

# Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

July 2019

Vol. 9, # 3

## The Wonders of Nature

By Joann Fricke

Nearly every day I can look out my windows and see something that makes me thankful to live in an area where wildlife abounds. I recently witnessed a young buck use his leg to "hit" one of the twin fawns in the photo below. Mama doe was resting under a cedar tree nearby and also witnessed this disciplinary action. Needless to say, she came to her baby's defense and gave the buck a wallop and chased him away. He sulked behind our fire pit for a while and finally left the area.

Several nights ago, the four baby raccoons that we see regularly around our yard decided to rattle around with a watering can I'd left on the porch just outside our bedroom—at 2:00 am! I opened the door and suggested they go away, but they needed more encouragement to do so. Some hand clapping did the trick, but mama raccoon came to the defense of her babies and sauntered toward me on her hind legs and growled. More hand clapping and a shout sent her packing.

I am constantly amazed that the deer are comfortable enough in our yard to lie down and rest, photo, right. Fawns are interesting to watch as they experience new acquaintances. Turkeys sometimes scare them and other times are the object of their curiosity, as seen in the photo below where the twins met the Toms.



Turkeys can be curious, too. The two hens in the photo at right seemed fascinated with the Timber Rattlesnake on the ground at the base of the tree where the arrow is pointing. He slithered off before they got too close.

You'd think I spend all day looking out my windows, but, honestly, I'm just very fortunate to see what I see.



# Living with Nature in the Bluffs

Photos and text by Daniel Davis, Fountain Gap, IL

My wife and I have lived along the Mississippi River bluff region for 27 years. My sister says we live in a deer park. While we see the deer throughout the year, we had noticed the variety of wildlife while living here, but it wasn't until we added our current dog, Angus, a goldendoodle, to our family that we noticed that the wildlife we see changes along with the seasons. Our doodle enjoys morning and evening walks which increase our contact with the animals that share our woodlands.



In January and February, the trees are bare which allow us to see through the woods, not just into them. This is the time of year we get the best views of the Barred Owls during their courting and calls of "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" One season they had a nest in the hollow of a sassafras tree; in July a storm broke the nest portion off. Sometimes we are walking along the road and suddenly notice two large owl eyes watching us from a low branch. The pileated woodpeckers are easier to see at this time. We haven't seen a nest but can hear their pecking and drumming all year.

Angus' first encounter with an opossum came in a February of 2013 when we were on the way back from getting the mail. An opossum was passing by about 20 feet down the slope. The doodle charged the opossum but with his size on a steep slope he overshot the opossum which rolled the critter. After coming to a halt in an accumulated pile of leaves, he bounded back up the slope and found the little guy "playing possum." (See photo at right.) He was used to chasing squirrels and did not know what to do with the inanimate guy so he lost interest and we continued on our walk.



In March we see the red-tailed hawks courting. This year a female hawk would sit in a treetop calling and two males would circle overhead displaying their red tail feathers. We think she made a decision as one male landed next to her, then they flew off together. One day we came upon a hawk eating along the road, two turkey vultures were on the ground 15 feet away and two more in a tree overhead. Their body language seemed to say, "Take your time, enjoy your lunch and we will clean up after you."

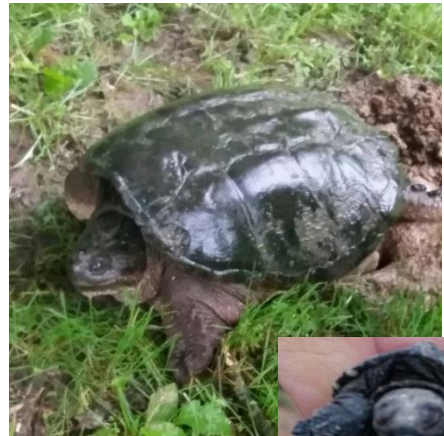
Another year we tracked a plastic bag trail from the community dumpster into a sinkhole that has an open bottom. We picked up the plastic on our way back to the road. Using a trail camera, we confirmed that the three sinkholes around the dumpster had a raccoon den in each of them.

In April the squirrels are actively displaying their acrobatic skills. Our dog will chase two or three up a tree and they mimic Cirque du Soleil at a place where the treetops overlap the road. They climb two-thirds of the way up then leap to the next tree, then two-thirds up and leap to the next.... After three or four trees they have either moved out of his sight or have traversed the road by the aerial route and moved on into the next sinkhole. Each year we will sight a pair of colorful Wood Ducks checking out the three sinkholes holding water but none have been judged suitable for nesting.



Late May and early June is when we will usually find one or two newborn fawns. The doe will give birth in a grassy corner of a lawn. They seem to know which homes don't have dogs and where the invisible fence keeps the dogs away in the homes that do. By the time we return on our walks the doe will have moved the fawn into better cover. We won't see the fawns again until July.

