

Natural Area Preservation News

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

Volume 17, Number 4

Winter 2012

Black Pond Woods: A Fine Winter Hike and More

by Anne Rueter and NAP staff

Make no mistake: after the autumn's excited squirrels and humming insects give way to the chill stillness of winter, life goes on in below-ground tunnels, tree cavities, and under dead leaves and snow in Black Pond



Downy Woodpecker

Woods (BPW). If winter delivers even a light dusting of snow, a walk in BPW can be rewarding, with easy to spot wildlife tracks, scat, and meal leftovers. Sometimes it's easy to spot faint pathways made as animals search their territories for food.

BPW is a 34-acre nature area located adjacent to the Leslie Science and Nature Center. The City was able to purchase and preserve the land after citizens spoke out against a proposed housing development. "Every time I go for a walk or to work in BPW I am forever grateful to that committed, nature-loving group of neighbors who mobilized to preserve

these beautiful woods years ago," says Ted Hejka, NAP park steward for BPW.

Snow or no snow, the trails through the woods offer a great chance to imagine the winter lives of the birds,

amphibians, and mammals here. They survive winter in some intriguing ways.

Some, like the woodchuck, sink into true hibernation. Others, like squirrels and deer, forage daily for food. Many life forms, such as BPW's celebrated amphibians, go into a slower mode, but are occasionally active throughout winter.

BPW's namesake, Black Pond, is worth a visit any time of year. The pond got its name because tannin and humic acid from the forest leaves turn its waters black. Fed only by runoff, it is less than one-quarter acre in size.

Black Pond is a vernal pond, which means it dries up into a leaf-covered mucky depression by late summer most years. It was formed by an ice chunk which slowly melted here after

the Wisconsin glacier that covered

Ann Arbor retreated some

14,000 years ago.

Dry in winter or frozen

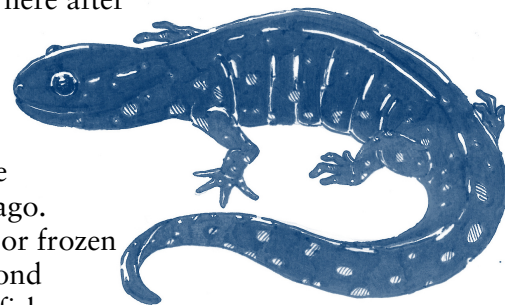
solid, Black Pond

can't support fish.

The pond is excellent

habitat for spring peepers,

American toads, and other amphibians. Here they can carry out their life cycles without the threat of fish predators, which often eat amphibian eggs and young



Blue-spotted salamander

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Coordinator's Corner

Positive Changes

For much of the summer and early fall, the view out my office window has been one of apparent chaos, with the grounds of the Leslie Science and Nature Center swarming with back-hoes, front-end-loaders, and other heavy equipment digging, piling, scraping and re-sculpting the landscape around the buildings. Frankly, it was an ugly mess, with dirt piles and construction fencing everywhere. It looked like a construction site, which in fact it was. The project: creating barrier-free trail access between the buildings and out to the raptor enclosures. It was a worthwhile project, and one that will greatly improve the site in the long-run. But we had to endure an ugly phase in the process, before we reached the desired improved outcome.

This is true of many things in life - difficult transitions are often necessary before we get to the desired final outcome. I could point to many examples in my own life where this was true. But I'd like to focus here on how we often see this play out in our ecological restoration efforts. Years ago, we worked with a graduate student from UM who was looking at the public's perceptions of various landscapes or ecological states. He showed people different photos of various stages of the ecological restoration process: buckthorn thickets, brush piles, cut stumps, recently burned areas, restored oak woodlands, etc... His findings indicated that although people generally don't like to look at cut stumps, brush piles, and recently burned areas, they *do* like to see the final restored oak woodlands, prairies, and other native ecosystems.

