



Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

January, 2016

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Invasion of the Forest Snatchers?

By Joann Fricke

Please forgive my reference to the old horror movies, but that is exactly how I felt as I drove along Bluff Road this past Fall. Asian bush honeysuckle has literally taken over much of the talus slope along Bluff Road as well as many other areas in Monroe and St. Clair counties. I feel like a broken record when I talk to friends and acquaintances about the need to rid ourselves of this horrid plant. Some have actually told me that they love the smell and pretty berries! You can guess my reply. "No!" I say, "The Asian bush variety has no smell and, while the berries might be pretty (not to me), they have no nutritional value to wildlife!"

On another note, bush honeysuckle is not the only invasive plant that gets my dander up. Tree of Heaven is also quite evident on the talus slope of the bluffs, especially south of Valmeyer. Those ugly single trunks, so numerous in colonies, are highly visible in the winter. The best method to control Tree of Heaven seems to be a basal bark treatment with an herbicide containing triclopyr. Burning bush, a common foundation plant, has also found it's way into local woodlands. I know, I used to love the bright red leaves of burning bush in the Fall, but now I cringe when I see them. I've found stray bushes deep in the woods of my own property as well as all along Bluff Road. Why, just last Fall, I spotted more than a dozen on the short drive between Valmeyer and Columbia. Basal bark treatment is also effective on burning bush.

I could go on and on, but I will spare you, kind reader, and conclude with this: If you are confident in identification of any of the three invaders I have mentioned, please go out on your property and control them this winter. For more information on doing your own invasive plant control, please visit our website: <http://www.clifftopalliance.org/invasive-plant-control-definitions-methods-safety/> It can make a world of difference as can be seen in the photo below. The woodlands to the left have had no invasive control, while on the right, the honeysuckle has been herbicide treated and a prescribed burn has been performed.



Winter: Reflect, Plan, Renew

Text and photos by Mary Ann & Dennis Groom

With the hustle and bustle of the holidays now past, we are able to settle into the calm quiet of Winter. In nature, it is a season that allows the soil to rest and recuperate its nutrients; as for us, it allows us to reflect on the year behind us, plan for the year ahead, and renew our stewardship to the land.



It is impossible to walk in the woods and be in a bad mood at the same time.

Dennis is always planting and transplanting various Oak saplings and a diverse variety of shrubs, to replace the bush honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, Japanese honeysuckle vines, and autumn olive he removes throughout the summer and fall. Will there be enough moisture this winter or will those tiny plants fall victim to hungry wildlife?

PLAN:

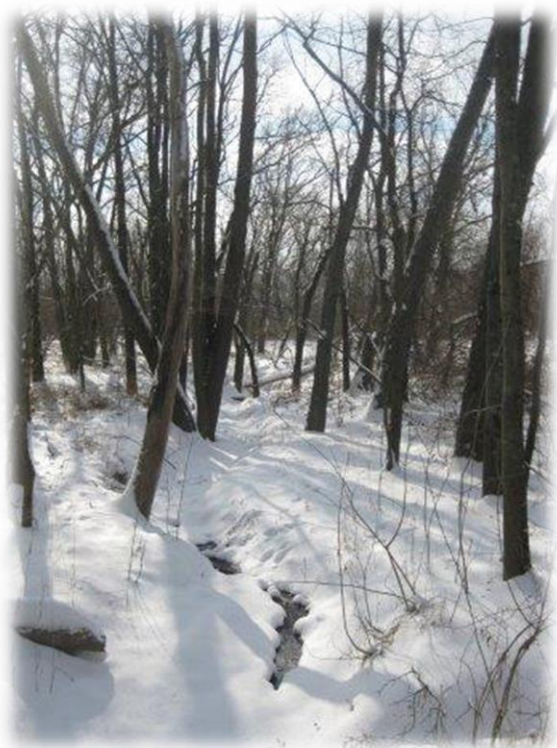
Winter is also a time to think about the year ahead. When we sit by the blazing fireplace, Dennis looks through catalogues filled with quite the variety of shrubs and trees. Which to order, what will do well in the soil we have and what specifications does each require? Mary Ann, on the other hand, leafs through plant catalogues. Last Spring we planted several native plant species and want to continue expanding on that idea. It is always a marvel when we hike the

REFLECT:

2015 was a typical "El Nino" year with periods of flooding and periods of drought, which causes us to reflect on how this will affect our land. We wonder how it will affect the survival of the flora and fauna throughout the Winter. As we walk through our woods, we wonder if the wildlife will have enough to sustain them until Spring. Our walnuts, hickory nuts and acorns were definitely in short supply this fall. We haven't seen the number of turkeys we usually do, but the squirrels are abundant. That indicates that the population of predators has changed as well. Another effect of the weather, perhaps?

