

Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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Vol. 7, No. 1

Big Cedars on the (Hill) Prairie

By Joann Fricke

Eastern Red Cedar trees are native to Illinois and make beautiful Christmas trees, but they have no place in hill prairies. Why, you ask? It's simple, really—the branches are so dense that the shade created allows absolutely nothing to grow beneath a cedar tree. And, left to their own devices, cedars can spread rapidly and profusely.



Illinois hill prairies are disappearing at an alarming rate, partly due to the invasion of woody species. Morton Arboretum recently reported that Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve suffered a 53.4% loss of prairie area between 1940 and 1988. Take a drive along the levee from Harrisonville to Fults and look eastward, you will see the bluff landscape dotted with cedars. Sadly, what was once a grand hill prairie corridor is now where the cedar trees are most heavily concentrated.

I have recently been performing stewardship work on two hill prairies, both of which have been neglected for several years and consequently overtaken by cedar trees. On the smaller of the two, just under an acre, my husband and I have removed over 50 cedar trees, of varying sizes, two of which can be seen above.

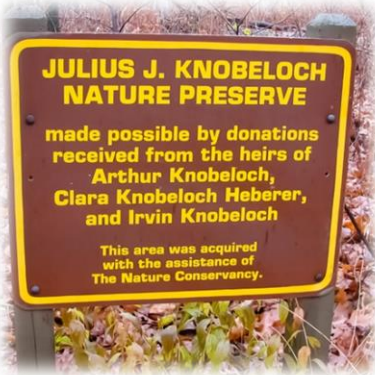
The good news is, if you cut a cedar tree below the lowest green branch, it will not grow back. The bad news is, cutting each one is time consuming and what do you do with the cut trees? Several years ago at Clifftop's White Rock Nature Preserve, our contractor, Kevin Slaven, cut hundreds of cedar trees out of a glade area south of the overlook prairie. This is where our volunteers came to our rescue. On a chilly March day, 20 hardy souls formed a chain gang to stack the cedar branches into piles which then were burned. (See photo at right.) Cedar makes for a spectacular fire because of the oils in the trees.

Some observers worried that we were removing too much cover for wildlife, but enough brush was left to more than accommodate our furry, feathered and slithery animal friends. And, not all cedars were removed, lest the new abundance of sunshine in the glade create a haven for another invasive woody species—bush honeysuckle.



The Making of a Volunteer

By Paul Janssen



Julius J. Knobeloch Woods Nature Preserve, in St. Clair County, is dark and mysterious. Maybe it's because of the huge trees that form an overhead canopy that seem to enclose the trails there, or maybe it's because of the history of the place, knowing it has been left much as the pioneers saw it so many years ago. And there are trees that have fallen to the ground, large enough to take a nap on, lying still and quiet, covered with green moss.

My family and friends have walked the trails there many times and I have enjoyed watching my children run wild on the trails feeling the freedom of being outdoors in such a special place. There is the memory of an older brother once getting lost in the preserve on a winter night hike. We laughed at his efforts to get back on trail, stumbling through the forest, flashlight firmly in hand.

So when a friend asked me to volunteer to help work on Knobeloch and its trails on a Saturday morning, I jumped on the opportunity to go there with other volunteers to see what I could learn and how I could be of use to this unique preserve. Little did I know what an impact this one day of volunteer work would have on my perspective on conservation and the outdoors of Southern Illinois.

Leading our group was Martin Kemper, a biologist with IDNR, members of Clifftop, and staff from Heartland Conservancy. Martin explained how Knobeloch had once been one of the premier places in Illinois to view native plants, especially native flowers. Our mission on that day was to pull, cut, and herbicide treat invasive plants threatening the native plant population. He patiently explained the proper methodology to eliminate the invasive plants. By the end of the day we had accomplished a lot.

With what I had learned that day at Knobeloch, I decided to take an inventory on our own family land in Monroe County. I walked through our forest of White Oaks, Hickories, and Wild Cherry trees with a startled awareness of the invasives



Paul, at right, and other volunteers, hard at work concentrating on periwinkle removal at Knobeloch Woods.

on our own land and the damage they were doing. It was now obvious to me we had a big job ahead of us. We wasted little time and began cutting, burning, and planting to ensure the future of plants and animals native to Monroe County.

Since that first day of volunteer work at Knobeloch, there have been many days of work on preserves and private land with Clifftop volunteers. Yes there is still much to be done, but each workday is rewarding in its own way. Please stay committed to Clifftop goals and together we can continue to make a difference.

Editor's note: All photos on this page courtesy Martin Kemper.

