

CENTER

2017 SPRING FISHING REPORT

# WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES

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- **Learn how ranchers partner with DNR to control invasives**
- **Discover the wonder of Woodland Dunes**
- **Kids invent a Wren-i-gade box for bluebirds!**

**TAKE A WALK**  
ON WISCONSIN'S WILD SIDE

# Back in the day

## All that remains

Story and photos by Len Harris

A couple years back while trout fishing I stumbled on an old abandoned homestead way back in the boonies in rural Crawford County. I typically fished this stretch in September when the leaves were still on the trees. This particular outing was in early March. The trees were barren and snow was still everywhere. The world looks much different in early March.

The trout stream I fish had a large pool with flat rocks at the top of the pool. I thought the flat rocks looked almost man-made, like a platform. The stream was shallow and fast-flowing down to the flat rocks where it then widened and deepened.

My first thought was the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources had done some work there, but after a little examination of the surrounding area, this was the only structure and it looked out of place.

I did some more exploring and saw a structure about 80 yards from the stream. I had fished this stretch numerous times before, but the foliage had hidden the structure from me in the past.

As I walked up to the monolithic structure, it looked very out of place. There were no roads nearby. I tried to guess how old it was; about 50 yards away was another structure. I wasn't sure what it was at first but after examining it and the surrounding area, I decided it was a smokehouse. I had stumbled on an old abandoned homestead. I had fished this area numerous times in the past and not seen it because of the leaves.

The flat rocks on the stream and the large pool below them were for bathing and washing clothes. This place was remote and had some rock bluffs that cradled the home and its occupants. The discovery piqued my curiosity and I needed to know the history behind these seemingly ancient ruins.

Back home, I looked at a plat map, found the closest landowners and paid them a visit. They were the caretakers of the place for the family who owned it and who camped and deer-hunted on the



A century ago, a family of five from Chicago built a homestead on the banks of a remote Crawford County trout stream. The current owners hunt the land and use the old fireplace to gather and share hunting stories from years past.

property. The caretakers knew some of the history of the place. Later that year, my wife and I visited the site when the owners were there deer hunting.

The owners had a fire in the old open hearth and were telling deer-hunting tales from years past. The history of the old homestead was here, there and everywhere. Each person around the fire added a tidbit to the story. Some of the reporting, I suspect, was romanticized and embellished through the years.

We learned that the homestead was built in 1917 by a family who moved up to rural Wisconsin from Chicago. There were five grown children in the family, besides mother and father. All of the family members helped build the hearth and smokehouse with rocks and bricks they brought on wagons.

The family built on the site because the limestone bluffs made an excellent wind break. They liked the stream nearby, but were careful not to build too close to it due to spring floods. The stream supplied clean water for drinking and brook trout they smoked in their smokehouse. A smokehouse was a necessity back in those days. There was no electricity and if they wanted to make it through the winter they needed to cure their fish and venison to keep through the Wisconsin winter.

As my wife and I sat at this open-hearth meeting, I remember her saying she could almost smell the hearty meals being cooked in a big black cast iron pot on the fire from years ago. She

admired the stonework and visualized the entire family making the structure almost 100 years ago.

Almost simultaneously we both asked the same question: "What happened to the family who built these structures?"

We were told that in late September 1918 a cold snap had hit the area. The father worried that winter was coming early and he didn't have enough smoked meat for winter. He needed to go hunting to stock up.

The father was gone for five days hunting. He camped and hunted and was bringing back the meat he had harvested during his outing. He walked into the log cabin to find all five of his children and wife bedridden. They had caught the Spanish Flu. The illness was fatal and the entire family died; the father was the only survivor. He abandoned the homestead in October 1918, went west and was never heard from again.

The Spanish Flu killed about 8,500 people in Wisconsin that year. Because of the deaths due to the flu, the homestead was considered toxic by the locals and sat empty for almost five years. Eventually it was used for many purposes through the years, even as a speak-easy during Prohibition. As time went by, the cabin decayed and fell in ruins. The stonework and the tale of the family from Chicago are all that remain.

Len Harris is an avid trout angler and photographer and writes from his home in Richland Center.

Back in those days a smokehouse was a necessity to cure fish and venison to keep through the winter.



## WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES

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PHOTO BY JOSH HAROLDSON

**BACK COVER:** A marsh marigold finds refuge in the eddy of a moss-covered boulder at Bradley Creek Swamp Conifers State Natural Area in Portage County. For more information about the State Natural Areas Program visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "SNA."

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PARTY HENRY

EXPLORE THE BEST OF WISCONSIN ON A NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION FIELD TRIP.

Christine Tanzer

It's the perfect time to get a little wild and venture outside to explore more of what makes Wisconsin special. With DNR professionals and knowledgeable leaders at the helm, there is so much to experience and so many places to explore. From bogs and frogs to birds and butterflies, from fish and bats to lichens and owls — we will see it up close and learn in depth. Whether it's hiking, paddling, biking or pontoon cruising, we will take you to the most diverse and interesting places to learn about prairies, savannas, rivers and even old growth forests. Join us in exploring the best of Wisconsin!

Natural Resources Foundation

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a nonprofit organization founded in 1986. It secures private funding for our state's highest conservation priorities. The Foundation also manages the Wisconsin Conservation Endowment, through which individuals and groups can create permanent funding for the places, species or conservation issues of most concern to them. The Wisconsin Conservation Endowment comprises more than 80 endowment funds with assets of more than \$6 million. The Foundation's newest initiative, in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources, is the Cherish Wisconsin Outdoors Fund, where individuals and businesses can give now so that our state fisheries, parks, wildlife areas and state natural areas can be cared for forever. Learn more at CherishWisconsin.org. Offering Field Trips is central to the Foundation's mission to connect generations to the wonders of Wisconsin's lands, waters and wildlife through conservation, education, engagement and giving. Of course, the trips are also a whole lot of fun! Become a member or donate to the Foundation at WisConservation.org or call 866-264-4096 for more information.

Register online: WisConservation.org

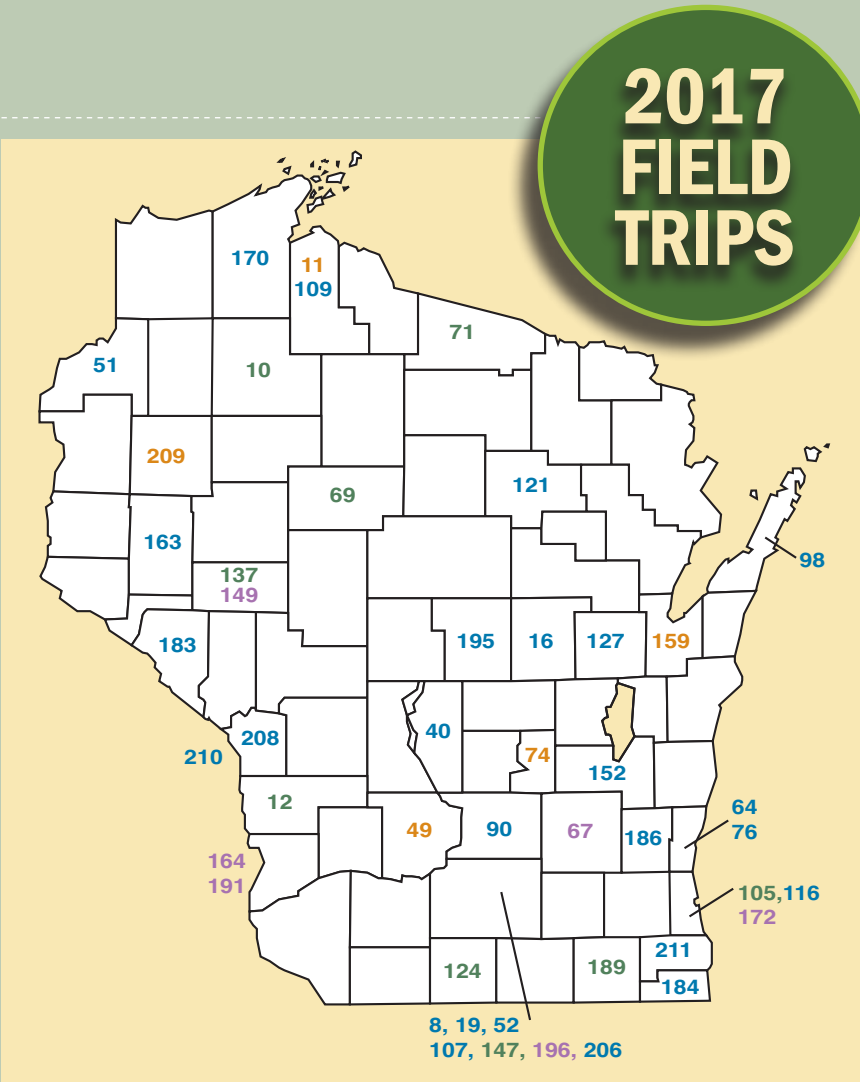
Christine Tanzer is the Field Trips coordinator for the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

EASY AS 1, 2, 3

- 1 PICK YOUR FIELD TRIPS**  
Trips are color-coded to provide information about physical demands, from easy to extreme. Each trip has a registration fee listed; some are fundraisers to support conservation or have an additional fee for equipment rental. Trips fill quickly, so check the Foundation's website (WisConservation.org) for current availability.
- 2 BECOME A MEMBER OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION OF WISCONSIN.**  
Field Trips are only open to members of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and their guests. You can become a member at a discounted rate of just \$15 per family as part of your online registration or become a member online anytime at WisConservation.org. Your membership fee supports conservation projects across the state.
- 3 REGISTER FOR YOUR TRIPS AT WISCONSERVATION.ORG.**  
Click on the "Register for Field Trips" link. Enter the passcode JoinNRF to receive your discounted membership. You may register for up to four trips and bring up to five guests. The Foundation does not accept phone or email registrations.

Approximately two weeks before each of your trips, you will receive an email with details and driving directions. Then it's time to get outdoors and get to know Wisconsin. **Trips will fill FAST, so sign up in April for best availability.**


**QUESTIONS?**  
Visit the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's website at WisConservation.org, call toll-free 866-264-4096 or email FieldTrips@WisConservation.org.



For a complete list of trips, visit WisConservation.org.

The color of the trip title indicates the physical demand level of the trip.

- 1** Accessible to people with walking disabilities
- 2** Easy, short hike on level terrain
- 3** Average hike with some hills
- 4** Steeper terrain, long hike or challenging hike

**Child-friendly** trips are identified with this symbol:   
Children must be accompanied by an adult.


**Questions?** Call toll-free 866-264-4096; or email: FieldTrips@WisConservation.org.

Only a selection of trips is listed here. There are over 150 MORE Field Trips in the lineup that span the entire state. View trips and register online at WisConservation.org

**8. TOUR THE USGS NATIONAL WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER**  
See where critical science comes to life! Tour the National Wildlife Health Center, a biomedical research facility conducting field and lab work to identify and assess diseases in wildlife populations. Learn the fascinating ecological relationships leading to diseases and how methods are developed to prevent and control them. Wednesday, April 26, 1-4:30 p.m. Madison, Dane Co. Leaders: Scott Craven and Chris Brand Limit: 25 Cost: \$15 per person

**10. SNAPSHOT WISCONSIN: WOODLAND TRAIL CAMERAS**  
Venture through spring woodland wildflowers to see trail cameras that are part of Snapshot Wisconsin, a DNR program to monitor wildlife year-round using trail cameras that volunteer citizens install on their own land. Learn how trail cameras on your land can help provide important data for wildlife management decisions. Thursday, April 27, 2-5 p.m. Hayward, Sawyer Co. Leaders: Susan Frett and Christina Locke Limit: 16 Cost: \$15 per person

**11. SPRUCE GROUSE IN THE BOREAL FOREST**  
Both spruce grouse and boreal forests are rarities in Wisconsin, and on this trip you get both! Hike off-trail through balsam firs in a mossy boreal forest for intimate views of spruce grouse in resplendent courtship display. An exclusive chance to see one of the state's most unique, secretive and threatened birds. Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund. Friday, April 28, 6-10:30 a.m. Clam Lake, Ashland Co. Leader: Ryan Brady Limit: 20 Cost: \$75 per person

 **12. FROGS AND TOADS OF THE KICKAPOO VALLEY**  
Learn to identify all 12 frog and toad species in Wisconsin by sight and call. Then venture on a dusk hike through the Kickapoo Valley Reserve to practice your new skills. See how easy it is to become a citizen scientist for the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey! Ages 10+



JOSH MAYER

Learn about frogs and toads on trips 12 and 98.

Friday, April 28, 7-10 p.m.  
La Farge, Vernon Co.  
Leaders: Andrew Badje and Ben Johnston  
Limit: 40  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



**16. CATCHING THE PEAK: MIGRATORY BIRD BANDING**

The annual Neotropical migration of millions of birds is one of the world’s most awe-inspiring phenomena. Marvel at birds up close as we spend the day assisting to capture and band many passerines that pass through the savannas, woodlands and prairies at the Waupaca Biological Field Station and Emmons Creek Barrens SNA. Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund. Ages 8+  
Choose one session to attend:  
**16-A.** Saturday, May 6, 6:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
**16-B.** Saturday, May 13, 6:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
**16-C.** Saturday, May 20, 6:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Waupaca, Waupaca Co.  
Leader: Robert Welch  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$45 adult, \$35 child per person



**19. SPRING BIRDING IN THE DRIFTLESS — FOR FAMILIES!**

Join us for a family-friendly afternoon of birds! Hike scenic trails through the Driftless Area with binoculars (provided) in search of spring migrating birds. Enjoy interactive birding activities for kids and families to do together. Then record our sightings into the eBird website as we learn the importance of citizen science. Ages 5+  
Sunday, May 7, 1-3 p.m.

