

# Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

July, 2015

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## Wildlife Through My Windows

By Joann Fricke

Some folks have expensive blinds that they sit in for hours trying to capture wildlife photos. I, however, just look out my windows and can photograph the most interesting things. This year alone I, or my husband, have managed to snap (clockwise from top right) a mama turkey and 7 poults, a hungry fox, playful raccoon babies, a mama deer and two fawns, a posing bobcat and a fence lizard lounging on the arm of a chair.

I don't know how accurate my observations are, but it seems that turkeys rule the roost, so to speak. If both they and deer want a drink from our tub of water, all the turkeys have to do is flap their wings and the deer submit. I have also observed a bobcat eyeing up two hens and one tom only to trot right by them, never even turning his head, as the hens put up a big fuss and the tom flew up in a tree—brave guy!

Foxes like rodents for breakfast. One morning, I witnessed a vixen catching chipmunks and depositing them in a pile until she had enough to feed her kits, then gathering them up in her mouth and sauntering off to her den.

Deer can dance--especially when bugs are bothering them. You'd be amazed how high they can kick up their heels trying to fend off pesky insects. Birds sometimes help with this task as they seem to hover in the air or even come to rest on a deer's rump, catching bugs as they buzz around.

Lizards lie in the shade when it's hot. The lizard in the photo jumps down from the arm to the seat of the chair and gets in the shade behind the arm post in late afternoon when the temperatures soar.



Besides being fastidious about washing their food, raccoons like to submerge their bodies in water to cool off. Thus the reason for the mud at the bottom of the water tub every morning.

A few days ago, a blur of movement caught my eye as I saw the shape of a fairly large bird fly into the woods. I couldn't tell what it was, but about that time my husband noticed a flurry of feathers wafting through the air. I guess that Cooper's hawk I've seen hanging around picked a nice, plump mourning dove for lunch! Never a dull moment at the Illinois Ozarks Nature Preserve.

## Guest Views...

### The Illinois Ozarks from my Bike Saddle

by Rick Roever

After a couple of months of snow, drizzle and freezing temps and restricting myself to hiking the mud soaked trails of Salt Lick and White Rock, it will feel good to get back in the saddle, bicycle that is.

The first part of my ride begins where the Illinois Ozarks begins, on the Bluffs in Valmeyer. With temperatures in the 40s, the ride down the hill at 35 miles an hour will be a little chilly. Riding this early in the year can be treacherous with the side of the road holding cinders and an occasional patch of ice along my lane, which is the 2 feet left of the white line. Not to mention the finger and foot numbing cold as I fly down the hill, the same hill that I will labor up 60 miles later.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

As I enter the valley and the 'old town', I can hear migrating snow geese on their way north. I usually hear them before I see them as my eyes are trained on the road. And, if the wind is from the north I can hear several shot volleys as some goose hunters on Moredock Lake do their best to control the ever increasing numbers of snow geese. Pelicans are also migrating and can be seen 'leap frogging' over the cottonwoods along the river.

With the north wind pushing me down the levee road south of Harrisonville, I can see eagles roosting in the trees along the levee. I have seen as many as a hundred eagles scattered along the levee road, some feeding in the open water as the sloughs begin to dry up as the river has reached its winter low. The fields and woods are barren making it easy to spot wildlife from the quiet approach of my bike. Coyotes can be seen 'mousing' the fields and deer are just inside the edges browsing on whatever they can find.



Photo courtesy Eric Fries

It is beginning to warm up a bit as spring approaches and the Bluffs are beginning to green up. Growing up in the valley, we kids often called the Bluffs mountains. They may not be majestic but we thought they were. It is hard to imagine that before the valley was settled and farmed, it was covered in prairie grass, willows, cottonwoods and oaks, with the Mississippi free flowing and meandering from bluff to bluff.