We can count on a large snapping turtle, photo right, to be laying eggs in the south facing lawn across the road from her pond. We have seen her laying four times but have only seen one young snapper, photo inset, right, heading back to the pond in November of 2015. We will also see mud turtles laying eggs in June near two ponds. In July of last year, we discovered one mud turtle nest that either a raccoon or a fox had dug out and only six empty eggshells were left. One mud turtle has a small portion of her shell damaged; we have spotted her in three different years. In May of 2017, we came upon a pair of box turtles procreating. The male tried to stare us down as if asking, "What are you looking at?" (See photo below)



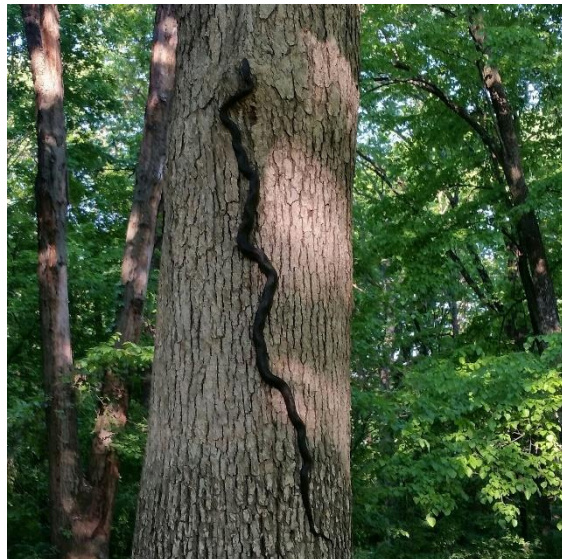
There is a fox den in one of the neighbor's sinkholes. They seem to have a set hunting route that circles counterclockwise through the neighborhood. Our route is clockwise and we will see the adults during the winter time with the shorter daylight hours. We start seeing the young foxes in May. A couple of times we have seen young ones hanging around a 12-inch culvert that crosses under the road. I don't know if they were playing or checking it out as a possible den—two exits would make for easy escapes. Driving home one June after a 1-inch rain we saw two pups at the culvert that were wet and looking miserable. Maybe that culvert wasn't such a good idea for a den.



We used to hear the humming of honey bees in the canopy of the two Basswood trees along our walks in June. The buzzing sound of the bees gave it the nickname of the bee-tree. But alas, the sound of bees collecting nectar has been missing the past few years. Perhaps it coincides with the loss of a bee hive in the knot of a tree in a nearby sinkhole when the tree top snapped off right at the hive.

We often see snakes along the walk--usually black snakes and occasionally a milk snake. In May of 2017, we came upon a five-foot-long black snake (see photo at right) climbing a large white oak. The head was about ten feet above the ground. I don't know how high it climbed or how it got down but it was gone when we passed the tree on our return home.

Between June and September, we see a variety of mushrooms and fungus. I only know morel, puffball, and chicken of the woods (see photo below, right), the balance of which we just look at and admire. I recently found a pair of leopard slugs at the base of a black oak tree. (See photo below, left.)



By the start of August, the squirrels are busy cutting hickory nuts and acorns from the trees. I swear one time the squirrels were throwing hickory nuts at Angus from an ash tree! The woodland spiders are busy showing artistry in web design. (See photo at left.) Heavy dews and early morning sunlight help to highlight the webs woven in the branches. If we take the trail through the woods the doodle's tail only clears the low webs, I have to carry a branch to keep them out of my face.

The persimmons start dropping in October. The raccoons have a trail to the trees and we occasionally catch deer gleaning the dropped fruit on our early morning walks.

In November, love is in the air. The deer are in rutting season. We see groups of does with this year's fawns and last year's fawns. The sighting of bucks is still rare, mostly on the trail camera. Large flocks of geese are seen and heard passing overhead heading south. We never see flocks of ducks even though we know they stop at Kidd Lake south of Fults.

In December, deer have finished with dating and occupy their time competing with the squirrels to eat the acorn drop under the red oak and white oak trees on the north end of our lot. If it was a heavy mast year, the drop will carry them into February or early March.

Thanks to Angus, we have observed and learned more about our neighboring wildlife.

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## Upcoming events...

**Seminar & Workshop: Seed Collecting, Saturday, August 24, 2019, 9:00-11:00 a.m.** Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults. Former IDNR Heritage Biologist, Marty Kemper, will conduct a brief seminar on collecting and processing native grass and wildflower seed, after which we will go out into the prairie and practice what we've learned. This event is free and open to the public. Register to attend by contacting 618-935-2542 or [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) by August 22



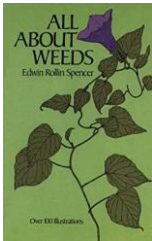
**Seminar & Field Trip: Bats of Southwestern Illinois, Saturday, September 14, 2019, 6:30-8:00 p.m.** Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults. By September, bats will have finished raising their young and be gearing up to leave for their winter grounds. Join Vona Kuczynska, USFWS Biologist and Jennifer Mullikin, consulting biologist in MO and IL, for a fall mist net survey where they will set up nets to catch bats, document species diversity, and teach us about bat migration, hibernation, and the reproductive cycle of bats. This event is free and open to the public. Register to attend by contacting 618-935-2542 or [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) by September 12.