Black Earth, Dane Co.  
Leader: Virginia Wiggen  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$21 adult, \$11 child per person

**40. KIRTLAND’S WARBLERS UP CLOSE**

Chance to see/hear one of Wisconsin’s rarest birds! Explore the carefully protected pine barrens to learn about Kirtland’s warbler life history and ongoing management initiatives. Look for barrens wildflowers, reptiles and other birds such as clay-colored sparrow. With a bit of luck and expert guidance, see/hear the elusive and rare Kirtland’s warbler! Fundraiser to support Kirtland’s warbler conservation.  
Friday, May 19, 6:45-10 a.m.  
Rome, Adams Co.  
Leaders: Kim Grveles, Jon Robaidek, Amy and Rich Staffen  
Limit: 36  
Cost: \$45 per person

**49. PHONEOGRAPHY AT DEVIL’S LAKE**

Phoneography is capturing images with your smartphone. Learn techniques for smartphone nature photography, how to edit using a variety of applications and tips for archiving images. Start in the classroom, then head outdoors to capture your own great pics of Devil’s Lake State Park! Note: some steep hikes.  
Saturday, May 20, 9 a.m.-noon  
Baraboo, Sauk Co.  
Leaders: David and Diane Edwards  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$20 per person

**51. SPRING BUTTERFLY TREK: CREX TO THE BARRENS**

Spring brings wildflowers, migrating songbirds and a burst of early-season butterflies to the pine barrens and bogs of Burnett County. From Crex to the Namekagon Barrens, join a butterfly enthusiast for a guided caravan tour of his favorite haunts. Venture amongst lupine, bearberry and juneberry bedazzled in bloom as we search for elfins, blues and dusky-wing skipper butterflies.  
Saturday, May 20, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Grantsburg, Burnett Co.  
Leader: Dean Hansen  
Limit: 18  
Cost: \$15 per person



**52. PRAIRIE BURN EXPLORATION FOR KIDS!**

We tell kids to be careful with fire but fire has its benefits too! Enjoy this kid’s-eye view of prairie ecology as we hike Westport Drumlín Prairie, part of Empire Prairies SNA, to learn how fire impacts prairies. Compare burned and unburned areas, identify early blooming prairie flowers and learn about remnant prairies. Ages 7+  
Saturday, May 20, 10 a.m.-noon  
Madison, Dane Co.  
Leader: Nate Fayram  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



**64. FISH PASSAGE ALONG THE MILWAUKEE RIVER**

Years of hard work have reconnected over 130 miles of rivers and streams in the Milwaukee River Watershed, allowing native fish access to high-quality spawning habitat. See this amazing transformation firsthand. Visit dam removals, habitat restoration projects and a fish passage with an underwater camera. An important project on a historic river! Ages 10+  
Friday, June 2, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Thiensville, Ozaukee Co.  
Leaders: Matt Aho, Andrew Struck and Kristina Kroening  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



**67. HORICON: PONTOON AND HIKE**

Birds and wildlife abound on this enjoyable naturalist-guided pontoon tour of the famed Horicon Marsh, home to over 300 species of birds! Also venture on a boardwalk hike for more birding and a different perspective of the marsh. Ages 10+

Saturday, June 3, 7:30 a.m.-noon  
Horicon, Dodge Co.  
Leaders: Elizabeth Herzmann, Jeff Bahls, Marc and Gayl Zuelsdorf  
Limit: 40  
Cost: \$34 adult, \$24 child per person

**69. GEOLOGY OF THE ICE AGE TRAIL AND MONDEAUX ESKER**

Venture into the Chequamagon National Forest to learn about glacial geology from the co-author of “Geology of the Ice Age Trail.” Marvel at geological features as we hike two miles along an esker ridge covered with big hemlock and yellow birch trees. Note: a few steep hills.  
Saturday, June 3, 9 a.m.-noon  
Westboro, Taylor Co.  
Leaders: Scott Everson and David Mickelson  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$25 per person

**71. LICHENS OF THE NORTHWOODS**

Explore the elusive life of lichens as we traverse the boreal forest of Johnson Lake Barrens SNA. Learn about lichen ecology, management for conservation and tips for lichen identification. Fundraiser for the Wisconsin Rare Plant Preservation Fund.  
Saturday, June 3, 9:30 a.m.-noon  
Boulder Junction, Vilas Co.  
Leaders: Jim Bennett and Mary Bartkowiak  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$20 per person

**74. BIKING FOR BIRDS IN WHITE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA**

Like biking and birding? Combine the two for double the fun! Pedal 13 miles through White River Marsh on a Rustic Road that crosses lowland forest, shrub-carr, sedge meadow and cattail marsh. Enjoy many stops to spy bitterns, rails, cuckoos, flycatchers, wrens, sandhill and whooping cranes. Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund.  
Sunday, June 4, 5 a.m.-noon  
Berlin, Green Lake Co.  
Leaders: Thomas and Wendy Schultz  
Limit: 12  
Cost: \$35 per person



**76. GET HOOKED! FLY-FISHING FOR BEGINNERS**

Tackle your curiosity about fly-fishing on this fun and inexpensive introduction to the sport. Experts will demystify the equipment and teach the basics. Then venture outside Riveredge Nature Center to learn some casts and fish the ponds. Cost includes use of rods, reels, lines and flies. Give it a try — you’ll get hooked! Ages 8+  
Sunday, June 4, 12:30-3 p.m.  
Newburg, Ozaukee Co.  
Leaders: Jerry Kiesow, Diane Kiesow and Chris Vollmer  
Limit: 12  
Cost: \$45 adult, \$35 child per person



**90. NATIVE WISCONSIN WILDLIFE AT THE MACKENZIE CENTER**

Discover, identify and learn about Wisconsin’s native wildlife. View nearly 20 different species of wildlife up close and hike through their native habitats. Ages 5+  
Saturday, June 10, 1-3:30 p.m.  
Poynette, Columbia Co.  
Leader: Christopher Tall  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



**98. FROGS AND TOADS OF THE RIDGES**

Learn to identify all 12 frog and toad species in Wisconsin by sight and call. Then venture on a dusk hike through The Ridges Sanctuary in Door County to practice your new identification skills. See how easy it is to become a citizen scientist for the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey! Ages 8+  
Friday, June 16, 7:30-10 p.m.  
Bailey’s Harbor, Door Co.  
Leaders: Andrew Badje and Brian Forest  
Limit: 40  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person

**105. WHEELS AND WATER! BIKING MILWAUKEE’S HARBOR DISTRICT**

At the confluence of three rivers, the Harbor District is a place where past meets future. Historic neighborhoods and century-old rail bridges meet high-tech manufacturing and world-class freshwater research. Our last remaining wetlands meet our newest urban developments. Enjoy a bike ride through streets and trails with stops along the way to discover the history and future of water resources. You must bring your own bike.  
Friday, June 23, 1-4 p.m.  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee Co.  
Leaders: Kevin Engstrom and Moranda Medina  
Limit: 32  
Cost: \$15 per person



**107. WONDROUS WORMS, AMAZING ARTHROPODS, FASCINATING FLORA**

How versed are you in the creepy and crawly of Wisconsin forests? Venture into the UW-Madison Arboretum and learn how diversity comes in all shapes and sizes! Search for interesting bugs, wiggly worms and problematic plants while learning how they affect our forests. Fun for kids! Ages 4+  
Saturday, June 24, 9:30 a.m.-noon  
Madison, Dane Co.



Get hands-on with the creepy crawly of Wisconsin’s forests on trip 107.

MICHAEL HILLSTROM

Leaders: Michael Hillstrom and Bernie Williams  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



#### 109. BIG BAY SAND SPIT AND BOG SNA

The beauty of Madeline Island awaits! One thousand years of natural history unfolds before us on this boardwalk stroll through time: from grains of sand to the present-day lagoon, bog and barrier beach. Enjoy enchanting tamaracks, barberry and wintergreen while hiking this treasured SNA. Ferry to the islands is not included. Ages 8+ Saturday, June 24, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Madeline Island, Ashland Co.  
Leader: Jennifer Birkholz  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person

#### 116. LAKESHORE STATE PARK: URBAN OASIS

Lakeshore is one of the newest and most urban of Wisconsin's State Parks. Located on a peninsula in Lake Michigan in downtown Milwaukee, it sports spectacular views of both the city and lake. Hike short-grass prairies to learn about ecology and marvel at the surprising diversity of wildlife, plants and birds that inhabit this beloved park. Friday, July 7, 10 a.m.-noon Milwaukee, Milwaukee Co.  
Leader: Tom Kroeger  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$15 per person



#### 121. TOUR THE RAPTOR EDUCATION GROUP INC.

View spectacular birds up close during a behind-the-scenes look at Raptor Education Group Inc., one of Wisconsin's premier bird rehabilitation and research facilities that takes in all native injured avian species, but specializes in bald eagles and other raptors. Ages 8+ Choose one session to attend: 121-A. Friday, July 14, 9-11 a.m. 121-B. Friday, July 14, 1-3 p.m. Antigo, Langlade Co.  
Leader: Elise Schuler  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$20 adult, \$10 child per person



#### 124. PLEIN AIR PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE PRAIRIE

Painting, photography and prairies? A perfect partnership! Hike York Prairie SNA to discover prairie ecology and



Learn about monarch ecology on trips 127 and 149 and seven others listed online at [WisConservation.org](http://WisConservation.org).

JOSH MAYER

blooming wildflowers. Then delight in your prairie experience with artistic expression, facilitated by two local artists. Try your hand at plein air painting — materials and instruction provided — or bring a camera to hone your prairie photography skills. You don't need to be an experienced artist, come learn and explore! Ages 10+ Saturday, July 15, 9 a.m.-noon Blanchardville, Green Co.  
Leaders: Heidi Hankley, Jim MacDonald and Jerry Newman  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



#### 127. MONARCHS AND MILKWEED: AN ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP

Venture to Mosquito Hill for a hands-on program to learn proper handling, feeding and sanitizing techniques to raise healthy monarch butterflies. Assist with testing adult monarchs for a deadly protozoan and go in the field to document monarchs and milkweed for a citizen science project. Ages 6+ Saturday, July 15, 12-3:30 p.m. New London, Outagamie Co.  
Leader: Jessica Miller  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$17 adult, \$7 child per person



#### 137. MODERN LANDFILLS: CREATING RENEWABLE POWER AND COMPOST

Learn how an innovative landfill is

constructed and operated, and how the gas collected is turned into renewable power. This facility also leads the way in commercial food waste collection, turning it into rich compost — an important topic all citizens should know more about! Ages 10+ Saturday, July 22, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Eau Claire, Eau Claire Co.  
Leader: Mark Vinall  
Limit: 15  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



#### 147. WATER TRANSFORMATION AT NINE SPRINGS

Where does our tap-water come from and where does it go? Follow water as it flows through the Nine Springs Wastewater Treatment Plant and is transformed from harmful pollutant to helpful resource. Understand the impacts of water use and the role of wastewater treatment in the water cycle. Ages 5+ Thursday, August 10, 1-3 p.m. Madison, Dane Co.  
Leader: Emily Jones  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



#### 149. NATIVE BUTTERFLIES UP CLOSE

Get up close with native Wisconsin butterflies! See more than a dozen native butterfly species in the Beaver Creek Butterfly House and visit a

caterpillar rearing lab. Learn about butterfly life cycles, migration, ecology and the garden plants that attract them. Ages 8+ Friday, August 11, 9:30 a.m.-noon Fall Creek, Eau Claire Co.  
Leader: James Schwiebert  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$23 adult, \$13 child per person

#### 152. SMALL PRAIRIE RESTORATION — THE EASY WAY!

Join a landowner to learn how you too can start and maintain a small prairie. Hike the 7-acre upland and lowland prairie to see 90 native plant species, and learn how to attract kestrels, monarch butterflies, mason bees, snakes and frogs to your property. Saturday, August 12, 10 a.m.-noon Waupun, Fond du Lac Co.  
Leaders: Darrel, Jerry and Ruthann Gunderson  
Limit: 30  
Cost: \$15 per person

#### 159. SHOREBIRDS AND WATERBIRDS OF CAT ISLAND

Note: Long, 5-mile hike. Enjoy an exclusive opportunity to venture into the usually closed-to-the-public Cat Island Wave Barrier for a rare chance to spy breeding piping plovers, common terns, Forster's terns and Caspian terns. See colonial waterbirds such as American white pelicans, great egrets, black-crowned night herons and double-crested cormorants. This island has hosted more species of migratory shorebirds than any other location in Wisconsin! Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund. Saturday, August 19, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Green Bay, Brown Co.  
Leader: Tom Prestby  
Limit: 25  
Cost: \$100 per person