A December stroll around our lake (below) reveals that El Nino's rainy tendency has raised the water level to its highest point. That makes us wonder how that will affect the fish population. No signs of the beaver that caused a lot of problems last year, which is a good thing, of course. Dennis has twice seen otters to take their place, though. What impact might they have?





"Each moment of the year has its own beauty.... a picture which was never before and shall never be seen again."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Clifftop/Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee sponsored wildflower walk each spring to see all the Virginia bluebells, wild ginger and Celandine poppies in full glory. We plan to purchase plants as opposed to seeds this year, in the hopes of quicker and more bountiful results.

RENEW:

As we count down the days before the first day of Spring, we renew our dedication to preserve the natural habitat we have here. Dennis is very earnest about eradicating alien species and will continue to do so. We hope to have a controlled burn of our prairie to aid the wildflower propagation. That, coupled with continued education by attending Clifftop seminars and research on our own, we hope to be better stewards of our precious surroundings.

As it is said, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." So use this season of Winter to reflect on your endeavors of the year behind you, plan how you will continue to conserve and protect, and renew your dedication to care for our land.

Upcoming Events...



Saturday January 23rd, 1-3 pm Seminar: Fogelpole Cave Biology and Geography. Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois St., Waterloo. Steve Taylor, Illinois Natural History Survey and University of Illinois – Urbana, and Clifftop's lead science advisor for our Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, and Aaron Addison, Washington University, will offer this presentation including a discussion of ongoing research on the Fogelpole Cave system. Cave-dwelling and cave-dependent wildlife includes rare species, some found nowhere else on earth. The entire system is being re-mapped, using modern technologies that will allow GIS layering. Please join us for this informative seminar about subterranean life and the space within the cave system. Register by Jan. 21 by calling (618)458-4674 or emailing clifftop@htc.net.

Thursday, January 28, 9 am – 4 pm Workshop: First Detector Workshop. Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois St., Waterloo. Jumping worms, 1,000 cankers disease, boxwood blight and changes to the Illinois Exotic Weed Act are just a few of the topics to be discussed in this daylong program designed to increase awareness about invasive species and to help people learn to detect new and potential pest invaders. The program is offered through the University of Illinois Extension Service. The \$40.00 registration fee covers instruction, lunch, and training materials. For additional information or to register please contact Sarah Ruth by email at: Ruth1@illinois.edu or by telephone, (618)939-3434.

FIRST DETECTOR WORKSHOPS

HOSTED BY UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION

JAN 23	Waterloo	FEB 17	Grayslake
FEB 2	Joliet	FEB 18	Freeport
FEB 3	Champaign	FEB 23	Quincy
FEB 9	Effingham	FEB 24	Springfield





Happy 10th Birthday, Clifftop!

By Pen DauBach

A lot of people deserve credit (or 'blame') for this.

It all began with a simple question: "Could you help?"

Debbie Newman, with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, asked that question of Ralph Buettner, Carl, and me, sometime in 2004. She was planning a prescribed burn on a blufftop hill prairie and wondered if we'd like to volunteer. We'd already met Martin Kemper, Scott Ballard, Joan Bade, and Mark Brown, all with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and they and Debbie had told us how very much they could use a few volunteers, willing to watch a burn – for a few hours.

We were excited to have a new experience and, on the morning of "burn day," I carefully explained to our two dogs that "Boys, we won't be long, just a few hours," before leaving them.* Sometime after midnight – that would be the morning after "burn day" – I ate the best meal of my life, a cold, soggy McDonald's hamburger delivered "hot" from Chester, as I sat beside Bluff Road and watched skeins of flame dance along the talus slope. I was exhausted, I had been confused ("Marty, how does a water pack pump work?"), I had been a little scared, but underneath all that I was exhilarated. Bill Gonterman, owner of the Nature Preserve that we (some of my exhilaration was tied to that "we") had burned, was on hand, camera in hand, climbing up and down the talus with a speed and agility that belied his reputed nearly 80 years of age. Bill and Debbie thanked us for volunteering. Ralph, Carl and I didn't reply "You're welcome." Despite the hour, despite the tiredness, despite the aches, we all said, "No. Thank you."

So, I said, Carl said, and Ralph said "Yes" when we were asked again.