(Not So) Fun Facts...

Jumping Worms

Have you ever heard the term jumping worm or crazy worm? It is not a novelty that shoots out of a can to scare your little brother or sister, but is actually a worm native to East Asia that is invading the United States. *The Southern Illinoian* reported in early July 2016, that the worms were identified in Wisconsin in 2013 and in Indiana in 2015. The article went on to say, "The species was previously identified in 3 northern Illinois counties—Cook, DuPage and McHenry—in 2015. The species was identified in June in Williamson County." A recent article in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Illinois Audubon* shed more light on the subject. It seems that although the jumping worms can only travel about 30 feet per day, they are being spread across the country in cargo, in the root balls of garden plants and as bait dumped after fishing.

Illinois Audubon went on to say, "Crazy worms are voracious consumers, having the potential to denude forest floor vegetation and leaf litter. Key characteristics for identifying these worms include:

- Thrashing about wildly when handled or disturbed.
- Reaching lengths of 4 to 8 inches.
- Skin is glossy or iridescent, and is usually darker on top than on the bottom; colored band is smooth and milky white.
- Shedding its tail as a defensive mechanism.
- Living in leaf litter and as deep as 3-4 inches in the soil.
- Producing unique soil castings reminiscent of coffee grounds.
- Appearing as adults from mid-summer through the first hard freeze. Quick breeders, they reach sexual maturity in 60 days. Eggs will survive an Illinois winter. The worms can reproduce without mating."



When contacted for comment, University of Illinois Extension Forester, Chris Evans said, "Yes, I am definitely the contact person for jumping worm reports. I think the biggest thing to point out is that we do not yet know a lot about jumping worms so any information about their distribution in Illinois is very helpful. Since the adults likely die off in winter, it takes a while for the new hatchlings to get big enough to be readily noticeable so people should not expect to see them until late spring/early summer at the earliest." Chris also provided the photo seen at left.

To report a sighting of a jumping worm population, contact Chris Evans at 618-695-3383 or cwevans@illinois.edu

Another Reason to Eradicate Honeysuckle

Also found in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Illinois Audubon*, Editor Kathleen M. Andrews Wright writes, "A study recently published in *The Auk* solves a question that has plagued scientists for decades. In the range where red-shafted flickers and yellow-shafted flickers overlap they produce offspring with salmon-colored flight feathers. But why do some flickers in the east possess red feathers? Researchers found that the red color in eastern birds was from a different source—a pigment called rhodoxanthin, rare in nature but found in some plants. Further analysis found that the culprit plant was the invasive honeysuckle, whose berries even the insectivorous flicker will consume during the summer months. These berries induce color changes in native birds—even one more reason why honeysuckle should be eradicated from the landscape.

Wightman Nature Preserve 2016 Science Report

Fifty-nine field trips, centered on biological or cave mapping surveys, were conducted at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve during 2016.

Cave surveyors mapped an additional 4790 feet during the year, bringing the total, updated resurvey to 3.13 cave miles. This effort will continue for several more years.



A moth in the genus *Eupithecia* found at night on a tree limb in one of the forested areas at the PWSNP.

Our collective goal from the beginning has been to rapidly improve the quality of surface water runoff entering the underlying cave system, and also carefully document changes in biota on the site as a result of surface habitat changes. We converted almost 300 tilled acres to prairie plants in May 2015. The prairie conversion has already manifested noteworthy biological changes on the surface. A large flock of wild turkeys and several coveys of bob white quail successfully bred on site this year. And, several "indicator species" of grassland birds showed up this year: migratory American bitterns, bobolink, prairie warblers, and northern harriers were all observed, demonstrating their acceptance of new prairie habitat.



The Delicate Cynia (*Cynia tenera*) found on one of the new prairie areas at the PWSNP.

A total of 338 animal species have now been documented at Wightman, both on the surface and within the cave system. The animal list includes 20 species of dragonflies, 57 species of moths, 39 species of butterflies, 12 species of frogs and toads, 4 species of salamanders, 6 species of snakes, 3 skink species, 4 species of turtles, 126 species of birds and 18 mammal species. The remaining 49 animal species identified are all invertebrates.

A total of 222 plant species have now been cataloged on the Preserve. These include 28 species of grasses and sedges, 150 species of flowers (forbs) and vines, and 44 species of trees and shrubs.



A "plume moth," member of the genus *Hellinsia*, found on little bluestem grass at the PWSNP.

These field surveys will continue at the Preserve for years to come. If you want to help with the efforts contact clifftop@htc.net.