This information is useful in several ways. It is a good reminder that people generally don't like to see the *process* of restoration, even if they appreciate the *outcome* of the restoration efforts. At NAP, we try hard to quickly get rid of the brush piles, cut the stumps low so they are aren't as visible, and time our burns so treated areas green up quickly. We also take extra steps to keep the public informed about what we're doing, and why - fully aware that if people understand that, they're more likely to support what we're doing.

So the next time you walk past our brush piles or cut stumps, remember that you are seeing "restoration in progress." That site may look ugly at the moment, but it is in the process of being transformed, just like the yard outside my office window this year. Don't let that visit be your final impression of the site. You owe it to yourself to return to that same natural area a year later and see for yourself the positive changes that have occurred there! Take a friend along on that return visit, and tell him/her how much the area has changed, for the better! And then the two of you might be motivated to get involved in future volunteer efforts to continue making these positive changes in all of our natural areas.

~ Dave Borneman
Deputy Manager of Parks and Recreation Services -
Volunteerism and Natural Area Preservation



CITY OF ANN ARBOR
**Natural Area
Preservation**

A unit of the City of Ann Arbor
Community Services Area, Parks and
Recreation Services

*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

Website: www.a2gov.org/NAP

www.facebook.com/ann.arbor.NAP

www.twitter.com/a2NAP

Manager:

David Borneman

Technician:

Lara Treemore Spears

Inventory Staff:

Dea Armstrong, Ornithologist

David Mifsud, Herpetologist

Chris McCreedy, Data Specialist

Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator:

Tina Roselle

Outreach Assistants:

Christine Chessler-Stull

Renée Hytinen, Adopt-A-Park

Yousef Rabhi, Workday Coordinator

Sara Jackson

Laura Mueller

Dana Novak

Toyoko Kamada, Intern

Technician:

Jason Tallant

Conservation Workers:

Alex Aizenman

Robb Johnston

Rachel Maranto

Rob Schubert

Jane Sherry

Josh Goldman, Intern

*Natural Area Preservation is funded by
the voter-approved 2007-2012
Park Maintenance & Capital
Improvements Millage.*

What It Means to be a Steward of City Parks

By Christine Chessler

One of the distinguishing aspects of the Park Steward program is that Park Stewards are empowered to work *independently* on projects that are jointly established and agreed upon by the steward and NAP staff. The majority of individuals who choose to become a Park Steward are not seeking a one-time volunteer experience, but are rather looking for a long-term opportunity to make a difference for local ecology and their community. Many of the stewardship activities that Park Stewards decide to focus on are a blend of their personal interests coupled with the ecological needs of the park. Typically you can observe one of our Park Stewards removing buckthorn in the fall, leading a garlic mustard workday in the spring, and being the “eyes and ears” of a park all year long!

Many of our parks have one steward; however an increasing number of parks are benefitting from “Stewardship Teams.” For instance, Dicken Woods Nature Area has a team of four Park Steward volunteers augmented by a group of dedicated park neighbors! The formation of such groups has happened quite organically, sometimes rising up around a concern such as a threat to a natural landscape. Long after the threat has subsided, groups continue to bring their talents, expertise, and passion together for the good of the park.

Although stewards may choose to take on their own projects, this does not mean that they are completely alone in their volunteer venture. NAP offers ongoing support and educational resources such as Workday Leader Trainings, monthly Steward Circle meetings, and assistance with herbicide certification to those interested. Currently NAP has 63 Park Steward volunteers who care in 37 different nature areas and parks.

Are you interested in joining this dedicated bunch of volunteers? To learn more about NAP's Park Steward program and how you can get involved, please contact us at NAP@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.



Inventory Information Technology

By Lara Treemore Spears

Since 1993 when our program started, email has become a daily part of life, people enter and receive data on their phones, and personal expectations have increased dramatically about the type and quality of information readily available at the touch of a button. NAP's early years included an intensive effort to inventory the plants that live in all the park natural areas, and the birds, butterflies, frogs and toads that live in selected habitats. Since then, our staff and volunteers have added salamanders and turtles to our annual survey efforts and have also occasionally surveyed for mudpuppies (although one has yet to be found!).