Go up the bluffs...help with a prescribed burn...pull a bush honeysuckle or two (thousand)...learn about the plants, bugs, birds, snakes, frogs...take a field trip...lead a field trip...call some friends and ask them "Could you help?"

That question already had been asked and answered with "YES" many times over when, in January 2006, George Obernagel called to order a meeting of eight people at JV's Restaurant in Waterloo to formalize and organize a volunteer group. Over dinner and drinks (yes, there was beer), we talked about what we might accomplish. We kept our goals simple and centered on our area's superb natural resources and wildlife habitat: public outreach, land stewardship, and permanent protection.

We felt there wouldn't be too many interested people and that we'd be a simple friends group, helping each other on our own lands and lending our collective hands to help care for state-owned and managed lands. We thought we might be able to bring together a few more people for talks and presentations about natural resources. We wanted a slightly formal structure for an informal group, 'cause maybe, possibly, eventually, a few folks might get interested...

In retrospect, we were spot-on with our goals, but – happily -- way wrong in our estimates about "just a few" interested people.

We had clues to our spectacularly-wrong estimates with registrations for our first public program, a series of presentations on woodlands management, held in January 2007, just about the time Clifftop was one year old. Ninety-two people



registered and more than 100 people attended. More clues: increasing numbers of people coming out to go up the bluffs and offer hands, backs, smiles, hard work, and their own thanks for helping with prescribed burns, brush cutting on hill prairies, seed-gathering, and honeysuckle pulling. A personal favorite clue: a 'phone call from a woman who identified herself as Edna Dell Weinel explaining that she'd read a couple of the CLIFFnotes articles and then said, "Who are you Clifftop people? I think I'd like you." (*editor's note: please see article on page 7 for more on the friendship that developed.*)

Good folks at the then-named Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development, Inc. (now Heartlands Conservancy), including Steve Black, Ed Weilbacher, and Dave Eustis helped Clifftop begin in an orderly and legally correct fashion. They lightened the burdens of organizational administration, and, guided by attorney Paul Evans, we signed an agreement to umbrella under the SWIRC&D's charitable status and have them act as our fiscal agent. The relationship endured even as Clifftop incorporated in 2007, and was approved by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) in 2008; our organizations stood together, with Heartlands acting as fiscal agent, for the purchase and joint ownership of the White Rock lands in 2010 and the Mill Creek Natural area in 2012.

As we discovered the actual high numbers of local faces interested in our area's great places we also received a welcome to a larger statewide network of people offering help, encouragement and thoughtful answers to our many questions about "doing conservation." Diane Tecic, IDNR administrator for our region's Heritage Biology Division, helped stand up and headed our Southwestern Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Partnership, our locally sourced step-down plan for implementation of the important goals of the I-WAP.

We met Elizabeth Cisar when, as Program Officer for Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, she attended the dedication ceremony for Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve. In 2008, Elizabeth, by then at the Grand Victoria Foundation, invited Carl and I to the inaugural meeting of Vital Lands Illinois, the inspiration and still-inspiring creation of Nancy Fishman, Executive Director of the Grand Victoria Foundation. Through this group we met invaluable teachers, friends, and mentors: Jolie Krasinski, Program Officer for Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation; Viv Bennett and Jeff Walk, The Nature Conservancy-Illinois; Tom Clay, Illinois Audubon Society; Brian Anderson, Senior Deputy Executive Director, Prairie Research Institute, and many more people always ready to listen, advise, and exchange ideas.

In 10 short years we've accomplished a great deal by working together. Our first, simple goals remain the same and stubborn adherence to them, made possible by finding lots more kindred souls than we initially thought possible, has accomplished a lot of good. Let's review a few milestones:

Clifftop (Conserving Lands in Farm, Forest, Talus or Prairie) was founded in January 2006 by a group of local landowners. Clifftop's mission is to conserve, preserve and protect the Mississippi River bluff lands corridor in Southwestern Illinois. The 40-mile long corridor (from Dupo to Prairie du Rocher), containing 130,000 acres, hosts a unique Illinois landscape of hill prairies, limestone glades, large forested blocks, and the karst sinkhole plain. The corridor is home to over 50 rare and threatened or endangered wildlife species. Our all-volunteer organization incorporated in 2007, and became an IRS-recognized 501(c) (3) nonprofit public charity in 2008. Clifftop's focus is three-fold:

- **Conduct information and educational outreach programs centered on the natural history of the corridor and the importance of conservation.** Since founding, Clifftop has hosted or co-hosted 74 public outreach events (workshops, seminars, field trips), with 5600 attendees. Since 2007, the organization has published a monthly local newspaper article series on the values of conservation.
- **Foster and incentivize landowner stewardship and conservation practices.** Since 2009, Clifftop has facilitated and orchestrated bringing \$1,600,000 federal and state dollars to the corridor to implement individual landowner conservation practices.