Late spring and it is getting even warmer. Feels good to leave the fleece behind and ride in shorts and t-shirt. I can see many of my old friends who farm in the valley working feverishly to get their crops planted. I see mallards and wood ducks in pairs in the sloughs along the levee. I expect to see some ducklings in a couple of weeks. Egrets and herons have taken over the feeding areas that the eagles have vacated as they moved back north.

Summer is finally here and the humidity and temperature are the same. Wheat harvest has begun and so



has the rise of the river. Some of the sloughs along the levee are beginning to fill again. Turkey, deer and rabbits are seeking refuge along the levee road. Armadillos are now a common sight. Where did they come from? The corn is growing so fast you can almost see it grow and the pollen is heavy in the air. Dehydration in the heat of the summer can be avoided by drinking several bottles of water. Good thing I can refill my water bottles along my route. My favorite watering holes are Fort Chartres, the village park in Prairie du Rocher and occasionally the Fults village park.

Early Fall is approaching and the corn harvest has started. Now the bottoms are seeing an increase in traffic with harvesters, trucks and other cyclists taking advantage of the moderating temperatures. Also see a lot of 'Sunday drivers' driving the Bluff Road and Levee Road gazing at the Bluffs as they begin to slowly change color. The trails are seeing more traffic as well, White Rock and Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserves are getting used more than any other time of year.



Photo courtesy Dennis Jacobsen

Winter is just around the corner, and you can feel it. The fleece is back on and my fingers and toes are getting cold again. Deer are getting more restless as the days grow shorter. Ducks and geese are migrating and I once again hear a few shots coming from a couple of the duck clubs along Bluff Road. Just about back home, 3000\* miles later and I am climbing the Valmeyer hill. Snow, ice and severe cold will keep me off my bike and back on the hiking trails until next year.

Jump on your bike or grab your hiking boots and take advantage of the best bike riding and hiking trails in Southern Illinois and wave at the rider wearing bright yellow, I will be sure to wave back.

*\*Editor's note: 3000 miles is an average year of riding for Rick on his bike. I once offered Rick a ride on a cold, rainy Sunday morning as he walked down Route 156 heading west from Valmeyer. Of course, I didn't know it was Rick out for his daily exercise, I thought some poor fellow had broken down somewhere and didn't have a cell phone!*

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**STARRY NIGHT**, Saturday, August 15, 8 until 11 p.m. at the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve. Join us and amateur astronomer Tom Sudholt for an evening of stargazing as the Perseid meteor showers will be raining down that night. This event is weather dependent, so reservations must be made by August 12 to [clifftop@htc.net](mailto:clifftop@htc.net) or (618)458-4674

**FUNGUS AMONG US**, Saturday, September 12 (note date change from event card), 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the White Rock Nature Preserve. Join us and mycologist Andy Miller for a day of late season mushroom and fungi hunting. Reservations are requested by September 10 via email at [clifftop@htc.net](mailto:clifftop@htc.net) or telephone at (618)458-4674.



**MASTER NATURALIST TRAINING**, Wednesdays from 1-5 p.m. from August 26 through November 11, 2015—12 sessions for \$225. For more information, contact Sarah Ruth at [ruth1@Illinois.edu](mailto:ruth1@Illinois.edu) or (618)939-3434.

Upcoming Events

# Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve Update

Photo courtesy Steve Taylor

We purchased the 535-acre tract, now dedicated as a nature preserve, in December 2013 with an overarching goal of helping to protect the Fogelpole Cave system lying below it. Improving the quality of groundwater transiting the cave system is most important. Four hundred acres of the tract had been row cropped for decades, a practice contributing to groundwater contamination by leaching agro-chemicals and highly-erodible soil particles into the cave system. The presence of 36 sinkhole ponds and over 100 dry sinkhole features on the property, each directly contributing surface water runoff into the cave, called for the quickest fix to stabilize erosion and filter water runoff. All advisors agreed that the quickest fix was to convert land use to grassland.