#### 163. TREASURES OF THE CHIPPEWA RIVER: NATIVE MUSSELS

Wade in the cool waters of the Chippewa River to search for one of our state's most diverse yet hidden treasures: freshwater mussels (clams). Learn about our 52 native species, their fascinating life cycle and amazing contributions to the history of Wisconsin. Great fun for kids and adults! Ages 5+ Saturday, August 19, 9 a.m.-noon Meridian, Dunn Co.  
Leaders: Lisie Kitchel and Jesse Weinzinger

Limit: 25  
Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



#### 164. MISSISSIPPI RIVER PONTOON: TASTE OF THE RIVER

Discover the many facets of the Mississippi River — from fishing and clamming to channel navigation and local history. You'll encounter unique plants and animals with some of the best opportunities for birding in North America. Enjoy a lunch of scored suckerfish on a floating restaurant (included) for a true taste of the river. A unique opportunity to experience local products from local waters. Ages 12+ Choose one session to attend: 164-A. Saturday, August 19, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. 164-B. Sunday, August 20, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. McGregor, Iowa  
Leader: Robert Vavra  
Limit: 40  
Cost: \$50 adult, \$40 child per person



#### 170. BANDING BIRDS OF THE NORTHWOODS

There's nothing like a bird in the hand! Using mist nets, we'll catch and band a variety of Northwoods songbirds. A

great opportunity for bird-lovers of all ages to see birds up close and hone their identification skills. Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund. Ages 10+ Choose one session to attend: 170-A. Saturday, August 26, 7-11:30 a.m. 170-B. Saturday, September 2, 7-11:30 a.m. Washburn, Bayfield Co.  
Leader: Ryan Brady  
Limit: 20  
Cost: \$40 adult, \$30 child per person



#### 172. MILWAUKEE'S WILDLIFE REHAB CENTER: BEHIND THE SCENES

Tour behind the scenes at the Wisconsin Humane Society's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Milwaukee, which admits over 5,000 injured, sick and orphaned wild animals each year. View some of the patients in the wildlife hospital and visit with a peregrine falcon, eastern screech owl, big brown bats and more. Ages 12+ Thursday, September 7, 2-4 p.m. Milwaukee, Milwaukee Co.  
Leader: Scott Diehl  
Limit: 40  
Cost: \$20 adult, \$10 child per person



Search the stream bed for many species of freshwater mussels on trip 163.

KESTREL SCHMIDT

### 183. TRAIN RIDE AND BLUFF PRAIRIE HIKE: TIFFANY WILDLIFE AREA

A full day of fun! Enjoy a morning walk in the 5-Mile Bluff SNA for amazing views of the Chippewa and Mississippi rivers. Along the way you'll learn about glacial geology, goat prairie management and timber rattlesnakes. Then off to the tracks for an open-air train ride into the remote areas of the Tiffany Wildlife Area with several stops for short hikes into prairies, savannas and floodplain forests. Learn why this is one of the most ecologically and historically unique areas of the state! Fundraiser for conservation along the lower Chippewa River. Saturday, September 16, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Durand, Buffalo Co. Leaders: Mark Rasmussen and Dean Edlin Limit: 64 Cost: \$48 per person



### 184. POLLINATOR PRIMER

Discover which pollinators live in

Wisconsin, what plants they love and what role they play in nature. Learn hands-on as we hike to capture, identify and tag pollinators. Take home a project to help pollinators in your own yard. Ages 6+ Saturday, September 16, 1-3:30 p.m. Brighton, Kenosha Co. Leader: Beth Goeppinger Limit: 30 Cost: \$20 adult, \$10 child per person



### 186. INSIDE WASTE MANAGEMENT RECYCLING PLANT

Where do your recyclables go and what do they become? Tour Wisconsin's largest recycling processing plant to learn how Waste Management converts recyclables into feedstocks for manufacturers around the globe. An amazing transformation! Ages 12+ Thursday, September 21, 9:30 a.m.-noon Germantown, Washington Co. Leaders: Lynn Morgan and John Schultz Limit: 24 Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



### 189. LAKE GENEVA ZIP LINE CANOPY TOUR

Enjoy an airborne ecological sightseeing adventure, as we soar through the trees of a 100-acre forest on eight different zip lines, five sky bridges and several spiral stairways. Learn fascinating facts on the ecology, biology, geology and local history of the Geneva Lakes area from 841 feet up with a bird's-eye view of Lake Como and beyond. Must weigh 65 – 250 pounds. Ages 7+ Saturday, September 23, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Lake Geneva, Walworth Co. Leaders: Seth Elder and Sparkle Lagerhausen Limit: 25 Cost: \$95 adult, \$85 child per person

### 191. HOUSEBOAT EXPLORATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Explore the many aspects of Mississippi River history and ecology on a houseboat cruise through the beautiful backwater nooks of scenic Pool 9. Learn from a retired biology professor about riverine habitats, glaciation, natural history, habitat restoration and the lock and dam system on this unique and exclusive boat tour. Saturday, September 30, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Lansing, Iowa Leader: Dr. James Davies Limit: 20 Cost: \$125 per person



### 195. SAW-WHET AND LONG-EARED OWL BANDING

Have your own close encounter with Wisconsin's smallest owl! Experience how the experts mist-net and band these adorable birds at Linwood Springs Research Station, which bands up to 700 migrating owls annually. Chance to see long-eared owls, too! Ages 7+ Time: All sessions 7:30-10 p.m. Choose one session date to attend: 195-A. Friday, October 6 195-B. Saturday, October 7 195-C. Friday, October 13 195-D. Wednesday, October 18 195-E. Friday, October 20 195-F. Saturday, October 21 Stevens Point, Portage Co. Leaders: Gene and Lorraine Jacobs Limit: 40 Cost: \$35 adult, \$25 child per person

### 196. BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE WISCONSIN STATE HERBARIUM

Botanists within the Wisconsin State Herbarium on the campus of UW-Madison have been documenting flora

for more than 175 years, and have amassed one of the world's largest collections of preserved plants, algae, lichens and fungi. Learn about the herbarium's 1.3 million botanical specimens and enjoy hands-on activities with museum curators. Saturday, October 7, 9 a.m.-noon Madison, Dane Co. Leaders: Ken Cameron, Mary Ann Feist and Mark Wetter Limit: 36 Cost: \$15 per person



### 206. OUTDOOR SURVIVAL SKILLS IN THE DRIFTLESS

You never know what Mother Nature will throw your way! Adventure in the Driftless Area to learn the basics of survival and outdoor skills. Develop a strategy when faced with a survival situation and work in teams to get hands-on to build a fire, boil water and make a debris shelter. Ages 7+ Sunday, October 22, 1-3 p.m. Black Earth, Dane Co. Leader: Virginia Wigger Limit: 30 Cost: \$21 adult, \$11 child per person



### 208. WATERFOWL ID OF THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Get to know your ducks, geese and swans of the Mississippi River flyway! Learn tips and tricks for waterfowl identification in an indoor classroom, then venture to the field in Pools 8 and 9 to hone your skills during the peak of waterfowl migration. Ages 12+ Saturday, October 28, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. La Crosse, La Crosse Co. Leaders: Brenda and Scott Kelly Limit: 30 Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person

### 209. GLACIAL FEATURES OF WESTERN WISCONSIN

Enjoy a bus tour to explore the geologic wonders of Barron and Washburn counties. Learn from an expert geologist how landscape features such as moraines, eskers and drumlins tell the fascinating story of western Wisconsin's glacial past. Stop for short hikes (some are steep). Saturday, November 4, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Barron, Barron Co. Leader: Dale Hanson Limit: 30 Cost: \$25 per person

### 210. MIGRATION ON THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI

A site to behold! Expect to see more than 250 bald eagles and 100,000 waterfowl as we caravan to birding hot spots along the Mississippi River. See swans, pelicans, eagles, hawks and more at the peak of migration at this Globally Important Bird Area. Fundraiser for the Bird Protection Fund. Friday, November 10, 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Brownsville, Minnesota Leaders: Andrew Paulios and Steve Houdek Limit: 50 Cost: \$45 per person



### 211. WINTER TREE IDENTIFICATION

Trees tell us their stories year-long if we only learn how to see them. Leaves are the easiest part to read, but we will delve into buds, leaf scars and lenticels to identify the trees of the scenic Seno K/RLT Conservancy in their leafless, early winter glory. Ages 8+ Saturday, November 11, 9-11:30 a.m. Burlington, Racine Co. Leader: Nan Calvert Limit: 30 Cost: \$15 adult, \$5 child per person



Explore Mississippi River biology aboard a houseboat cruise on trip 191.

SUE STRIN



Zip through a forest canopy on trip 189.

LAKE GENEVA CANOPY TOURS



Get up close with saw-whet owls on trip 195.

BRUCE BARTEL

## 5th Annual Great Wisconsin Birdathon

April 15 – June 15



See a bird...  
Save a bird

NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION

Since 2012, participants in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon have raised more than \$200,000 for bird conservation projects all over the state.

What is a Birdathon? Think of it as a walk-a-thon with birds. You can participate anywhere in the state – in your neighborhood, county or state parks, or even your own backyard – and can take part for just a few hours or a whole day.

Donations and pledges are held by the Bird Protection Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and fund projects including whooping crane reintroduction, Kirtland's warbler monitoring, Bird City Wisconsin and more. Organizations can participate in the Birdathon to raise funds for their own projects as well.

Whether you're a novice or veteran birder, the Great Wisconsin Birdathon is a fun and easy way to support conservation efforts, while spending time outside with friends and family.

See a bird, save a bird! Find everything you need to get started at [WIBirdathon.org](http://WIBirdathon.org)!



Woodland Dunes boasts multiple nature trails showcasing a rich diversity of species, like club moss found on Yellow Birch Trail.

# The wonder of the DUNES

## WOODLAND DUNES NATURE CENTER ON LAKE MICHIGAN IS A MIX OF GLOBALLY SIGNIFICANT HABITATS.

*Story and photos by Nancy Nabak*

I didn't expect my dream job to be located on the second floor of a farmhouse but it is. In fact, when you pull into the gravel driveway of the Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve, the first thing you'll notice is an old, Cream City brick house, circa 1850s. Just northwest of the house sits an aging red barn. The quiet, unassuming appearance of Woodland Dunes Nature Center isn't just a nice place to visit. Your first impression may be anything but "globally significant," though I can assure you that it is.

Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve in Two Rivers is located on the Lake Michigan shoreline just south of the Door County peninsula. The DNR's Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation has ranked this 1,300-acre preserve as "globally significant" because of its rare and special terrain offering a great diversity of habitats: marsh, sedge meadow, shrub carr, old field, native grassland and the rare forested dunes and swales.

"You'll always find something new and interesting every time you're here," says Jim Knickelbine, executive director of the Dunes. "Caring for this special place," he says, "its wildlife and people, is an incredible opportunity and a great joy."

### How it all began

In 1965, local resident Bernie Brouchoud

began catching, banding and releasing birds on what is now Woodland Dunes Nature Center property. It wasn't long before Brouchoud, a federally licensed bird bander, and a small group of junior high school students were making regular visits to the area. Realizing its value as a bird migration stopover and nesting area, they established a bird-banding research station on site. Interest and support grew as bird-watchers, hikers and schoolchildren visited the station.

In 1974 an organizing committee was formed and generated a plan to preserve approximately 1,200 acres with an additional goal of one day erecting a nature and education center. That year they purchased the first 40 acres and a few years later the nature center opened — a farmhouse converted to instructional space on the first floor with staff offices in the former upstairs bedrooms.

### Connecting kids with nature

Even before the nature center opened, community education began on the property and Woodland Dunes has been offering hands-on learning to school groups, summer camps, adults and families ever since. Jessica Johnsrud, education coordinator and assistant director, offers a variety of programs to keep learning fresh and exciting. She's as engaged and curious as the youngest member of her crew.

"I really enjoy watching young children make discoveries in the outdoors," says Johnsrud. "Their minds are so curious. Even something as simple as a toad hopping across the trail can ignite great excitement and wonder."

Johnsrud is a juggernaut when it comes to education. In the warm months, she's at the pond with kids in tow, holding dip nets looking for nymph dragonflies, or marching onto the Cattail Trail boardwalk. Heading into the marsh, she's ready to listen for frogs or teach the "vote for meeee" song of the red-winged blackbird.

"You don't need to be a nature expert to share the joy of nature with children," she says. "Simply taking them for a walk and allowing them to make their own discoveries can make a meaningful impact in their lives."

She also spearheads adult education programs and special events such as the Owl Fest, a morning of learning about Wisconsin owls; Enchanted Forest, a children's event created to showcase the natural wonders of fall; and Bird Breakfast and Migration Celebration, a cel-



David's Pond is an outdoor classroom for kids with dip nets searching for nymph dragonflies and other aquatic treasures.



Families are frequent visitors to the marsh via the Cattail Trail boardwalk.

ebration of the return of migrating birds in the spring.

She has a great classroom for teaching. Woodland Dunes is home to more than 400 species of plants, 40 species of mammals, seven species of amphibians, thousands of species of invertebrates and over 260 species of both resident and migratory birds.

