in Lake Michigan. Longevity data suggests a life span of 25-30 years. Mudpuppies are a generalist predator and will eat anything they can catch. Crustaceans, insects, worms, fish, fish eggs, salamanders, crayfish, and carrion are all reported foods. Mudpuppies have a lateral line sensory system consisting of pressure, motion, and electroreceptor cells on the body which are used for locating prey (and predator avoidance). They rely heavily upon olfactory cues to find their prey.

So, if they are active year round, why do we look for them in late fall or early winter? This is Mudpuppy breeding season, during which time they can be found along the shores of rivers, ponds, and lakes when water temperatures are cool enough. This makes sampling for the species much easier.

Stay tuned to the NAP newsletter for more information about mudpuppies and how you can get involved in the Mudpuppy Monitoring Program. If you are interested in participating in MPMP or any of our volunteer amphibian monitoring programs, call the NAP office.

Summer 2007

Natural Area Preservation News



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