Photo courtesy Susan Rick

So, on May 7th of this year, we planted 282 acres of prairie grasses and flowers on the property. The project was made possible through enrollment in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which helped to fund seed costs and field preparation, and allowed us to hire Gateway FS to mechanically broadcast the seed. (Great job by Matt Keller who can be seen in the terroGator in the photo at left.)

Twelve native grasses and sedges were planted including broom sedge, side-oats grama, Short's sedge, fox sedge, Canada wild rye, Virginia wild rye, sand lovegrass, June grass, little blue stem, prairie dropseed, purple top and Eastern gamagrass. Little blue stem and side-oats are the dominant component, comprising a third of the grass

mix. We shied away from taller native grasses, such as Indian grass or big blue stem, because they like to take over and crowd out other grasses and flowers.

In addition, 41 species of native, pollinator-friendly flowers were planted. The list includes: leadplant, butterfly milkweed, smooth aster, New England aster, aromatic aster, sky-blue aster, white indigo, Maryland senna, partridge pea, lance leaf and tall coreopsis, white and purple prairie clovers, Illinois bundleflower, pale purple and purple coneflowers, rattlesnake master, flowering spurge, ashy sunflower, ox-eye (false) sunflower, round-headed bush clover, prairie and rough blazingstars, bee balm, wild quinine, foxglove penstemon, narrowleaf mountain mint, gray-headed coneflower, black-eyed, sweet black-eyed, and brown-eyed Susans, four silphiums (rosin weed, compass plant, cup plant, and prairie dock) stiff and showy goldenrods, Ohio spiderwort, yellow crown beard, western ironweed, and golden alexanders.

Establishing a new prairie takes time, patience and work. For the remainder of this year and next we need to manage weeds in the seed bank to allow the native grasses and forbs to out compete and takeover. The key is repeat mowing, about six to eight inches high, to cut off weed seed heads and set back further weed takeover. It takes time, about 50 hours, to mow 282 acres, and it takes the right equipment. So we have just purchased a 2013 John Deere 6115 tractor and a 15-foot wide rotary mower. Depending on rainfall, we'll have to mow three times or so this year and two or three times next year.





Clifftop Board Vice President, Steve Gonzalez, was the first to take the new tractor and mower for a spin. Left photo courtesy Pen DauBach, right, Joann Fricke.

Control of weedy species also will require some spot herbicide applications, as non-native grasses, like European fescues and foxtails, can be very aggressive. But, once established with a few years to mature, our native grasses will flourish and thrive. In fact, grasses sometimes can be too much of a good thing, reducing space for pollinator-necessary flowers. We plan to boost flower production over the next several years.

Inter seeding and customized additional seeding also are very important steps to establish a botanically diverse prairie, which then provides conditions for wildlife diversity. Beginning in late fall of next year we will begin to burn selective spots in the prairie and spread additional seed to fill in gaps and add species. The 36 sinkhole ponds on the preserve also require special handling, with customized planting of wetland-tolerant sedges, grasses and flowers along pond edges. We are working on several grants to assist with acquiring native plant species both for the main prairie planted this year and for the special wetland areas. Both inter seeding and the creation of customized "boutique" plant communities will be an ongoing management responsibility for many years ahead. Finally, probably in three years, we will begin prescribed burns on select sections of the prairie on a rotational schedule.



On hand at the PWSNP to take delivery of the tractor and mower were, left to right, Clifftop Board member, Jim Hill, Wm. Nobbe & Co. John Deere Set-up Technician, Ken Otten, board members, Jared Nobbe, Joann Fricke, Pen DauBach, Ralph Buettner, Steve Gonzalez and Carl DauBach. After a crash course in operating the tractor, Steve and Carl spent the rest of the day mowing.  
Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