These efforts by over 335 observers have resulted in a lot of data over the years: 32,868 plant observations, 36,252 bird observations, 14,920 frog and toad

observations, 15,730 other amphibian and reptile observations, and counting. We think this is an impressive catalog, and one that we rely upon for our daily work.

We're proud to say that NAP has continued to update the way it tracks and interacts with its inventory data throughout the technological changes of the past 19 years. The amount and type of information, as well as level of detail, make it challenging to organize and maintain our databases. Volunteers who have participated in more than one of our biological inventories know that they must employ different survey methods depending on the type of animal, and the resulting data must be organized and stored accordingly. Unavoidable software updates can create

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Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

Winter 2012-2013

December

December 11, Tuesday
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 the local nature? The Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor cluster meets monthly for an informal discussion. Free and open to anyone interested. **Topic: New Invasives-** The latest species to watch-out for.

January

January 8, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels—709 N University Ave
7:30 am to 8:30 am
See December 11. Topic: TBA

January 21, Monday
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service
Furstenberg Nature Area
1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
MLK, Jr. Day of Service is an opportunity to make your day "off" a day "on" for community service. Help remove invasive shrubs from the Furstenberg wetlands. Meet us in the parking lot off Fuller Rd., across from Huron High School. For more information go to www.mlkday.org

January 26, Saturday
Citizen Pruner Volunteer Training
Wheeler Service Center
9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Help nurture and prune newly planted city trees. Don't worry if you are new to tree care, we will provide information and tools. Training is both indoor and outdoor. Please register by Jan. 24, troselle@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.

February

February 12, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels—709 N University Ave
7:30 am to 8:30 am
See December 11. Topic: TBA

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.

February 26, Tuesday
Controlled Burn Public Presentation
AADL - Malletts Creek Branch
3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway
7:00 pm to 8:30 pm
Learn about why we conduct controlled burns and ask questions. Open for all interested in why and how we burn. Recommended if you plan on helping with our burn crew for the first time this season.

February 27, Wednesday
Controlled Burn Volunteer Training
Cobblestone Farm - 2781 Packard Rd.
12:00 pm to 5:00 pm
This training is REQUIRED for new burn volunteers. Burns take place Monday through Friday afternoons. Registration is required by Feb. 25, NAP@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.

March

March 3, Sunday
Salamander Inventory Kickoff
Leslie Science & Nature Center
Nature House - 1831 Traver Rd.
10:00 am to 12:00 pm
If you have some identification experience and a willingness to get muddy, join us. Surveying is done

three to six times in early spring at multiple sites. Each round takes a few hours. Please register by Mar. 1, NAP@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.

March 3, Sunday
Frog & Toad Inventory Kickoff
Leslie Science & Nature Center
Nature House - 1831 Traver Rd.
1:30 pm to 3:00 pm
Help monitor frog and toad populations in the parks. Learn their calls, then go out to listen. No previous experience required. Family-friendly. Please register by Mar. 1, NAP@a2gov.org or 734-794-6627.

March 12, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels—709 N University Ave
7:30 am to 8:30 am
See December 11. Topic: TBA

March 16, Saturday
Photomonitoring Kickoff
Leslie Science & Nature Center
Leslie House - 1831 Traver Rd.
10:00 am to 11:30 am
Join us capture photo points in nature areas each season to better observe the restoration process over time. All you need is your own digital camera. Please register by Mar. 14, NAP@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.

March 16, Saturday
Workday Leader Training
Leslie Science & Nature Center
Leslie House - 1831 Traver Rd.
12:00 pm to 5:30 pm
If you are interested in helping lead workday events, join-us to learn how to make it a safe, fun, and productive event. Minimum age of 18. Please register by March 14, NAP@a2gov.org or 734.794.6627.