Research at PWSNP goes on during the entire year, with several investigations requiring special conditions and equipment, such as mist netting, acoustic recording, and black lighting (see photo below), used to attract night-flying insects, such as moths.

The photos included in this article were taken during several late summer evenings by Steve Taylor, INHS.



Upcoming events...



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Hosted by University
of Illinois Extension
Unit 22, serving
Madison, Monroe and
St. Clair Counties

Wednesday, January 25, 2017

9:00 am until 4:00 pm

Monroe County Annex

901 Illinois Avenue

Waterloo, IL

Plan to attend this workshop focused on oak diseases, insect invaders of Illinois trees and invasive plants and how they may affect human health. \$40 registration fee (\$25 for students) includes lunch. Register at: <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms/> by Jan. 16. For more info, contact Sarah Ruth at 618-939-3434 or ruth1@illinois.edu

Prescribed Burning Workshop

Saturday, January 28, 2017

1:00 to 3:00 pm

Monroe County Annex

901 Illinois Avenue

Waterloo, IL

Learn about the benefits of prescribed fire for natural areas, requirements of the Illinois Prescribed Fire Act, and safety and equipment used for this important part of our stewardship tool kit. Registration required by January 26 to cliffmbr@htc.net or 618-935-2542.



Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.com



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

Kaskaskia Eagle Fest

Saturday, February 4, 2017

9:00 am to 3:00 pm

Jerry F. Costello Lock and Dam

4800 Lock and Dam Road

Modoc, IL

Eagle watching with spotting scopes. Meet feathered inhabitants of the World Bird Sanctuary 10:00, 11:00 & 1:00. Physics of Flight presentation given by the Natural History Education Co. of the MidSouth at 12:00 & 2:00. Event is free, lunch is available for a suggested donation of \$5/person, to cover lunch expenses. For more information, contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kaskaskia River Project Office at 618-284-7160.

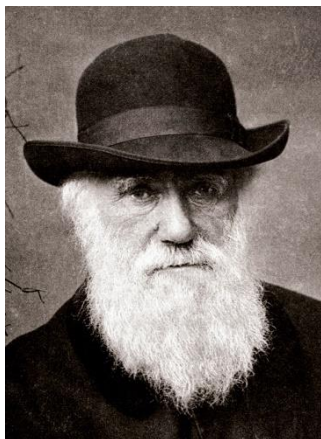
Darwin Day

Friday, February 17, 2017

10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Southwestern Illinois College Theatre

Belleville, IL



Darwin Day, held annually at SWIC, offers a birthday celebration of biology and biological topics. The focal topic this year is fungi and three noteworthy impacts. At 10 am, Dr. Steve Taylor, Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) will discuss "Impact of White Nose Syndrome on Bat Populations in Illinois;" at 11 am Dr. Andrew Miller, INHS, will discuss "Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms of Illinois;" and at noon, Dr. Ben Jellen, Urban Chestnut Brewery, will discuss "The Biology of Beer." All presentations for Darwin Day are free and open to the public.



Gateway Green Industry Conference
Wednesday, March 1, 2017
8:00 am until 5:00 pm
Gateway Center
One Gateway Drive
Collinsville, IL



Keynote Speaker Neil Diboll from Prairie Nursery will be speaking about Successful Prairie Meadow Establishment. Five additional breakout sessions will round out the day featuring talks about Jumping Worms, Dwarf & Unusual Landscape Conifers, Common Fungal Diseases of Trees and Shrubs, Stinging Insects, Rain Gardens, Native Land-scaping Design Styles, Illinois Big Tree Registry Program and many more to choose from. Registration Fee: \$80 General Admission or \$50 for Students, Active Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists. For more information, please call University of Illinois Extension at 618-344-4230 or visit: <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms/downloads/67867.pdf>

Renewal Time!

Annual appeal/renewal letters were mailed in early December. If you misplaced your remit-a-lope amidst all the holiday cards, please download the membership form here: <http://www.clifftopalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/membership-form.pdf> and mail at your earliest convenience. If you have already renewed, we thank you.

A big THANK YOU to our members and donors who helped us more than meet the \$7,000 monetary challenge of the Community Challenge Grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF). This will be matched at a 3 to 1 ratio with \$21,000 from ICECF. Kudos to the volunteers who donated the stewardship hours at PWSNP to garner an addition \$4,000 from ICECF. The foundation will fund 80% of the costs for equipment up to \$5,000. We salute you!



Illinois Clean Energy
community foundation



Eagles have returned to Monroe County! A short drive along the levee between Harrisonville and Fults will yield a bounty of these majestic birds.