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 An "eyes-up" scan of the planted acreage in late June and early July showed a lot of weeds. But, an "eyes-down" hike across the planted acreage at the same time brought all new and much more rewarding views. Penstemon, coneflowers, bundleflower, silphiums and many more seedlings are present. All are showing strong, healthy growth and sturdy green leaves, but only a few inches tall. Even a more rewarding sight: lots of partridge pea, butterfly weed, wild quinine, ox-eye sunflowers and groupings of "Susies" IN BLOOM, on still short stems. And, tufts of little blue stem and side-oats grasses shine low on the ground. The wet, cool spring and early summer, interspersed with a few days of incubator-like heat apparently provided excellent conditions for germination. The seedling prairie seems eager to grow. In future years, these small tufts of grass will grow to three and four feet tall and spread outward, supporting and holding the varied flowers scattered between, in front and even within the bunches of grass. Some of the flowers – like the silphiums – will tower, returning an "eyes-up" scan into a new reward.



Looks like lots and lots of weeds -- but underneath are healthy native plants, the result of good germination on the prairie planting at PWSNP.



Wild quinine (*Parthenium integrifolia*) already in bloom at PWSNP prairie/savannah restoration.



Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is hidden under the tall weedy growth. Mowing will provide sunlight and space for "good stuff" like this to flourish.



A young healthy silphium sprout.

All photos this page courtesy Pen DauBach.



# Citizen Science Volunteers Needed

The restoration of the surface to native plant land cover at the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve is a long-term set of varied tasks and we hope – we count on – Clifftop volunteers to carry this forward.

- Want to own it?
  - Would you like your own patch of prairie, perhaps your very own sinkhole pond, or a woodland within the prairie to manage, steward, and restore?
- Want to figure it out?
  - What native plants might do best in one setting and which ones might do better in another and then carry out the planting, growing, tending, discovering and documenting the results?
- Want to learn how critters respond?
  - Interested in conducting butterfly surveys, or, even, concentrating on Monarch butterfly habitat and conservation?
  - Want to do some scouting for mammals; figure out just how many quail coveys live there and how they respond to our prairie planting; or want to discover if “herptiles” prefer a particular type of pond?

Clifftop Citizen Science volunteers already are working some projects to help us learn what’s there now and what effects the land use change will have. Basic planning documents for a variety of studies are available: Monarch Watch, for example, gives us a ready-to-use set of methods to analyze the conservation measures we’re putting in place.

Consider the above as a VERY short list, a jumping off place for ideas. Volunteers who want to take a real hands-on approach can have their very own PWSNP project: your help and creativity is needed and wanted!

Contact Clifftop at [clifftop@htc.net](mailto:clifftop@htc.net) or 458-4674 to share your ideas. Please help all of us make PWSNP a great wildlife habitat and great environment for learning.

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## Dragonfly Survey

Master Naturalists Joe and Pat Roti Roti began the first of many planned dragonfly surveys and counts at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve in July. Their study “Drop in the Halloween Pennant (*Celithemis eponina*) Population at a Specific Illinois Site,” published in a recent edition of *Argia*, the news journal of the Dragonfly Society of America, details their initial analysis of possible population changes of dragonflies at a site near their home in Highland, IL. Their counts at PWSNP will include some pond areas and portions of our (still roughed-in) hiking trail system.

Many thanks to Joe and Pat for helping all of us learn more about the PWSNP as the surface transitions to native prairie/savannah land cover!




Female Pondhawk

Twelve Spotted Skimmer






Grins  !

We've had a couple of inquires regarding the AmazonSmile program, a way for shoppers to donate to charities. While we always applaud efforts to do more for nonprofits, we have to point out that a BIG eScrip "grin" of 3% or more is a better reward than a slim smile of 0.5%.

Earn money for Clifftop with a BIG eScrip grin when you shop. The program is simple: just pick up an

eScrip card  at a Schnucks Market and register your card to Clifftop, group ID # 500022680, either online at [www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com) or by telephone, 1-800-931-6258. Schnucks offers automatic contributions of up to 3% of your purchase price when you have your card scanned at checkout. Online merchants – accessed through [www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com) – offer rewards at varying percentages, some as high as 6% and frequently also offer additional deals, like free shipping. You can even earn eScrip contributions when you shop the "smile" guys, though here again, shopping Amazon by entering through the eScrip website earns up to 1.5% in contributions to Clifftop. Now that's something to grin about!