Volunteer of the Year: Community High School

By Sara E. Jackson

Volunteers are the driving force behind the incredible amount of work NAP is able to accomplish each year in our City's natural areas. Every single volunteer makes a difference, but we particularly love it when larger groups contact us to help. It was an incredible opportunity when Ann Arbor's Community High School (CHS) first called us in the spring of 2010 asking if they could bring half of their students out to volunteer. Not only was it an opportunity to get a lot of work accomplished, it was also an opportunity to get a lot of young individuals outdoors and learning more about what it takes to care for our nature areas.

Since then, CHS has continued to volunteer with NAP once or twice a year and now brings their entire school! It is because of this amazing and inspired effort, as well as the continually evolving excitement from the students for the event, that NAP is thrilled to honor CHS as our 2012 Volunteer of the Year.

CHS math teacher and primary coordinator at the school for this recurring event, Marci Tuzinsky, explained, "We knew we wanted to try something new and get the students outdoors helping nature and the community. We explored many ideas. The first year we sent half of the students to work with NAP and the other half were spread around at different elementary schools to do yard work. With that many sites and different contacts at all of the locations it was a logistical challenge. We didn't know NAP could take our whole group. When we learned we could bring the



whole group the next autumn it was a great relief. NAP really knows how to organize these types of activities!"

The following autumn 360 students from CHS were sent to ten different nature areas and put in 960 volunteer hours. They walked and rode city buses to get to their sites. Many trails were mulched and thousands of invasive shrubs were cut. It was an overwhelming success, and the fledgling partnership was solidified. Now, four events with CHS later, the logistics continue to get easier on both sides and the positive outcomes continue to flourish. In the spring of 2012, CHS pulled a staggering four tons of garlic mustard and dames rocket!

The students really enjoy it, too. Several students agreed to be interviewed and their comments are a true showcase of pride for their efforts, excitement for the out-of-school learning and bonding experience, and an appreciation for the beautiful nature Ann Arbor has to offer (*see below*).

Congratulations to Community High School for being selected as the 2012 Volunteer of the Year! The entire NAP staff applauds each and every one of you for your time, energy and inspiring positivity. Half of NAP's mission is to restore and protect Ann Arbor's natural areas, and the other half is to foster an environmental ethic among its citizens. CHS has proven itself to be the perfect partner for both parts of the mission. Working with young citizens with such motivation serves as an inspiration for us all.

What CHS Students Enjoy about Volunteering with NAP

Joris von Moltke, Senior, "It is rewarding that we're doing something good. It's not a regular day at school and that's cool. We can still hang-out AND accomplish something positive. All of the activities are fun, but seeing the bags and bags of garlic mustard pile-up and helping mulch paths is most satisfying to me. Instant gratification. It makes me realize how crazy beautiful our parks are, and the Huron River. I feel when we help clear it of invasive plants, we help beautify it for everyone."

Cooper DePriest, Senior, "I love to revisit where we have worked. Helping together on a common cause really makes it fun. It's such a great bonding event for our school."

Isaac Scobey-Thal, Sophomore, "It's a change of scenery for student bonding. I got to know different people. I like the process. It's satisfying and not just a pointless team building activity, but really

something we can see and feel accomplishment about. It's a very rewarding feeling to look at the before and after. I would encourage everyone to do more for the environment. I feel it's a very crucial part of our era."