### Bird's the word

Because of the varied shoreline habitats, the Dunes is a fabulous stopover for migrating birds, with an interesting assortment of nesting species as well. There are Canada warblers, mourning warblers, winter wrens, alder flycatchers, willow flycatchers and scarlet tanagers.

That's not all. The Dunes is also classified as an Important Bird Area (IBA), a geographic location recognized as vital for the conservation of bird populations. Each year, Knickelbine, staff members and volunteers participate in multiple bird surveys to monitor what's on the preserve and to share with visitors what they may

experience while hiking the trails.

Visitors can observe nesting osprey on site, or via the osprey-cam that feeds to our website, [www.woodlanddunes.org/osprey-cam](http://www.woodlanddunes.org/osprey-cam). The webcam offers great opportunities to learn more about osprey behavior and other birds as well. Last spring, I witnessed a kingbird dive-bombing the female osprey on the nest!

When I asked about this, Knickelbine nodded saying, "Oh yeah, the genus for kingbird is *Tyrannus* — like the dinosaur. They're aggressive!"

We have a regular visitor at Woodland Dunes named Gwendolyn, 8, who is evidence of the positive influence birds have on children. She brings in her drawings of a variety of birds, shares how much she loves them and wants to be an ornithologist when she grows up. She gave me a picture of a magpie, labeled with the bird's call, territory and field marks — perfectly drawn and colored. It now hangs above my desk.

Her grandmother shared that Gwendolyn recently asked her, "Is a European



Trails at the Dunes are free and open to the public sunrise to sunset every day. Sights you may see when you visit include a wood frog calling off of Trillium Trail (upper left), a mink trotting on the Cattail Trail boardwalk (upper right), the circa-1850s Cream City farmhouse turned nature center (lower left) or a swamp sparrow (lower right), one of 260 bird species found on the property.

coot flightless?" Eight years old and on her way to an avian ecology degree.

**What you'll see at Woodland Dunes**  
The Dunes boasts multiple trails through an array of habitats. An interactive map can be found on our website under "Nature Trails" to give you an idea of what birds you'll find on each trail and the general ecosystem associated with it. Trails are free to the public and open from sunrise to sunset each day. An exciting new twist will be coming to one of them soon — a floating canoe/kayak dock at the end of Cattail Trail, allowing visitors to experience the softer side of nature from both water and land.

Visitors won't see sand dunes here, but they will see ridges and swales. More than 5,000 years ago, the lake bed was 30 feet higher than it is now. During the ice age melt, breaking waves scooped up and redeposited the sandy bottom of the shore, forming a series of parallel underwater ridges and troughs. As the water level fell, the ridges became long, low sand dunes, with swales alternating between them. Fourteen such ridges and swales, the ancient lake shorelines, are the geological foundation of the Wood-

land Dunes preserve today.

These forested dunes and swales provide a biologically rich habitat found in only two places in our ecological region — the other at nearby Point Beach State Forest.

#### Staying power

The 1,300 acres of land that make up the Dunes require continual maintenance and forethought. Jennifer Powell, land management coordinator, has a big-picture vision with a warm-hearted passion for land at the Dunes. She can tenderly remove an invasive thorn from a volunteer's hand yet wield loppers and hand saws with the best of the "barberryians," a nickname for those who tackle invasive Japanese barberry and other nonnative species.

Of the Dunes she says, "I am drawn to its life, wonder and constant change. It has a calming effect and a beauty that is unmatched."

The Dunes owes that unmatched beauty in part to Powell and volunteers who spend countless hours and muscle power fighting the invasion of honeysuckle, common buckthorn, dame's rocket, Japanese barberry and autumn

olive. They replace them with beneficial native species that provide food and shelter for migrating and nesting birds and other wildlife. Native wildflowers benefit pollinator species such as bees and butterflies.


Their efforts translate into a richer experience for visitors. You're likely to see more wildlife because food sources are nutritional and plentiful. Beautiful colors and textures of native wildflowers, fascinating fungi, butterflies, pollinators, bats, swallows and flycatchers are all right in front of you.

Such an amazing, well-managed place also attracts some not-so-common species of animals. Rarities we've recorded include nesting little gull, fisher, red saddlebags dragonfly, seven of Wisconsin's bat species and the southern spreadwing damselfly. The Dunes has also attracted rare migrating birds such as horned grebe, hoary redpoll, Baird's sparrow and yellow-throated warbler.

#### Potential threats and how you can help

The ongoing battle with invasive species — such as the priority management of reed canary grass — requires time, money and manpower and the Dunes' small staff can't do it alone. Hundreds of volunteers help answer the phone, weed the butterfly garden, plant trees and mow. Others volunteer at the Dash at the Dunes 5K Walk/Run held each April, or serve on the Tropical Blast fundraiser committee.

Dolly McNulty, a long-time volunteer and board member, says, "I enjoy helping an organization that is good for nature and good for people."

Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve is a treasured and special place to wander and wonder with dip nets and binoculars. It's a place to fine-tune your senses, to connect and hold hands on a well-managed trail. So make the trip, sign our guest book and when pulling away from our gravel drive, know that you will leave Woodland Dunes feeling fine. 

*Nancy Nabak is the Communication and Development Coordinator for Woodland Dunes Nature Center.*

#### >>> MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve, please visit our website at [www.woodlanddunes.org](http://www.woodlanddunes.org) or call 920-793-4007.



Team Epsilon SaberBOTz (left to right): Varun Gupta, Poojha Prabahasundar, Samantha Burkard, Eric Ma, Clay Kreimeier, Sohail Shaik, Arber Januzi, Corbin Slinde and Calvin Slinde.

# The Wren-i-gade

HOW SCIENCE, TEAMWORK AND STANDING UP TO A BULLY MADE A MIDDLE SCHOOL GROUP THE BLUEBIRD'S BEST PAL — FOR LIFE.

*Derren Slinde*

When a group of middle school students from Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District learned the bluebird of happiness was experiencing anything but that when it came to the winged world of nest box wars, they decided to join forces with a conservation professor to help the bird claim its rightful place in nature's birdhouse battles.

Eastern bluebirds face threats from other birds that vie for nest boxes or destroy their eggs.

"There are birds that compete with bluebirds for nesting boxes," Glacier Creek Middle School student Varun Gupta said, noting the bluebird's competitive culprits typically are tree and house sparrows, starlings and house wrens. "And some of them can be very nasty."

Who knew those pretty bird songs that fill the air actually may be nest box battle cries? In this case, those cries served as the rallying cry for Varun and his student research team who chose the plight of the beautiful bluebird as theirs in an annual, international team event that uses science, technology, engineering and mathematics (also known as STEM curriculum) to develop real-life solutions.

In a smart, strategic move to up their chances of success, the team tapped the counsel of Stan Temple, noted emeritus professor of conservation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Aldo Leopold Foundation advisor.

Along the way the team considered high-tech answers such as a facial recognition tool. Yes, bluebirds have faces. In the end they settled on a simple, but effective way to slam the door on the beaks of the bullies — a little barricade the team likes to call, cue the music, Wren-i-gade.

This is the story of how these middle schoolers created the housing save that's really for the birds!

#### Learning is FUN! FIRST LEGO League competition

The student team from Middleton-Cross Plains is one of thousands from 88 countries who participated in the 2016 annual robotics program known as the FIRST LEGO League. The league's website says this program is designed to help tomorrow's innovators use creative thinking and teamwork to research and develop real-life solutions to real-life problems. The teams, who have adult coaches, also must design and construct a robot using the LEGO MINDSTORM™ technology for an exciting and fun tabletop competition. The competitors are ages 9-14. Last year's theme was "Animal Allies: How could we improve the way we interact with animals?"

First step? The Middleton-Cross Plains team had to pick an animal. They went for the eastern bluebird because of its reputation as a happiness symbol, and the fact that nesting bluebirds face aggressive and hostile house sparrows — that sounds like something out of a Hitchcock movie.

However, thanks to the wise advice of



Team members Corbin Slinde (left) and Eric Ma helped evaluate 100 bluebird nest boxes in the village of Cross Plains to see how well they met the bluebirds' needs.

DERREN SLINDE

Professor Temple, the students learned the real nest box threat facing the bluebird is the smaller house wren. The wrens are known to destroy the bluebirds' nests, then pierce their eggs and pull them out of the nest. That *is* a horror movie!

Adding to the team's challenge of devising a solution was the fact that the house wren is a native species protected by law, making it illegal to harm the bird or to interfere with their active nests.

Now that the team had its animal, its goal and a handle on the law, their objectives became clear:

- Increase awareness about how to create the ideal habitat for bluebirds to nest.
- Design a device to prevent house wrens from claiming an empty nest box.

#### Finding answers in backyards

With Professor Temple's help, the team went to the Dane County community of Cross Plains where they worked in pairs and evaluated 100 bluebird nest boxes to determine how well the residents were meeting bluebirds' needs.

The students assessed the nest boxes using these five criteria:

- Was the nest box mounted on a pole?
- Did it have a predator guard?
- Was the nest box located in an open field with scattered trees?
- Was it located far from woods?
- Finally, was the nest box surrounded by vegetation of low height (i.e. mowed lawn)?

Here's the good news: They found

more than half satisfied four out of the five criteria necessary for creating a suitable habitat for bluebird nesting. Way to go, Cross Plains! Now, the not-so-good news: They observed a predator guard, which prevents climbing predators from accessing the nest box, in only a quarter of the nest boxes surveyed.

Now that the study was complete, it was on to creating the solution.

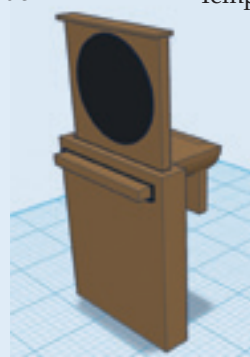
#### How to say "no" to house wren guests – and still make budget

Student Poojha Prabhakar said the team thought about the solution with this goal: Create a device to prevent the house wrens from claiming an empty nest box.

Poojha noted the team first explored the use of facial recognition technology and color sensors in the nest box. "The idea was that when a bird that wasn't a bluebird entered the nest box, the sensors would trigger audio and visual deterrents that would scare the bird away."

Wow.

But, the reality of a tight budget entered the kids' jaw-dropping brainstorm. "Taking a high-tech approach seemed exciting to our team at first," Poojha said. "But we soon realized such



CALVIN SLINDE

**The Wren-i-gade has a pressure-sensitive perch that allows entry to birds that weigh more than 20 grams, essentially barricading the tiny house wren from entering the nest box.**

a solution would not be economically feasible."

It was at that point, teammate Calvin Slinde remembers, the team shifted gears and opted instead for a low-tech, low-cost approach. The team picked a name that would tell any bully bird to think twice about entering a bluebird domain.

"We chose the name, 'Wren-i-gade', because our solution is a device that acts as a barrier to keep house wrens out of a nest box," Calvin said. And it's weight-activated.

The Wren-i-gade is a small plastic pressure-activated door that blocks the entry hole into the nest box. The team designed the device to fit into existing bluebird nest boxes with no drilling, screwing or other attachments. The pressure-sensitive perch triggers the barrier door to drop and allow entry only when the weight of the bird is greater than 20 grams. Because the weight of the average house wren is 10-12 grams, it cannot access the nest box. The weight of the average bluebird is 27-34 grams and will therefore release the barrier door, allowing access to the nest box.

#### Making the papers and a difference

The team hopes to have a Wren-i-gade device available for testing this spring. They also are working with Professor Temple to have their research published in the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology's peer-reviewed journal, *The Passenger Pigeon*. And they have been the subject of local stories in the Cross Plains newspaper, *The News-Sickle-Arrow* and in the *Badger Birder* Newsletter.

The team presented their research and solution at the Badgerland Regional FIRST LEGO League Tournament at Madison College this past November.

Varun, Poojha, Calvin and the whole team hope the Wren-i-gade will make it easier and less stressful for bluebirds to find and keep nesting boxes so their population continues to flourish happily for years

to come.

Learn about the FIRST LEGO League at [www.firstlegoleague.org/](http://www.firstlegoleague.org/)

*Derren Slinde is the coach of FIRST LEGO League team Epsilon SaberBOTz, manager of STEM-based Destination Imagination teams in Middleton, and a bluebird enthusiast.*

Increased demand for locally produced, grass-fed beef is one reason conservation grazing has gained attention in Midwest states. The partnership between land managers and graziers meets the needs of both the wildlife and agricultural communities.



DNR FILES

# Greener pastures

## CONSERVATION GRAZING ON PUBLIC LAND IS A WIN-WIN FOR BOTH RANCHERS AND WILDLIFE MANAGERS.

*Kris Johansen*

**Day breaks at the Buena Vista Wildlife Area on a cool August morning, and as darkness and a ghostly fog recede, life bursts forth from this expansive grassland. The emerging sights and sounds, for this visitor, are unforgettable.**

Sandhill cranes announce themselves with their rolling, trumpeting call as they fly out for their morning meal. Greater prairie chickens flush with grace from their grassland roosts. Canada geese lift through the last traces of fog, piercing the morning silence with raucous calls. White-tailed deer, seeking quiet refuge, bed down for the day in a sea of grass.