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## Salt Lick Point Committee Awarded Community Stewardship Challenge Grant

You've heard the old saying, "We're all in this together," haven't you? That couldn't be more true for volunteer stewardship conservation organizations. We all support one another by combining efforts whenever possible. Toward that end, Clifftop is pleased to share that the Salt Lick Point Committee has been awarded an eighteen month Community Stewardship Challenge Grant by the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF). The grant consists of two components:

- 1. Cash Donations:** \$3 for every \$1 of actual cash contributed toward a stewardship fund for use at the Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve, up to \$21,000.
- 2. Volunteer Labor:** An outright gift of \$4,000 for a minimum of 400 hours of volunteer work completed at Salt Lick Point L&WR.

Because of changes in federally-funded programs the committee has not been able to finish the important work of controlling foreign invasives on a portion of the Reserve. The Salt Lick Point Committee will use the money they receive from ICECF to improve the reserve in various ways, one of which will be the removal of these invasive plant species to help bring sunlight, and, consequently, wildflowers, back to the forest floor.

Please help our friends on the Salt Lick Point Committee by considering a tax deductible donation at one of the following levels:

Bluebell Level	\$25
Missouri Coneflower Level	\$50
Crested Coralroot Orchid Level	\$100
Woolly Buckthorn Level	\$200
Red Fox Level	\$500
Indiana Bat Level	\$1,000
Timber Rattlesnake Level	\$5,000

*Thank you!*

Please follow the instructions and complete the form on the following page and mail to:  
Salt Lick Point Committee  
P.O. Box 99  
Valmeyer, IL 62295





Illinois Clean Energy  
*community foundation*

Yes, I want to help the Salt Lick Point Committee with the Community Stewardship Challenge Grant Project!

Enclosed, please find my donation in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_\*. I understand that for every one dollar that the Salt Lick Point Committee raises for stewardship at the Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve in the next 18 months, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation will contribute three dollars in matching funds, up to \$21,000. In addition, for every 100 hours of stewardship documented at SLP, ICECF will donate \$1,000, up to \$4,000.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Sorry, I can't help financially, but I am willing to volunteer for stewardship work. Please contact me.

Send your check payable to Salt Lick Point Committee to:  
P. O. Box 99  
Valmeyer, IL 62295

Please note in the memo line of your check that this is a donation for the stewardship challenge grant. THANK YOU!!!

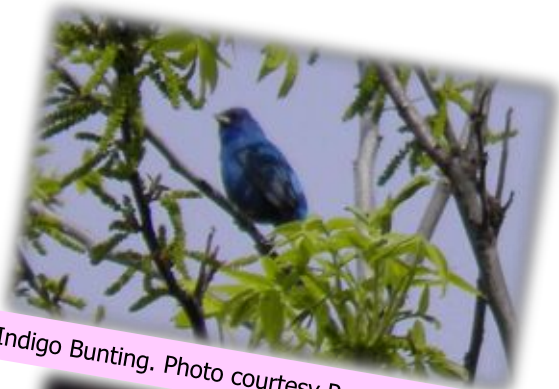
\* Salt Lick Point Committee is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization. Donations in support of the committee's activities are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



# Photo gallery...



Friday night social gathering. Photo courtesy Mike Fricke



Indigo Bunting. Photo courtesy Randy Schietzelt

## IAS Spring Gathering highlights...



A Saturday field trip. Photo courtesy Susan Rick



Saturday evening dinner and auction. Photo courtesy J. Fricke



Zebra swallowtail on butterfly weed.



Climbing milkweed.

## White Rock's healthy prairie & woodland wildflowers

Photos courtesy Susan Rick



Rudbeckia



## Allscheid Rock Shelter Field Trip

Photos courtesy Joann Fricke