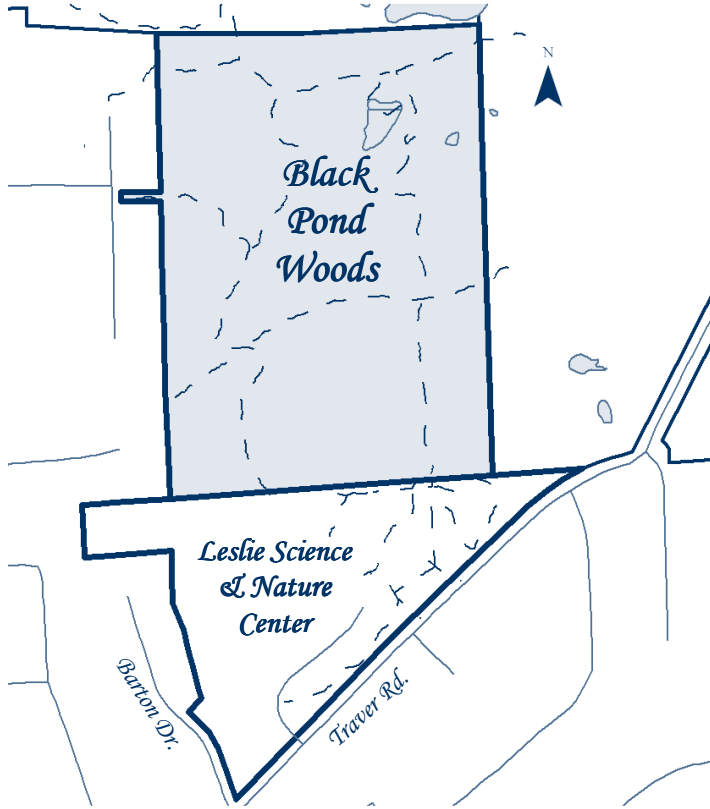
Anyse Malcolm, Junior, "Volunteering together helps us have more respect for each other. I enjoyed helping mulch a playground in my neighborhood. It helps make it a safer place for the kids."

Dennis Carter, Senior, "I really enjoy helping our community. I like pulling garlic mustard the best. The process of weeding is rewarding."

Jason Talley, Senior, "I use the trails regularly. It's great to take friends with me and share with them what I helped do to make the trails better. All of the schools should do it!"

Black Pond Woods Nature Area

Continued from page 1



Black Pond Woods is adjacent to the Leslie Science and Nature Center. Turn north onto Barton Dr. from Plymouth Rd. and then east onto Traver Rd.

in year-round ponds. That's good news for amphibian populations.

Most amphibians and reptiles become inactive in late fall and winter. "They do not undergo a true hibernation," says City Herpetologist David Mifsud. "Some burrow into the ground, while others rest near the surface hidden under leaf litter. In many cases amphibians and reptiles can be active underground during fall and winter," he says.

BPW is also an excellent site for bird watching in the winter. Cooper's hawks and eastern screech owls are known to nest in BPW. A Cooper's hawk nest is visible from the longer trail loop on the west side of the woods. "It won't be active until spring and then only if the Cooper's decides to reuse the nest," says Dea Armstrong, City Ornithologist.

There is a nice variety of smaller birds, too. Armstrong says to look for downy, red-bellied and hairy woodpeckers, as well as white-breasted nuthatches, tufted titmice, and black-capped chickadees. Other

bird species you may find here are northern cardinal, blue jay, European starling, cedar waxwing, house finch, American goldfinch, house sparrow, and sometimes eastern bluebird, Carolina wren and American robin.

Year-round, BPW is a beautiful location and the restoration efforts here have been extensive. "The transformation that this park has undergone over the last 15 years has been nothing short of amazing, thanks to the efforts of Dave Borneman, the NAP staff and crew, and the army of volunteers who have worked to remove the many nonnative plants that have been strangling the diversity of life in these woods," says Hejka.

The annual Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count, led by the Washtenaw Audubon Society, may include a count this year at BPW if enough volunteers show interest. Contact Michael Kielb, makielb@comcast.net, if you're interested. Find out more at <http://washtenawaudubon.org/annarbortcbc.php>

Inventory

(cont. from page 3)

challenges for keeping data entry processes up-to-date, but also create opportunities, such as the ability to display and analyze biological information geographically.

New opportunities to share our data with national and regional databases such as the Michigan Herp Atlas (www.mihherpatlas.org) and eBird (<http://ebird.org>) have resulted in new opportunities for staff and volunteers alike, as we dive into questions about how and where the data should be stored and entered. What is the best way to make the data useful to all, but still protect the locations of animals and plants that may be vulnerable to collection? How can NAP achieve the best data management efficiency while still having the flexibility to report which parks contain which species, or analyze the data collected by a single observer? As we grapple with these questions, we invite both volunteers and staff to take on special projects relating to data management. We hope you are as excited as we are about the biological inventory information in our parks!