Then, amidst the wild noises, comes the unmistakable call of a red Angus cow as mother bellows for her calf. While common on private lands, this bovine pair and the herd to which they belong

seem a bit out of place on the state-managed Buena Vista Wildlife Area, within a 320-acre fenced area devoted to conservation grazing.

#### A new tool for managers

Wildlife managers with the Department of Natural Resources have a suite of tools to improve habitat on state wildlife areas and other DNR properties. In grasslands like these, prescribed fire, mowing and herbicide application have traditionally been the most effective. Ideas and techniques evolve with time, however, and

during the past five years, conservation grazing has gained great attention here and in other Midwest states, in part because of increased demand for locally produced, grass-fed beef raised on sustainable grasslands.

Conservation grazing employs a staple of Wisconsin agriculture — cattle — to help manage wildlife habitat and to expand partnerships both with the agricultural community and with local, sustainable food movements.

On state wildlife areas where grazing occurs, lands are closely monitored and assessed by DNR staff and by cattle producers to avoid the negative environmental effects seen in poorly managed systems, such as over-grazing and erosion. The goal is always to minimize negative impacts on recreational users and maximize positive effects on vegetation, soils and wildlife. Grazing cattle, for instance, can help spread wildflower seeds and stimulate their growth while providing plant residue for nesting birds.

Scientists have found many ben-

efits from well-managed, conservation grazing including:

- Improved habitat for grassland-dependent wildlife species
- Increased diversity of wildflowers and other plants
- Suppression of invasive species
- Improved soil health and water quality
- Decreased use of herbicides and mowing
- Support of local farming communities

**The power of partnerships**

For DNR, partnerships are critical to success. In 2015 and 2016 conservation grazing was initiated on four DNR state wildlife areas in Portage, St. Croix, Crawford and Dane counties through a recently developed partnership between University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Agroecology Program, the Wallace Center Pasture Project and local graziers.

The Wallace Center Pasture Project works to increase the number of sustainably managed farmland acres in the Upper Mississippi watershed, benefiting wildlife, farmers, water quality and soil health. The Pasture Project works with farmers, landowners, land trusts and government agencies to implement sustainable agricultural practices such as grass-based livestock production, cover cropping and integration of livestock grazing into row-crop farming. All these practices can add up to a win-win by increasing farmers’ profits while conserving natural resources. The Pasture Project provided financial and technical support to DNR land managers with site-specific, certified management plans, assistance with infrastructure, workshops for DNR staff and educational signs for each conservation grazing property.

Rod Ofte is a consultant for the Pasture Project and lives in southwest Wisconsin where he uses rotational grazing on his own ranch. He said the partnership between DNR and local graziers is a huge win for all involved.

“Using cattle as a land-management tool on public lands allows ranchers access to productive forage sources and it reduces the need for mowing and pesticide spraying,” Ofte said. “Well-planned grazing improves wildlife habitat while having minimal impact on the patrons who use the land. Better management lowers costs and makes for healthier soil and water quality, which everyone likes.”

For their part, the UW Agroecology



William Kolodziej grazes his cattle on the Buena Vista Wildlife Area. Pastures are divided into paddocks with temporary fencing and regularly rotated. This continual movement of cattle provides them with quality forage while at the same time improving grassland habitat for wildlife.

DNR FILES

Program is studying potential opportunities, benefits and impediments for grazing livestock on public lands, assessing environmental, economic and social outcomes of public-private conservation grazing partnerships during a four-year period. One of the principal investigators is Mark Renz, Associate Professor of Agronomy at UW-Madison who specializes in weed management.

“This effort demonstrates how institutions can work together to improve Wisconsin’s landscape management so that everybody benefits,” Renz said. “It’s still ongoing, but we hope the results of these studies will be used to adapt DNR’s approach to grazing and grazing partnerships to maximize wildlife benefits and strengthen relationships with the agricultural and conservation communities.”

The final critical component involves the partnerships being developed with agricultural producers. Everyone is learning from each other and gaining a better appreciation of what each has to offer. Each producer entered into a five-year farming agreement with the DNR to ensure the project is beneficial to both parties. Agreements cover details such as the number of cattle that can be grazed, seasonal schedules, fencing, water specifications and liability.

**The Buena Vista experience**

This spring, DNR Wildlife Technician Erin Grossman and William Kolodziej, a rancher and grazing specialist, will begin

year three of a five-year project using rotational grazing to improve wildlife habitat at Buena Vista. The project area consists of 320 acres within the Central Sands region of Wisconsin.

“Rotational grazing allows for varying rates of grazing pressure to achieve our desired outcome,” Grossman said. “I’m excited for the potential this project has on Buena Vista and other wildlife areas. We’ve seen positive results so far,

and I’ve gained a greater appreciation and understanding of what is important to ranchers. We’ve developed some great partnerships.”

Grossman and Kolodziej are working to improve wildlife habitat with cow-calf pairs at varying grazing intensities. They plan to bolster plant species diversity and increase variation in vegetation heights and densities while reducing woody and invasive plant species, and



Different types of cattle provide different management services. This Scottish Highlander removes exotic invasives, such as buckthorn and wild parsnip.

DNR FILES

the need for herbicide use and mechanical management methods. Additionally, they hope to foster partnerships with neighbors and the agricultural community.

When first approached, Kolodziej saw opportunities, but also had many concerns.

“Will DNR understand my goals and needs as a producer?” he wondered. “Will my cattle have enough to eat and adequate water to be healthy and stay inside the fence?”

After year two Kolodziej had this to say: “DNR staff have been easy to work with and showed concern for my livestock operation. We rely on each other’s knowledge and skills from wildlife needs to livestock needs. We’re a team working together to reach both wildlife habitat and livestock production goals. It’s rewarding to be part of a successful project where commercial agriculture works with the DNR to improve water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat.”

In 2016, stocking doubled to 60 beef cow-calf pairs. Kolodziej says cattle performance has been great, with 100 percent breeding success last season. Forage yields were roughly six times higher after one year of rotational grazing and great weather. In addition, the cows have been trained to eat woody and invasive plant species, including spirea, willow, aspen, musk thistle and goldenrod, which allowed a diverse set of native plants and wildflowers to reappear.

**How does conservation grazing impact hunters and other property users?**

As with all land-management techniques, public property users may notice some changes on properties with conservation grazing. The practice requires fences to keep the cattle inside areas where grazing has been prescribed. Depending on the location of the project, these fences may have multiple strands with barbed or electric wire.

DNR property managers carefully consider how conservation grazing may affect other users. Steps taken include: providing numerous access points to enter fenced areas; posting properties with educational information; restricting timing of grazing operations to spring, summer and early fall; and providing property manager phone numbers so users can seek out additional information.

The goal for all these managed areas is to improve habitat, including for game birds. While ungrazed areas provide



A host of grassland and wetland birds benefit from conservation grazing, including sandhill cranes, pheasants, wild turkeys, greater prairie chickens, upland sandpipers and meadowlarks.

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undisturbed nesting habitat, managed grazing areas provide excellent brood-rearing cover and abundant sources of invertebrates that growing chicks need. Together, this creates important habitat throughout the developmental phases of game birds.

**Planning for the future**

Though conservation grazing holds great promise, it is not suitable for every place or time. DNR staff plans to identify areas in the state best suited for conservation grazing, provide support for DNR land managers and identify possible funding sources for infrastructure.

Most importantly, DNR staff will work closely with conservation partners and the agricultural community, continually searching for solutions that benefit wildlife, farmers and the citizens of Wisconsin who enjoy and appreciate public lands.

*Kris Johansen is DNR’s regional wildlife manager stationed in Eau Claire.*

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PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

DNR’s wildlife management program manages over 500,000 acres across more than 200 state wildlife areas for the benefit of both wildlife and wildlife-based recreation. DNR-managed public lands provide many opportunities for individuals and families to hunt, fish, trap, hike, canoe or watch and photograph wildlife. To find a property near you, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search “wildlife areas.”

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# Hilda, the unmuffled grouch

*An unusual backyard visitor won this family's heart.*

Story by Tony Welch / Illustrations by Kayleigh Oreshack

One bright spring morning 67 years ago, a feisty bundle of feathers walked out of the Wisconsin woods and confronted my Aunt Leone, seated in a backyard lawn chair minding her own business.

Lee knew a ruffed grouse when she saw one, but this scold was something else. For starters, the bird gave her a five-minute tongue lashing before evacuating on the flagstone patio — narrowly missing Lee's left foot. The grouse then suddenly took wing and soared off into the woods. Lee called her family together and described the encounter in detail.

"Fermented berries," declared my grandfather Pete, poking at the scat with the tip of his cane. My Uncle Rip, Lee's husband, observed that whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. Only grandmother Frances showed any sympathy: "Maybe the poor dear is wounded...."

Next day the rogue female returned, this time with a suitor in tow. Goose-stepping stiffly, wings ajar beneath epaulets of ebony hackle, the lovesick cock tried every parade ground maneuver to lure his lady back to the sanctuary of the woods. Eventually tiring, the male thundered off and was never seen again.

That afternoon, Lee paid a visit to check her extensive flower garden. To her dismay, a half-dozen plants were missing some newly forming buds. At least, she consoled herself, the marauding nocturnal rabbits couldn't reach her precious potted geraniums. Glancing in their direction, Lee spotted the female grouse perched on the rim of a three-foot-tall flower pot. The bird's bulging crop sagged like a swollen goiter.

With its beady eyes and drab vestments, the grouse reminded my aunt of a light-fingered cleaning lady who had

worked for her years before.

"Hilda was a thief and so are you," Lee announced. The geranium pots were promptly covered with a webbed netting and Hilda's namesake was put on probation.

As a 14-year-old nephew privileged to spend his summers at Tainter Lake, I was far more interested in what the fish were eating. So much so, that I began leaving baited but unattended fishing poles dangling off the dock overnight — an angling violation. In no time, I caught the attention of the Dunn County game warden, who passed by in his boat early one morning and spotted the poles. We collided halfway down the trail to the lake. His iron grip on my arm foretold a swift and certain punishment as he led me up the hill to inform my relatives I'd broken the law. As we rounded the corner of the cottage, a brown explosion burst from behind a clump of fiddle-head ferns and settled directly in our path.

"Beat it, you dumb cluck," I muttered, depressed by what I knew awaited me. A sudden look of disbelief crossed the warden's face. "Is that grouse...yours?" he asked.

Sensing a golden opportunity, I replied, "Oh, yes sir, that's Hilda. She's...uh...crazy. She's making me crazy, too. Maybe you can tell what's wrong with her."

Unlocking his grip, the warden spun around, ran down

to the lake and returned out of breath, with a long-handled telescopic fishing net. The ensuing chase was punctuated by flapping wings and much vocal coaxing and pleading, until at length the lawman finally got lucky and snared his quarry in the net. Following his instructions, I held the bird firmly pressed to my chest as the warden fastened an engraved metal band around Hilda's left leg and then copied the serial number in a notebook. Gripping the base of each wing, he next examined every square inch of her body.

"Your grouse looks perfectly healthy." With that, the warden suddenly released his catch and Hilda barreled out of sight behind the house.

"Wait'll I tell our game biologist about this," the warden added, grinning. "He won't believe a word of it."

Then back down the hill went my tormentor, pausing long enough to caution me about unattended fish poles. Crazy or not, Hilda now had her own personal wild game protector and I felt deeply in her debt for getting me off the hook — so to speak.

Mid-mornings at the homestead were special. Grandpa Pete, who fully understood my adolescent needs, would bestir himself and mutter, "For pity's sake, would you look at the time." In a twinkling I was seated behind the wooden



*"Did you see that, Gramps?  
Hilda wants to race!"*



steering wheel of his 1928 Pontiac sedan. Sliding in beside me, Pete would light a cigar, lean back and nod solemnly. The half-mile postal run to the cluster of mailboxes at Picnic Point was officially underway.

At 25 mph, the aging Pontiac stirred up a gratifying cloud of dust as it began traveling down the long private road leading to the highway. On this occasion, a casual glance in the rearview mirror caused me to suddenly slam hard on the brakes. Almost instantly, Hilda shot past the stopped car in a half-barrel roll and continued on down the winding road out of sight.

"Did you see that?" I cried, ignoring the damage done to my grandfather's German nose and Cuban cigar after coming in sudden contact with the dashboard.

"Hilda was running behind the car and when it got going too fast she flew after us. She wants to race, Gramps!"

Advised of this latest development, Uncle Rip thought with a little training Hilda could be taught to fetch the mail herself, like a carrier pigeon. Aunt Lee was not amused.

"You two be careful from now on," she admonished. But the occasional Great Mail Race continued; there was no way to prevent it.

In fact, if it moved, Hilda shadowed it. Lee noticed the bird tracking behind Gramps while he mowed the lawn.

"What a clever team," she commented. "Dad stirs up the grasshoppers and Hilda harvests them." After lunch I relieved Pete with the lawn-mowing, minus my shoes. Being much younger and thus bursting with energy, I stepped off

*Suddenly I felt a sharp stinging sensation in my left heel and spun around. Hilda!*

smartly, anxious to return to my favorite fishing holes. Suddenly I felt a sharp stinging sensation in my left heel and spun around. Hilda!