• **Preserve and protect critical natural areas in the corridor.** Clifftop became a conservation land trust in December 2010. The organization now co-owns 475 acres in Monroe County, including White Rock Nature Preserve, which is open to the public, and 115 acres in Randolph County. Clifftop solely acquired the 535-acre Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve in Monroe County in 2013, which eventually will be open to public visitation. Clifftop has garnered over \$4½ million dollars in federal and foundation grants and more than \$100,000 in local donations to acquire these natural areas.



Jolie Krasinski, ICECF, presents Clifftop's Board with a \$1,915,050.00 check used to help purchase the Wightman Nature Preserve
Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.com

Since founding, Clifftop's Board of Directors, membership (now 250 households strong), and supporters have donated 33,800 volunteer hours to the causes of conservation in the corridor.

Clifftop received IDNR's Conservation Group of the Year Award in 2009, the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development's Conservationist of the Year Award in 2010, the Governor's Volunteer Service Award in 2011, and the National Speleological Society's Conservation Group of the Year Award in 2015.

Happy 10th Birthday, Clifftop!

But, of course, 10 years of Clifftop means I, too, am 10 years older. I remember a conversation with Larry Scace and Paul Feldker, my burn buddies and fellow volunteers, while standing on "the line" a few years ago. Larry, noting the need to attract more young people, said, "We need more young legs. We've got to get young folks out here..." Paul replied that he agreed, we do need to get younger folks interested, but added, smiling, "We can still do stuff, you know. They may have more strength, but **we** have stamina." I hope – I will myself to believe -- that Paul is right. Along with all our volunteers, I want to say "Yes, I will" when asked "Could you help?"

Current and former members of Clifftop's original Steering Committee and, since 2010, our formally constituted Board of Directors. Current director's names are in bold face, founding members are marked with an asterisk.

Joan Bade*
Ralph Buettner*
Carl DauBach*
Pen DauBach*
Dennis FitzWilliam*
Charlie Frederick

Joann Fricke
Bill Gonterman*
Steve Gonzalez
Jim Hill
Dennis Jacobsen
Dennis Knobloch*

Jared Nobbe
George Obernagel*
Susan Rick
Tom Rollins
Bob Weck

**Lest I bring down the wrath of dog lovers: I was excused from the burn line several times to drive back home and let "the boys" out and give them their dinners; I was and remain a very well-trained human.*

Edna Celebrates Her Birthday...with Gifts for Clifftop!

By Pen DauBach

Ever since she introduced herself by 'phone, Edna Dell Weinel has been a friend and supporter of Clifftop and our mission. She has encouraged, supported, and helped at all times. In her invitation to the celebration of her 90th birthday, Edna asked for no gifts for herself, but added:

"If you have a passion for our Monroe/Randolph County bluffs, woods and prairies (as I do), please consider supporting Clifftop."



Edna Dell at the opening ceremony for the October, 2011, for the White Rock Nature Preserve.

Photo courtesy Tom Rollins
ThomasRollinsPhotography.com



Wow!

Edna widened our circle of friendships as responses poured in from 28 households, raising a total of \$1,315 for Clifftop: an amazing tribute to an amazing woman.

Clifftop's Board voted unanimously to use these funds to fulfill a long-postponed organizational wish. We will add interpretive signage at White Rock Nature Preserve and enhance visitor enjoyment of and information about the wonders of this site we are privileged to protect and steward.

We plan to add interpretive panels describing the richness of White Rock's forests and to showcase our hill prairie and limestone glade areas. When White Rock Nature Preserve was dedicated and opened to the public in October 2011, we named the beautiful and healthy hill prairie – glade complex at the southern end of the Ridgetop Trail "Edna's Dell," in recognition of her passion and support for protecting these rare and rich areas. Now, through Edna's generosity and the bounty of birthday gifts in her honor, we will be able to offer visitors thoughts and photos on why White Rock and Edna's Dell are such wondrous places of healthy, sustainable, invaluable wildlife habitat.

Thank you, Edna and all your birthday celebrants!

More upcoming events...