**Seminar: Ducks and Waterfowl of Southern Illinois, Saturday, October 12, 2019, 1:00-3:00 p.m.** Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois Avenue, Waterloo. Illinois Department of Natural Resources District Wildlife Biologist, Carl Handel, and Gretchen Steele, from Delta Waterfowl, will present this seminar on the different species of waterfowl that are present and their habitats in Southern Illinois. They will also cover the migration process and hunting. This event is free and open to the public. Register to attend by contacting 618-935-2542 or [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) by October 10.





At our Prairie Ecology Field Trip in June, that turned into a seminar because of the torrential rain, we discussed several reference books that are our favorite go-to guides. As we promised, they are listed here:



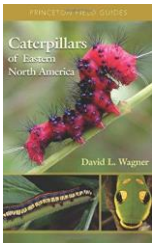
*All About Weeds*  
By Edwin Rollin Spencer

This book covers 102 of the most common weeds found throughout the United States.



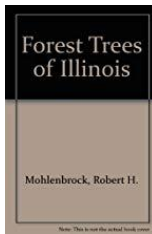
*Butterflies of Illinois*  
By Michael R. Jeffords, Susan L. Post and James R. Wiker

Shown inside the front and back covers are topside and underside wing photos for quick ID.



*Caterpillars of Eastern North America*  
By David L. Wagner

Want to know what that funny looking caterpillar will turn into? This book will tell you.



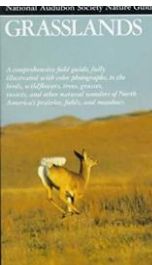
*Forest Trees of Illinois*, Original text by Robert H. Mohlenbrock  
2009 update by U of I Extension, Jay C. Hayek, Editor

A great means of identifying trees that grow in this state.



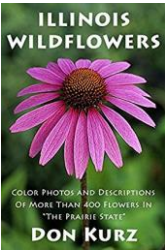
*Grasses: An Identification Guide*  
By Lauren Brown

How to identify 135 of the most common species of North American grasses, sedges, and rushes, with their economic and ecological importance.



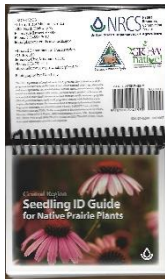
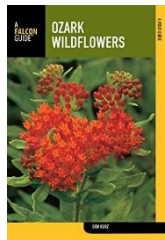
*Grasslands* (Audubon Society Nature Guides) By Lauren Brown

A comprehensive field guide, fully illustrated with color photographs, to the trees, wildflowers, grasses, insects, birds, and other natural wonders of North America's prairies, fields, and meadows.



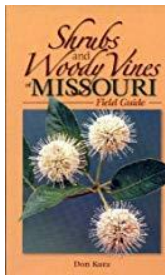
*Illinois Wildflowers and Ozark Wildflowers*, both by Don Kurz  
All photographs also by Don Kurz

Excellent field guides for local native wildflowers, using both common and Latin names. A description, habitat/range and comments are included for each wildflower. The comments often refer to in what capacity Native Americans or early settlers used the plant for medicinal purposes.



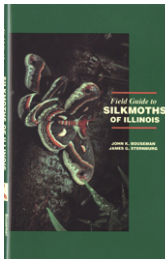
*Central Region Seedling ID Guide for Native Prairie Plants*  
Photography by Don Kurz  
A joint effort by USDA-NRCS, Missouri Department of Conservation and Grow Native!

Identifying prairie plants as seedlings.



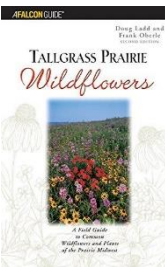
*Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri*  
By Don Kurz

Excellent illustrations and descriptions of plants that are not wildflowers nor trees.



*Silkmoths of Illinois*  
By John K. Bouseman and James G. Sternburg

This comprehensive treatment provides accounts of 19 species of silkmoth.



*Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers*  
By Doug Ladd

This valuable reference enables all prairie enthusiasts to quickly and accurately identify hundreds of tallgrass prairie plants.



# Grand Opening of PWSNP May 18, 2019



Father Paul Wightman, for whom the Reserve is named



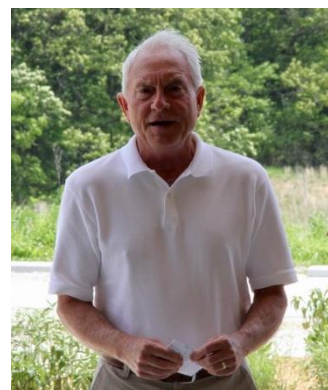
Debbie Newman, INPC, right was a speaker.



Fr. Paul gifted his handmade ladder to Clifftop



Jared Nobbe, left, Clifftop Board President and Jolie Krasinski, above, ICECF, were speakers



Chip Bieber spoke on behalf of the William Zimmer Family Foundation



Fr. Paul cuts the ribbon to open the accessible trail while Clifftop board members look on





# Prairie Wildflower Trail Run/Walk, July 13, 2019



72 registered for the inaugural walk/run through the prairies at PWSNP



CliffTop Board Member, Jeremy Volkmar, presents the overall female finisher award to Adrienne Huth-LaCroix of Waterloo, left, and the overall male finisher award to Ben Eubanks of Hartselle, AL