Well...two could play at this game. I lit out after her, gaining speed behind the lawn mower. Keeping well ahead of a tail trimming, the grouse led me clear across the yard and smack into a clump of bleeding heart bushes. From the corner of my eye I saw Aunt Lee rush outside.

"Stop that, you wicked boy!" Pleading that I was only having a little fun, I explained that the goofy bird had attacked me from behind. As long as I plodded along in grandfatherly fashion, Hilda was content to follow. But the moment I picked up the pace she dashed in and hammered at my heels.

"Let that be a lesson!" Lee shouted back. And with that, she tossed my shoes out on the lawn. "Put these on before Hilda makes dessert of your toes."

In early September, Hilda suddenly disappeared. Pete, himself a longtime upland game bird hunter, hung "no trespassing" signs along the public road bordering Rip's 90-acre woodlot. Most upper Tainter Lake residents knew by now of Hilda's presence, but grouse hunters from nearby towns were another matter. That first spring and summer, Hilda paid our place a total of 26 recorded visits; undoubtedly a few more went unseen during the family's occasional absence.

May 16, 1950. "Hilda's back – apparently none the worse

for wear. We clucked the morning away like two old biddies. Wish I knew what I said."

This arrival notice marked the first of many "H" entries in Lee's diary that summer, and the summer to follow as well.

Hilda's attraction to *Homo sapiens* continued to both amuse and amaze the family. She came tantalizingly close, but never permitted anyone to touch her. Occasionally we noticed her pecking at her "ankle bracelet," attempting to dislodge it. On June 12 Lee wrote:

"Three tubs of laundry, hung out to dry. H. roosted on clothes pole, supervising. Pest!"

And again, two weeks later:

"Cleaned windows this p.m. H. flew onto porch roof opposite guest room. Talk, talk, talk. Closed the windows in a hurry."

Hilda disliked being rained on and her aversion became apparent one afternoon when Pete turned on the rotating lawn sprinkler. Caught full blast, Hilda dashed to the driveway and skidded to a stop on her belly like a disabled fighter plane. The circular driveway was surfaced with crushed sandstone, and her drumming wings raised a cloud of dust. In a few moments she was dry and dignified again.

This performance helps explain Hilda's first and only indoor visit that took place during a thunderstorm. The upper half of the Dutch door leading outside from the kitchen had been left open and a thoroughly dampened fowl sat perched on the lower half, exposed to an occasional spatter of wind-driven rain drops. From her vantage point Hilda maintained a running criticism of my grandmother's bread-making ability. Harmless enough, Frances opined, as she gathered together the necessary ingredients.

Frances interrupted the start of her chores to visit the bathroom. She had just gotten comfy when a distracting thump-thumping noise faintly reached her ears. Cutting short her visit, Frances hastened to the kitchen where she discovered a pound of white baking flour missing from the bread board and now scattered across the counter and kitchen floor. Lee's diary entry for the day:

"Prest-O, change-O! H. transformed into a lovely snowy owl."

When the end came in August 1951, it was just as we all feared. Gramps and I left earlier than usual that morning, intending to visit with a distant

neighbor before returning home. Judging from Hilda's position at a sharp curve in the private roadway, it appeared she had taken flight from within the woods, then flown on an intercepting course into the side of the car — all of which went unnoticed by its occupants. As wild creatures sometimes do, she had miscalculated. Her pretty ruffed neck was broken.

We all behaved badly. I kicked the Pontiac until I limped from the pain, vowing never to drive another car again. Pete said it was nobody's fault, and as a distraction he offered me a puff on his cigar, which only brought on more tears. Grandma Frances forgave Hilda for making a mess of the kitchen. And the damnable insects, Lee averred, would have eaten her geraniums anyway.

That evening Rip and I dug a grave in Hilda's favorite hangout, the flower garden. Her casket: an empty shoe box, heavily wrapped in tinfoil to prevent groundwater — Hilda's nemesis — from entering. Carefully tucked under each wing were half-a-dozen airmail postage stamps, deposited by Uncle Rip. Airmail stamps, I pondered...whatever for? Slowly, Rip's puzzling gesture began to sink in and I turned my face away to hide yet another trickle of tears.

Hilda's aluminum ankle bracelet? It still dangles from my key ring.



Tony Welch writes from his woodland nest outside Portland, Oregon.



# Learning rooted in place

Elementary students from the Highland Community School District, in partnership with The Prairie Enthusiasts, collect seeds from a golden sea of prairie grasses.

KIRSTEN RUSCH

## PLACE-BASED LEARNING CONNECTS KIDS TO THE NATURAL WORLD.

*Skylar Primm and Kim Wahl*

Hannah caught a persistent case of Lyme disease as a young girl and developed a fear of the outdoors that long outlasted her symptoms. By the start of high school, she had lost any connection to the natural world. Considering this history, Hannah took a big chance when she chose to enroll with the first class at High Marq Environmental Charter School in Montello. After four years of weekly outdoor learning experiences and through many highs and lows, she graduated with a renewed appreciation for the natural world and an understanding of her place in it. She especially learned to value time away from technology and the classroom walls, a value she carries with her into college. Throughout Wisconsin, hundreds of Hannahs are enrolled in place-based education programs that help them develop a sense of belonging in their local community and a responsibility to the natural world that sustains them.

In his bestselling book, “Last Child in the Woods” (2008), Richard Louv defined the disconnect between students, nature and our communities as “nature-deficit disorder.” As educators, we have a responsibility to guide the next generation as they grow into stewards of our natural places. Nature-deficit disorder is not an insurmountable obstacle — we can help young people connect to our world through meaningful outdoor experiences.

Place-based learning is a way to help students make that connection to nature and to understand their role in it. By practicing land stewardship, students like Hannah learn about relationships in their natural communities through restoration projects and sustainability efforts, either on the schoolyard or reaching into

the local community. Community partnerships help us to be more adaptive and sustainable as educators, while giving students direct experience with the 21st century skills of critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity — the 4-Cs of P21, a national nonprofit organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. (Visit [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org) for more information.)

The Wisconsin Green Schools Network (WGSN) offers resources and support focusing on using the natural environment as a context for learning. WGSN also formed the Fostering Inquiry and Engaging Learners through Discovery (FIELD) Corps program to connect schools with field biologists who lead outdoor learning experiences. High Marq Environmental Charter School

in Montello and Highland Community School District in Highland are two examples of FIELD Corps schools where students develop deep connections with their natural communities, serving as models of place-based education.

### Case study: High Marq

High Marq Environmental Charter School is in its seventh year of operation. This Marquette County public school in the rural Montello School District serves 32 students in grades 7 through 12. The day-to-day work in the classroom consists of student-driven projects while weekly field experiences directly connect students to local ecosystems and organizations. Through their six years using the community as a context for learning, students come to value Marquette County and develop hope for its future.

One such project involves a partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. After the success of a few smaller projects in the area, local DNR staff and community members invited High Marq to contribute to a project in the Grand River Marsh Wildlife Area. Another local school would build an accessible blind for hunting and wildlife viewing in the marsh and High Marq was tasked with constructing and installing an accessible boardwalk to the completed blind.

With the supervision and assistance of DNR staff and local volunteers, and guided by the WGSN FIELD Corps educator, teams of five or six students constructed sections of the boardwalk on dry land. These construction crews practiced communication, collaboration and creativity — not to mention carpentry — while

working to solve a problem. Meanwhile, other student teams explored a local restored prairie and collected seeds for future DNR restoration efforts.

Later the same teams worked hip-deep in the wetland to install and build the boardwalk over the water. They battled mud, gravity and their own mistakes to make the structure secure, level and ready to serve the needs of individuals with or without disabilities. In the short term, High Marq students will be able to bring their families out on the boardwalk to show off the fruits of their labor. Longer term, future generations of students will walk in their footsteps as they explore this beautiful natural landscape.

This is only one example of a connection between students and the land at High Marq, and it would not be possible without the place-based element. Students could learn the same skills in the classroom, but the context of the natural environment provides meaning and purpose. The lessons our students learn will provide the environmental, cultural and economic basis for the future community leaders we need them to become.

### Case study: Highland

In rural southwestern Wisconsin, Highland Community School District’s vision

is rooted in community with a strong environmental education focus. To increase environmental literacy and foster a land stewardship ethic, the district contracts with a WGSN FIELD Corps educator to work with all students in grades 4K-8. Weekly hands-on field experiences and community partnerships teach students to appreciate Wisconsin’s natural resources.

Highland Middle School students’ outdoor learning experiences go beyond the classroom as they face environmental issues. For example, students visited Big Spring Creek and met with fish experts from the DNR and Trout Unlimited, who taught the students about fish tagging, stocking, population studies, fish shocking and threats to our native waterways. Both partners have worked with the school for several years.


Highland Elementary School has followed the middle school example of promoting ecoliteracy in the district. Recently, students took on a prairie restoration project and additional DNR staff visited Highland to discuss the role of prescribed burns in healthy prairies. They gave an overview of training and safety and volunteered to do a prescribed burn on the property outside of school time to aid the students in their prairie maintenance and restoration ef-

forts. Along with the DNR, the students have worked with The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) to learn more about the care, maintenance and restoration of Wisconsin’s native prairies.

Elementary students visited the Mounds View Grasslands, part of the Driftless region, and land owned by TPE. At the prairie, they explored a large red barn full of prairie seeds. Some seeds were drying in child swimming pools, while others were ready to go in paper grocery bags hanging against the wall. It was an amazing sight as students learned about the complex process of prairie-seed storage and preparation.

Once students left the barn, they learned how to collect native Indian grass seed and then the real fun began. Students stared across a field of golden Indian grass and forbs, then grabbed a bucket and dove into the sea of prairie. With plants reaching above their heads, students collected seeds, explored the prairie and connected with nature. This partnership with TPE helped students learn firsthand the value of prairie and native plants, and TPE in turn donated seed to help the school in prairie restoration efforts on school property.

Through such field experiences — restoring prairie, wetlands and woodlands — students gain an appreciation of the web of life by learning the connections and relationships among plants and animals. In place-based learning, students are given the opportunity to reflect on their role and place in Wisconsin ecosystems, as well as their relationships with wildlife and each other.

David Sobel, an environmental educator from Antioch University, said, “If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the Earth before we ask them to save it.” Connecting people to place in this way is a critical first step in protecting Wisconsin’s natural resources, now and in the future. 

*Skylar L. Primm has taught in project-based schools since 2009, and for the last six years at High Marq Environmental Charter School. He is an instructional coach in project-based learning for the Montello School District. Outside of school, you'll find him photographing rocks, birds and lichens. Kim Wahl has 20 years of experience teaching science. She joined Wisconsin Green Schools Network in 2014 and works both as a FIELD Corps educator for High Marq and Highland and as a program director for WGSN. Kim is also adjunct faculty with the LEAF Forestry Education Program at UW-Stevens Point. The authors thank WGSN and all the students, teachers, volunteers and administrators who support their efforts.*

AMANDA BOLAN



Community volunteer Phil Anastasi helps High Marq students place a boardwalk they helped construct in the Grand River Marsh Wildlife Area.

# Keeping it wild: Outdoor food and forays

## TALKING TURKEY, FROM FIELD TO FORK

John Motoviloff

### Field dressing and cleaning

While bagging a wild turkey can be challenging, cleaning one is a fairly simple matter. Field dressing — removing the entrails and allowing the bird to cool — is the first step in the process, with slightly different procedures followed for birds that will be plucked versus those that will be skinned.

Young turkeys — those with spurs of an inch or shorter — are good candidates for

plucking; the skin and accompanying layer of fat help keep the bird juicy during roasting. Older birds are best skinned and cooked using a marinade or other moist method.

For birds to be plucked, remove all feathers from the area between the breastbone and tail feathers. Make a shallow

cut along (not perpendicular to) the base of the breastbone. For birds to be skinned, the incision can be made without plucking.

At this point, use your knife or fingers to remove the entrails (liver, heart, crop, lungs, windpipe and intestines) from the chest cavity. Livers and hearts are choice morsels if not shot-damaged. Stew them with wine and shallots; puree and add butter or olive oil, salt and pepper, and, voilà — you have pâté.

Discard the other entrails. Clean the cavity well with paper towels, blotting up any blood or juices. The turkey should be set in a cool, shaded place or in the refrigerator.

### Skinning vs. plucking

Plucking is not a complicated task, but it is time-consuming. Pull out all feathers up to and beyond the first wing



KERRY MOTOVILLOFF

joint and neck. Use strong tweezers or needle-nose pliers for stubborn feathers. Go slowly and take care not to tear the skin. If the skin tears easily, try freezing the bird for an hour and then plucking it. This helps firm up the skin.

Using a sharp knife or game shears, remove the wings and head. Make a final pass and pull out any remaining feathers. Remove blood or other material from the chest cavity. For birds being cooked immediately, rinse until water forced through the cavity runs clear.

For birds that are being frozen, enclose them in an extra large zip-top bag. Press out as much air as possible and seal. You can further protect the turkey by wrapping the bag in butcher paper. Vacuum sealers accomplish the same thing, locking in air and keeping out freezer burn. Always label game with the species and date of kill.

Skinning a turkey takes less time. After the initial incision is made, the hunter can simply stand on the wings and pull the skin, feathers and all, from the bird. Skinning, which is like removing a sock, is best done while the turkey is still warm. Cut through wings with game shears.