Saturday February 6th, 1-3 pm Seminar: *Dragonflies*, Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois St., Waterloo. Clifftop members and volunteers Joe and Pat Roti Roti share their passion for dragonflies with us during this seminar and a July fieldtrip. Their well-illustrated seminar presentation includes discussion on dragonfly types found in our area, their natural history, identification tips, and enhancing habitat for these fascinating insects. Joe and Pat also are conducting dragonfly surveys at the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve and will share their early findings from the 2015 surveys. Reservations are required by Feb. 4 by calling (618)458-4674 or emailing clifftop@htc.net.



Photo courtesy Tom Rollins
ThomasRollinsPhotography.com



Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.com

Saturday February 20th 6-8 pm Field Trip: Owl Prowl. White Rock Land and Water Reserve. Bundle up for a hoot as we once again listen and watch for nocturnal raptors. Owls are calling out territorial claims and beginning their annual mating and nesting season. Please join us for this enjoyable — despite bracing weather — outdoor evening field trip. Reservations are required by Feb. 18 by calling (618)458-4674 or emailing clifftop@htc.net.

Native by Design: Landscapes Beyond Beauty, 7:30 am – noon, Friday, February 26th, Lewis and Clark Community College, Nelson Center, Edwardsville, IL. Doug Tallamy, author of Bringing Nature Home, and professor and chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology, University of Delaware, is the keynote speaker for this event focused on the value of native plants in our landscapes. Additional discussions include using native plants in your yard, promoting pollinators, and practicing sound stewardship. A registration fee of \$30.00 is required. Use this link <http://grownative.org/events/feb-26-native-by-design-landscapes-beyond-beauty/> for additional information or to register or call 888-843-6739.



Eagle Fest has been postponed until March 5, 2016, due to the recent flooding and subsequent cleanup needed at the Jerry F. Costello Lock and Dam, 4800 Lock and Dam Road, Modoc, IL. Watch your local newspapers and our website for further information on this unforgettable event.



Photo courtesy Eric Fries.

Saturday, March 5, 2016, 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. University of Illinois Extension Weekend Gardener, Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, 442 South Demazenod Drive, Belleville, IL. Attend your choice of one seminar in each of 4 time slots during this diverse event. Choices include: Pruning, Pollinator Gardening, Take a Hike (presented by your humble editor), The Fragrant Garden, Attracting Purple Martins and Container Savvy. Advanced registration is required. Cost is \$40 which includes a buffet lunch and a flash drive containing handouts from all the presentations. For more information or to register, please visit: <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms/> or call Sarah at (618)939-3434.



Pardon Our Mess!

We're about to begin another phase of wildlife habitat improvement at White Rock Nature Preserve and some of this work may look a bit messy. Kevin Slavin, Rock Road Ecological Services will be doing "Forest Stand Improvement" (FSI) on the west portion of the Nature Preserve. The work is designed to help our oak/hickory forest better regenerate so that we help maintain this wildlife-critical ecosystem for future generations.

Most of the work will be culling of maple trees, which grow thickly and quickly and shade out seedling and youthful oak and hickory trees. The increase in sunlight onto the forest floor, once maples are removed, especially on western and southern facing slopes, will help oak and hickory trees grow, flourish and produce many more acorns and future trees. Understory trees bud, and blackhaw, all important key roles in recycling soil nutrients, stronger from the increased



nuts, all good for wildlife and for such as dogwood, serviceberry, red wildlife food sources that also play also will greatly benefit and grow sunlight that will result.

We're thinking wildlife benefits as won't be cut down but will be ensuring their death but leaving mammals, insects, and fungi to Of course, we're also thinking trails will be felled to prevent and near-trail areas open for its burn line.

part of the work: larger maples girdled and treated with herbicide, large snags for woodpeckers, feed upon and use for nest sites. safety, so large maples near the hazards to hikers and keep our trail second priority use as a prescribed

Some of the work may look messy: trees felled, branches tangled on the ground. The mess will pass and we will have a healthier, much more sustainable oak-hickory forest, an understory brightened with dogwoods, red buds, and other flowering tree and shrub species, forest floors carpeted with flowers, sedges, grasses, "shrooms" and hosts of critters that make their homes in a healthy forest.



Kudos to our friends at the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee. In just six short months, they met and exceeded the \$7,000 they needed to raise in order to receive \$21,000 from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation for their Challenge Grant Program. It just goes to show how much folks love the trail system at Salt Lick. Way to go!

Photo gallery...

Just 5 days before Christmas, 21 volunteers arrived at White Rock Nature Preserve to help eradicate bush honeysuckle. Some worked in pairs while others worked alone, cutting and treating the stumps with herbicide. One volunteer developed back issues a few days prior and so served as cheerleader, chauffeur and photographer.