NAPpenings

Thank you...

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

CHS Group, L.L.C.
Concordia University
EMU Circle K
EMU GREEN student organization
Greenhills School 7th Grade
Lutheran Church District Jr. High Church Gathering
Michigan Community Scholars
Pioneer High School Interact Club
Skyline High School Interact Club
UM Alpha Pi Mu
UM Asian Pacific American Law Students Assoc.
UM CSE Scholars
UM Indian American Student Association
UM Law School
UM Phi Sigma Rho
UM Sigma Alpha Lambda
UM Sigma Chi
UM Theta Xi
UM Triangle Fraternity

Thank you...

REI, Trader Joe's, City of Ann Arbor Golf Courses, Leslie Science and Nature Center, Children's Hand's-On Museum, Downtown Home and Garden, and Starbuck's for donating door prizes, coupons, and potluck items for NAP's annual Volunteer Appreciation Potluck.



Turtle Relocation

As part of the Traver Creek Restoration Project through the City-owned Leslie Park Golf Course, turtles were relocated from the two inline detention basins on Traver Creek in the Golf Course and placed in a third pond with temporary retention fencing around it. NAP staff and volunteers live-trapped and

caught 17 turtles over the course of 3 weeks. Several of these were large snapping turtles estimated to be 60-70 years old! Many thanks to all of the volunteers who helped!

Staff Updates

Hello...



Chris McCreedy

I graduated from the U M's School of Natural Resources & the Environment in 1998. I had focused on botany and forest ecology, yet two days after graduation I drove to New Mexico to look for Bell's Vireo nests. The desert rocked my world, and I have worked on birds out West ever since, in Marin County (just north of San Francisco), the eastern Sierra Nevada, throughout the Sonoran and Mojave Deserts, Sonora, and Antarctica. A poet and her MFA program have brought me back to Ann Arbor, and I am excited to help the NAP program however I can during my return.

Congratulations...



Christine Chessler was married on October 15th, 2012 and is now Christine Chessler-Stull! NAP staffer Jason Tallant officiated the ceremony. Best wishes to Christine and Ricky!



Big Green Birding Year

By Dea Armstrong



Dark-eyed junco

Thinking and acting “locally” and “being green” is something many who read this newsletter are all about. This, of course, includes birders and members of our volunteer Breeding Bird Survey team. However, unfortunately for the environment, most birders will *drive* to the next “good

bird” (sometimes across the state or farther!). In 2008, some Ontario birdwatchers challenged birders to minimize the greenhouse gases generated by car trips and to start concentrating on viewing wildlife locally and travelling by human power alone to do so. That challenge resulted in the concept of a Big Green Birding Year (BGBY, pronounced “big-bee”), where a birder keeps a list of all the bird species she has seen in one year without use of an internal combustion engine to get to the bird from one’s home.

While one approach to this would be to pick a nearby local patch (like your neighborhood park or natural area) and bird it regularly for a year, longtime NAP volunteer Jacco Gelderloos decided he still wanted to

keep a broader Washtenaw County list, so he dusted off his bike and hit the road starting in January 2011. By the end of 2011, he had ridden his bike 2565 miles to find birds in Washtenaw County and ended up with a total of 228 species seen in Washtenaw County. 234 is the all time record for folks who have used their vehicles to take them to any Washtenaw County bird, so Jacco’s 228 is most impressive! (Roughly 320 species of bird are regularly seen in the whole state of Michigan). Surely a mild winter helped out but so did Jacco’s interest in his local patch, Scarlett-Mitchell Woods and nature area.

This reminds us all that we can enjoy our local environs and really “take some time to spend time” close to home. So check out a nature area *near* you. You can keep a list of birds you see or even frogs, toads and turtles that you find. Scarlett-Mitchell has a completely walkable frog and toad survey route! Your bird sightings can be recorded on eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird>) and herp sightings can go into the Michigan Herp Atlas (<http://www.miherpatlas.org>).

Winter 2012

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Ann Arbor, MI 48105
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