Alternatively, you can peel back the skin and carve out the big fillets on either side of the breastbone. Work slowly and deliberately so you don't waste meat. To remove the drumsticks and thighs, peel back the skin covering these areas. Fillet out the thighs on either side. Cut the drumsticks from the body with game shears.

The parts can be wrapped and frozen. Remember that gamebirds which are transported — either from the field, home or camp — must have a full feathered wing, an entire leg or the head attached to the carcass.

### Three ways to cook your bird

Americans eat a lot of turkey — some 700 million pounds a year, with 46 million of the big birds cooked on Thanksgiving day alone, according to the National Turkey Federation. However, what we know about domestic turkeys doesn't always translate to their wild cousin, *Meleagris*.

Cagey as opposed to gullible, active instead of sedentary, eating nuts, grasses, insects and forbs instead of premixed feed, the lifestyles of the two birds are quite different. As a result, their flavor profiles and textures are also a study in opposites. While the wild turkey has lean meat full of bright flavor, its domestic cousin is fattier and milder.

So, how does the average cook make the most of this stately gamebird? Fortunately, like most game cooking, the job isn't rocket science. But it does require a shift in thinking from the throw-it-in-the-oven-and-watch-the-Packers approach that one uses for domestic birds.

### Going Dutch

How a turkey is cooked depends, in large part, on how it's cleaned. While most domestic turkeys come to American kitchens plucked, the vast majority of wild turkeys come to the cook skinned. Since this already lean meat is now missing protective fat and skin, moist cooking is called for. Think marinating, basting and braising.

Cut the turkey into six pieces (two breasts, two drumsticks, two thighs) and dredge them in seasoned flour. A Dutch oven or similar cooking vessel is handy for this job. It saves on dishes and captures the taste left behind from browning. Heat your cooking grease of choice — butter, oil or bacon drippings — and brown the pieces. Remove them to a dish. Now, get ready for mushrooms.

Why mushrooms? Mushrooms are great with game. Spring turkey hunters, especially in southern and western parts of Wisconsin, may well stumble across a patch of morels. Throw in a handful of ramps if you're lucky enough to find them. Both morels and ramps can also be purchased at food co-ops or natural food stores if you don't find them.

Deglaze the Dutch oven with a cup of chicken broth. Replace the browned turkey pieces, cover and bake at 200 degrees until tender, about four hours. The liquid produced in the Dutch oven is a powerhouse of flavor. Thicken it with a few tablespoons of flour or cornstarch and serve it over egg noodles or

mashed potatoes. Asparagus, wild or store-bought, and wild rice are the perfect sides.

### Soup's on!

Another approach to cooking wild turkey is to use the breasts and legs separately. Marinate the breast as you would chicken and reserve the legs for a soup. Any sharp marinade used for chicken works well for wild turkey. Soak it for a few hours, as turkey breast is lean and prone to drying out.

Fowl paired with lemon and herbs is delicious for good reason. Citric acid is a tenderizer and green herbs such as rosemary or thyme complement the mild taste.

White wine, olive oil, sea salt, garlic and fresh-ground black pepper all add to this sharpness. Drain from marinade and sear or grill the turkey breast over a hot flame. Doneness will vary with the thickness of the breast fillets, which can be sliced in smaller pieces to promote even cooking.

Drumsticks and thighs of wild turkey are as — or more — flavorful than the breast, though tougher. A long, slow simmer in broth or water along with noodles or wild rice, is a no-fail approach. Carrots, onions, mushrooms and celery are good add-ins. Add salt, pepper and a pinch of poultry seasoning. When the meat is tender, strip it from the bone and replace it in the soup. Correct the seasoning and serve.

### Whole foods

The largest gamebird in North America, a plucked wild turkey, roasted whole, is an eye-catching treat. Keep in mind, though, that plucking a wild turkey is a task of an hour or more. Check the bird's age by the length of its spurs; spurs of an inch or less indicate a young bird and good candidate. Soak the plucked bird for an hour or two in cold, salted water (about a cup of salt for each gallon of water) before roasting.

Bard the breast of your prized bird with bacon strips. Keep the heat low — 200 to 250 degrees. Baste frequently with pan juices and make sure the roaster stays moist with a cup or two of broth, white wine or orange juice. To get the most out of your bird, use the carcass to make a rich and delicious soup.

### DRIFTLESS WILD TURKEY

This dish is a fine example of seasonal eating — turkey, morel mushrooms and ramps are all springtime treats. If you find some wild asparagus growing in a fence row, so much the better. The Driftless area contains many small-scale producers such as millers, dairies, breweries and wineries, making it possible to construct this dish from ingredients produced in this region. Interestingly, Wisconsin's highly successful wild turkey reintroduction project started in Grant, Crawford and Vernon counties in the Driftless area.

1 wild turkey skinned and cut into 6 pieces — 2 breast fillets, 2 drumsticks, 2 thighs

1 cup all-purpose flour seasoned with salt, pepper and thyme for dredging

¼ cup sunflower oil

1 quart broth made with 1 pound wild turkey trimmings (bones, odd pieces, skin) simmered for 30 minutes in 6 cups water (1 quart chicken broth may be substituted)

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour for thickening

½ cup sour cream

½ pound or more of morel mushrooms,\* chopped, soaked in salt water and dried

4 ramps, washed and chopped (equivalent in onions, garlic or shallots may be substituted)

1 pound spaetzle or egg noodles, cooked according to package directions

1. Heat a Dutch oven on the stovetop. Preheat oven to 200 degrees.
2. Dredge turkey pieces in seasoned flour; shake off excess.
3. In Dutch oven, fry turkey pieces so outside is crisp; remove to platter in oven.
4. Sauté mushrooms and ramps in Dutch oven. Deglaze with turkey/chicken stock; bring to a boil. Add salt and pepper as needed. Replace turkey pieces.
5. Bake and check in 4 hours; turkey should be tender. If not, cook for an additional hour, adding more liquid if necessary.
6. Remove 1 cup of liquid from Dutch oven, thicken with flour and sour cream, add this to the Dutch oven. Turkey pieces can be removed with a slotted spoon during thickening, and then replaced.
7. Heat thickened mixture on stovetop until sauce thickens. Do not boil.
8. Serve over spaetzle or noodles, with steamed asparagus on the side.

\*All mushrooms thought to be morels should be cut in half lengthwise. Inspect mushrooms to make sure they are hollow inside. If mushrooms are not hollow, discard them.

### LEMON-THYME TURKEY BREAST

Breast fillets from one wild turkey

½ teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon sea salt

Fresh ground black pepper to taste

Juice of one lemon

4 shallots, peeled and diced

1 cup dry white wine

½ cup olive oil

4 tablespoons butter

1. Place turkey breasts in a large glass or other nonreactive container. Season with thyme, salt and pepper.
2. Combine the next four ingredients in a measuring cup, whisk together; pour over the fillets. Marinate, covered, for 4 hours in the refrigerator.
3. Remove fillets from marinade; drain, reserving marinade.
4. Heat a large skillet and melt butter. Sear breasts so they are brown on the outside and still juicy on the inside, about 10 minutes per side.
5. Remove fillets to platter in warm oven. Add marinade to skillet and heat, boiling for 5 minutes or longer.
6. Serve sauce over turkey breast with wild rice and fresh steamed asparagus on the side.



MICHAEL GORDON

Keeping wild turkey moist is crucial to cooking success.



RICH PHALIN

Take your spring turkey harvest to new levels of culinary delight with these tips and recipes.



**PRAISE FOR “FIREWISE”**  
I live between Elkhart Lake and Plymouth. I have 25 acres bordered to the west by county-owned Gerber Lakes wilderness area. When I bought my property in 2000, the 50-acre idle farmland to the west of me was approved by the town to become a subdivision. Sheboygan County approached the landowner who decided instead to sell the 50 acres to the county to add to the wilderness area. Now the wilderness area is about 150 acres. After the purchase the county hired a farmer to farm the land for three years to control the weeds. During that time the Boy Scouts collected wild native prairie seeds. The fourth year after the farming was done the farmer drilled the native prairie grasses into the soil.

The county had good intentions for doing this planting and I supported it. However, as time went by the dead grasses piled up year after year and I started to realize it was a ticking time bomb waiting to happen during wildfire season. The DNR tried doing controlled burns but my barn (which is assessed more than my house) is located only 50 feet from the grass edge and the winds are rarely favorable for a controlled burn. The winds this year were finally favorable after seven years. The DNR staff said they rarely see flames so high (several hundred feet) and were amazed how powerful the burn was.

For the past five years I’ve been writing to our county officials about the threat of the prairie lands with no luck. They just did not understand the threat the unmanaged field presented to my family and property. Then last year I found the Firewise program that helped bring neighbors and the community together to help understand the threat wildfires can present and what we can do to help protect ourselves.

In the spring of 2016 I went to the Sheboygan County Planning and Conservation Department meeting and told them about the DNR-sponsored Firewise program. Next, I got on the next month’s agenda and the Planning, Resources, Agriculture and Extension Committee (PRAECom) approved the Firewise-recommended home ignition zone for my situation. The following month, the Sheboygan County Recreational Facilities Management Advisory Committee approved the Firewise-recommended home ignition zone for me.

The agreement is that in the fall I cut a 200-foot area of the grassland, marked out by the county surveyor, with my haybine. I then bale the grasses, hence removing the fuel a wildfire needs. I will then place the bales in another area of the field to help promote habitat for mice, moles, and other small mammals, which are the main food source for prey birds, especially the barn owl. This winter my son and I will build approved houses for the barn owl and will place them on my barn and on the tree line of the wilderness area.

I want to thank the DNR because without the Firewise program this couldn’t have happened. Next year’s fire season will bring much less stress and anxiety.

Brian Niemi  
Plymouth

**NEED TO FIND A BETTER BALANCE**  
I was heartened by a piece in the groundwater section of the February 2017 issue (“Groundwater: Powering Wisconsin’s economy”) highlighting groundwater conservation efforts of the Diercks family at Coloma Farms. The partnership between Coloma Farms and UW researchers on groundwater conservation is a step in the right direction. With pressure from both economics and Mother Nature, modern agriculture can be quite challenging. Often it seems that stewardship of the land and water seems to take a back seat. Hats off to the UW and to the Diercks family for working together to come up with viable solutions. The efforts of UW need to extend beyond water to also aid agribusiness in finding ways to conserve soil, use fewer chemicals and find ways to preserve natural habitats and woodlands. We need to find ways to better balance the effects of modern agribusiness with maintaining Wisconsin’s cherished landscape in ways that can make sense economically.

Jeff Wittrock  
Delafield

**EXPERIMENTAL GAME FARM**  
We have subscribed to your magazine for many years and enjoy every issue. We usually pass them on to friends and neighbors. I’ve been going through old booklets and travel information in an effort to downsize. I found this old booklet about the game and fur farm that you might enjoy. At one time I had some photos taken at the farm but they were nothing special so I purged them some years ago. Where do the years go? I was 14 years old when the booklet was published. I still remember my experience at the farm with much pleasure.

Juanita Parsons  
Menasha



*Thanks so much for your loyal readership and for sharing this old treasure. The State Game Farm in Poynette is a modern facility where staff incubate over 300,000 pheasant eggs each year in incubators that have been in use since the 1950s when this booklet was published. In those days, the farm was more than a game farm. Its experimental work included pathological post-mortem examinations of wildlife to learn about food habits and diseases. It also raised many species of pheasant, partridge, quail, peafowl, wild turkey, grouse, many species of ducks and geese, and furbearing animals like deer, black bears, raccoons, martens, fishers, Wolverines and many more. The year this booklet was printed, the game farm raised and stocked 265,843 day-old pheasant chicks and 1,349 raccoons.*

**USE SCIENCE-BASED SOURCES IN MAGAZINE**  
In the December 2016 issue of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine, I found some of the responses in the Readers Write column to be quite troublesome. The DNR is an organization that should be protecting and managing our resources using scientific data. When readers write in with questions, the responses should include scientific data and cite sources. Wikipedia, although a fun and usually fairly accurate place to gain limited knowledge, is not a source that should be used in a science-based publication (“Frog legs on the menu”), and citing “an online search” as a source (“Invasive crayfish”) is not only irresponsible, but also denies the provider of the information credit when using it. In a society where facts and falsehoods are hard to distinguish and science seems to be under attack, the DNR should make a much greater attempt to provide factual information with solid documentation.

Matthew A. Robisch  
Rib Lake

CORRECTION

In our February 2017 issue, we identified James White, Jr. (shown on page 18) as a member of the Oneida Nation. He is a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles tribe. We regret the error.



**AUTUMN ON STONE LAKE**  
We have a cabin on Stone Lake just east of Danbury and I am also with the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. This is a stunning area in so many ways. I should have sent you these two fall pictures from my little lake in late October. Thanks for the magazine!

Mark Nupen  
Danbury



**PHOTO IDENTIFICATION**  
I’m sending three stories each with a picture: First, on Nov. 10, a fellow birder called to report a hummingbird at his feeder that definitely was not a ruby-throat. He was considering either rufous or Anna’s. With the help of my camera and a long lens, the ID was easy — rufous! This is way out of its range. Our thoughts were this was a rare sighting and that it had better go south soon. Second, here’s another color variation of the gray squirrel at the base of my feeder. Third, I found this branch in my front yard in Iowa County. I believe that I read somewhere this is the behavior of the sharp-shinned hawk.

James P. Beck  
Madison

*Ryan Brady, a DNR bird expert stationed in Ashland, offered the following explanation: The hummingbird appears to be a rufous or Allen’s hummingbird. Except for adult males (which this one is not), the two species are indecipherable without examining fine details often not visible in photos. Both are western species not found here alongside our typical ruby-throated hummingbirds during the summer months. Allen’s is exceptionally rare in the eastern U.S. and has never been confirmed in Wisconsin. Rufous hummingbird, however, occurs in small numbers each year as birds migrate from the western breeding areas to wintering areas along the eastern mid-Atlantic to southern Gulf coasts. They are very hardy and routinely occur in mid to late fall like this one, some even staying well into December in years with late-arriving winters. One was seen regularly on the southwest side of Lake Mendota between Madison and Middleton last fall and may have been the same bird. If not, I’d encourage the reader to submit his sighting and image to [www.ebird.org/iwi](http://www.ebird.org/iwi). I’m not a squirrel expert but it looks like an aberrant gray squirrel to me. They show a wide variety of pigmentation from blonde to black and everything in between.*

*The photo of the cardinal head is a tough one. Hawks and owls typically eat the head, though sometimes only the back of the head like this. However, they usually don’t wedge it into a branch as shown here. Northern shrikes, small raptor-like songbirds, are nicknamed “butcher birds” for their behavior of impaling prey on sharp items like thorns or barbed wire fences. They occasionally wedge prey like this also, though a cardinal is a big prey item for a robin-sized bird. Iowa County also doesn’t have many shrikes but if the photo was taken after mid-October then that’s a possibility. Otherwise, these sorts of things are often a mystery!*

Ed. Note: A follow-up email from Mr. Beck, who checked with a birding friend in Texas where Allen and rufous hummingbirds are common, confirmed this is a rufous hummingbird.

**KUDOS FOR “WOLF SONG”**  
Thanks for printing “Wolf song” by Stephen Lars Kalmon in the December 2016 issue. It was a brilliant piece of writing and led me to reflect on how we missed the howl of the wolf in Wisconsin for almost three decades. With its repopulation of northern Wisconsin we can once again be awed by this song of wilderness. We are lucky to be just one of 12 states to have a timber wolf population. I hope the *Canis lupus* serenade is here to stay so future generations can be awed by its haunting beauty.

Ray Pinter  
West Bend

**A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MONARCHS**  
On Sept. 16 a friend and I were walking the Ice Age Trail in Janesville after an early morning rain. Suddenly, hundreds of monarch butterflies flew out of the woods on one side of the path, fluttered around us and then landed in the field of wildflowers on the other side of the path. We have never seen so many monarchs and wondered if they were gathering to migrate to Mexico for the winter?

Ruth Barrett  
Janesville

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY**  
Regarding a Readers Write letter in the December 2016 issue (“Bee tree hunting” from Ron Winter), I thought I should give the “other side of the story.” In 1950 after living through the Depression and the rationing of World War II, we all learned not to waste. After a windstorm a carpenter (who also kept a few hives of bees) and his son were doing repair work on the farm buildings where we lived. The subject of bees came up. Dad was telling him about a hollow cherry tree on a fenceline with bees in it. We all went and cut the tree down. I don’t remember (it’s been 66 years) just how he did it, but it had something to do with the queen. He got the bees in a hive and took them home. Nothing was wasted or destroyed. He got the swarm, we got almost a wash tub full of comb honey and I am sure the tree got burned for firewood that winter. Just wanted your readers to know we can have our honey and eat it too, all in a way that protects the bees. By the way, my wife is a Badger fan from Wisconsin and I’m from Iowa, so we get both *Iowa Outdoors* and *Wisconsin Natural Resources*. They are both great!

Ronald Donovan  
Dubuque, Iowa



ROBIN'S NEST

I'm a subscriber of your *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine and thought you might enjoy the photos of a robin's nest with four little ones that hatched in early July. The nest was in a wreath that was outdoors in the front of our house, which is sheltered. Mother robin picked a good spot for her nest.

Jeff Vogt  
Town of Sugar Creek

STINKY 'SHROOM

We photographed this image of a mushroom growing in our grove of pine trees. It has a strong odor, like a decomposing animal. Can you tell us the name of it?

Catherine Shirk  
Owen



Thomas Meyer, wildlife biologist with the State Natural Areas Program, provided this identification: The fungus is the netted stinkhorn or veiled stinkhorn, scientific name *Dictyophora duplicata*. This, like all mushrooms, is the fruiting portion of the main body of the fungus, which lives underground. It emerges from the soil as an egg-shaped form from which a stalk quickly expands to the phallic-looking shape in the photo. In fact, the stinkhorns are placed in the scientific family Phallales, which also includes the earthstar and puffball fungi. The black, slimy mass at the end of the stalk is where the reproductive spores are produced. And the odor of that mass is truly fetid, reminiscent of rotting flesh. The odor attracts carrion-seeking flies and other insects, which serve the purpose of distributing the spores that stick to their bodies. The lacy, veil-like structure that hangs down from the cap is a defining characteristic of this interesting mushroom.



HEN OF THE WOODS

While hunting deer on the Aldo Leopold Foundation grounds with the shack group, I discovered these mushrooms. I showed them to Steve Swenson, who is the field ecologist with the foundation. He was sure they were a form of hen of the woods, a beautiful bunch of them. We have known the Leopold group for a long time and have hunted with Steve for pheasants. I'm the old man of the group at 80 years. I help with repair to the old shack. We live on the Wisconsin River across from the foundation.

James N. Fedkenheuer  
Baraboo

A BONE TO PICK WITH WISCONSIN TRAVELER

As a reader of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* and its predecessors since the time I could read, perhaps 1954, I am a bit puzzled by some content that seems all but related to natural resources. These articles seem to be creeping into an otherwise good publication. A case in point is the Wisconsin Traveler article "Hops meet history at the Potosi Brewery" in the June 2016 issue. It begs the imagination to find anything in this piece that even remotely relates to natural resources or a location that is or has a unique natural resource. I say this without prejudice to Potosi, since I drank many glasses of Holiday beer in Potosi as a student at UW-Platteville in the 1960s.

While well researched and written and embellished with nice photographs, the piece has nothing to do with natural resources, even by a broad definition of the term. The piece belongs in a Wisconsin tourism publication. Indeed, the only outdoor experience associated with the brewery, a hard-to-find overlook of the river some distance away, is not even mentioned. Beer, cheese, bratwurst — all Wisconsin traditions, but having nothing to do with natural resources. There are so many sites of interest to a traveler and each related to natural resources in our beautiful state, indeed in Grant County alone, to write about in your Traveler section. Please do.

Michael J. Roy  
Madison

We appreciate your feedback, Michael, and while the bulk of our magazine is devoted to stories about enjoying and preserving our state's natural resources, we occasionally use the Wisconsin Traveler section for broader travel-related items. Traveler in the past has highlighted Wisconsin museums, historical sites, day trips, food venues and festivals. Wisconsin Traveler was initiated in the February 1995 issue with an introductory paragraph that defined it as a "sprightly guide [to acquaint] readers with festivals, tours, museums, outdoor recreation and other diversissements offered all around the state." That issue's Traveler covered events at Olbrich Gardens, the Madison Children's Museum, Elvehjem Museum of Art and other venues. Thanks for your loyal readership and it's good to hear your opinion. We hope you continue to enjoy our magazine.

MONARCH BUTTERFLY MAGNET

Meadow blazing star (*Liatris ligulistylis*) is a prairie flower that performs well in full sun and well-drained soils. It blooms in late summer on tall spindly stalks with numerous flowers from top to bottom. The top flowers open first, generally in mid-July, with the remainder opening for the next 4-6 weeks. The attractive purple flowers contain nectar that draws the monarchs to them like a magnet. MBS grows tall — up to 6 feet — which makes it an easy target for the hungry monarch.

My first exposure to meadow blazing star was in September 2014. A friend invited me to visit him and see the monarchs swarming his neighbor's flowers. As a wildlife photographer, I jumped at the opportunity. It was an amazing sight. Monarchs were fighting for position on these tall purple flowers. There was an identification tag attached to the base of one of the stalks which named the flower so a few days later I purchased five plants and planted them in our flower garden. In mid-July 2015 the first flower opened and immediately a monarch landed on it and began feeding. For the next four weeks, there were monarchs feeding and mating every day but the flowers all dried out prior to the monarch migration. Back to the nursery to get three more plants. The next year, the three new plants didn't flower until mid-August, so we had monarchs, through their mating and migration, into September. During migration I was able to tag 25 monarchs in affiliation with "Monarch Watch," a study by the University of Kansas.



John Dart  
North Fond du Lac



CURE FOR CABIN FEVER

Suffering from cabin fever, I knew a hike at Devil's Lake was the cure. Sunny skies and storm clouds were a perfect mix for capturing photographs.

David Edwards  
Beaver Dam



PEANUT THIEF

Just digging into the new issue (February 2017) and saw in the Readers Write section someone who sent a photo of a "deer stand visitor." I have one that puts smiles on peoples' faces to share if you choose to publish it. For seven days in the very tall deer stand one gets bored especially in the Northwoods waiting for the 30-point buck. This is how I choose to pass the time, training black-capped chickadees. That is a peanut in my teeth, which they seem to enjoy very much. At one point they would be half-way into my mouth trying to reach the peanut!

Brian Niemi  
Plymouth

COMMENT ON A STORY?

Send your letters to: Readers Write, WNR magazine, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. Or email letters to [dnrmagazine@wisconsin.gov](mailto:dnrmagazine@wisconsin.gov). Limit letters to 250 words and include your name and the community from which you are writing.

NO ACCESS TO THE WEB?

Don't have access to a link we mention in a story? Let us know when you want to follow a link we list. We'll do what we can to get you a copy of the material if it is available free of charge and is relatively short in length.

ANOTHER X40 FAN

I was reading the February 2017 issue of your magazine when I turned the page to the Readers Write section. "Holy cow," I exclaimed to my wife, Brenda, "It's X40!" Dorothy Kruse had written about her experience with a trumpeter swan in 1998. Included was a photo of the swan known as X40. I, too, became intimately familiar with X40 while duck hunting at Meadow Valley in the late 1990s. It was not uncommon to see a trumpeter at Meadow Valley, as that was one of the areas where reintroduction efforts were taking place.

One morning while I was picking up my decoys, I noticed a swan several hundred yards away. I "honk-honk-honked" at him and he swam my way. Eventually he swam right up to me. He did a "duck and splash," and I imitated it. He did it again. This was too much for Tucker, my golden retriever. He ran out of the brush blind and charged through the water at X40. The swan did not appreciate that and he chased Tucker back to dry land. X40 returned to me and allowed me to pet him. I finished picking up my decoys with X40 staying by my side as I waded along. After I bagged the decoys, Tucker and I headed for the dike that ran parallel to the flowage. X40 stayed about 20 yards distant as I kept Tucker at heel. Once Tucker and I were on the dike walking to the parking area, X40 swam alongside. We bid each other goodbye at that point. When I got home I told Brenda about the incredible experience I'd had. I didn't think anyone would believe me. Now I know I wasn't the only one who came to know X40!

Curt Pluke  
Wisconsin Rapids



STANDING "TALL"

During the 2016 gun deer hunt we had taken a midday lunch break. As we stood by a previously harvested deer I noticed a white animal scurrying in and around the hanging deer and the wood pile. It was as curious of me as I was of it and I got within a few feet and was able to take some great pictures of this ermine in its winter coat of white. I was lucky enough to snap a picture as it stood up on its hind legs.

Patrick Bohm  
Shawano



## BRADLEY CREEK SWAMP CONIFERS STATE NATURAL AREA

*Thomas A. Meyer*  
State Natural Areas Program

Clear, cold, spring-fed Bradley Creek provides the lifeblood for this small, but diverse, nature preserve in Portage County. The Class I trout stream is a tributary to the Little Wolf River and features a sand and rubble bottom interspersed with large, glacially-rounded granite boulders. The aquatic larvae of stone flies, caddisflies and mayflies inhabit its alkaline waters and provide food for the population of native brook trout. Fringing the creek and providing dense shade to the understory flora is a northern wet-mesic forest of white cedar, balsam fir, hemlock, white pine, yellow-bud hickory and red maple. The wet, mossy ground layer supports the delicate three-leaved goldthread, nodding trillium, partridgeberry, wild ginger, naked miterwort, wild sarsaparilla and maidenhair fern. In spring, marsh marigolds add a splash of yellow to wet pockets along the creek. Cuckoos – both yellow-billed and black-billed – along with hermit thrush, Nashville warbler, ovenbird and black-throated green warbler are among the birds that nest here.

Bradley Creek State Natural Area is owned by the DNR and lies within the Little Wolf River Fishery Area. It was designated SNA No. 585 in 2008. There are no designated trails or other facilities on the property. Visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "Bradley Creek Swamp Conifers" for a map, access directions and more information about this site and the rest of the State Natural Areas Program.

