

Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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A Reluctant Teacher

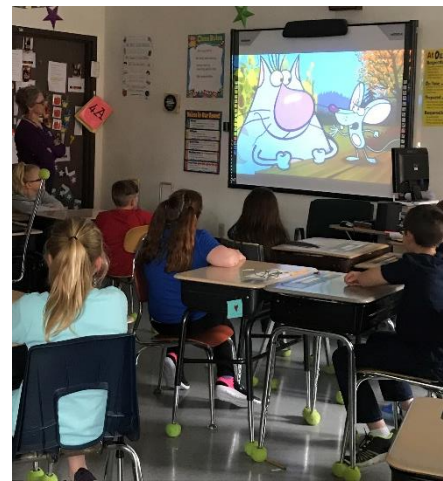
By Joann Fricke

Many years ago I had a summer job as a teacher's aide, helping second graders improve their math skills. I so convinced one student that $1 + 9 = 10$, that any number plus one equaled 10. I knew right then and there that my future was not in teaching. However, situations change, you find yourself training people on aspects of your job, you teach your children their colors, address and phone number and now, I am teaching about conservation.

Almost everywhere I go I find myself talking about Clifftop and the work we do. "What is the best way to eradicate invasive species?" I might be asked. I'm pretty well versed on bush honeysuckle, but am still learning about other species. In September, I learned that the best way to treat Oriental Bittersweet is by using a basal bark treatment of triclopyr and bark oil (mixed at the proper rate, of course). I had used the cut stump method (cut the vine and spray a 50/50 mix of glyphosate and water) on some vines on my property. This method, apparently, only aggravates the vine and makes it come up in numerous other locations.



In 2018, I started a program in local elementary schools and to speak to the children about invasive plant species, specifically bush honeysuckle. Spiffy Productions has given me permission to use the episode "Have a Grape Day" from the series *Nature Cat*, locally broadcast on KETC, Channel 9, PBS. In the episode, Nature Cat and his friends find that their favorite fruit, grapes, can't ripen because the vines are covered by an invasive plant that they must eradicate so the grapes can mature.



In the photo at left, I am showing the children at Prairie du Rocher Elementary an actual bush honeysuckle plant, telling them about how it came to this country and that it is taking over our forests. At right, the Valmeyer Elementary students are watching the *Nature Cat* episode.

In the future, I'd like to reach out to elementary schools in Red Bud, Waterloo, Columbia and Millstadt. If you are associated with a local elementary school and would like a *Nature Cat* presentation, please feel free to contact me at cliffmbr@htc.net or by phone at 618-935-2542.

The Making of a Biologist

Photos and text by Laura Schaefer
Clifftop Board Member

I was asked to write an article about why I love the outdoors or how I became a biology teacher and the more I thought about it the two seemed inseparable. This is just one recipe on the making of a nature lover and teacher.

Step one: release a child into the great outdoors, having faith that the natural world is safer than not.

Allow for grass stains, dirty clothes, mosquito bites, poison ivy rashes, ticks and tangled hair. Let that child free range, like you'd want your chicken. Un-parent. Let nature be the teacher and soon that child will know the poison ivy from the Virginia creeper, the ticks from the mites, the best places for mud pie dirt, the footholds to climb the cherry tree and how to tell the sweetest ones from those with the worm inside.

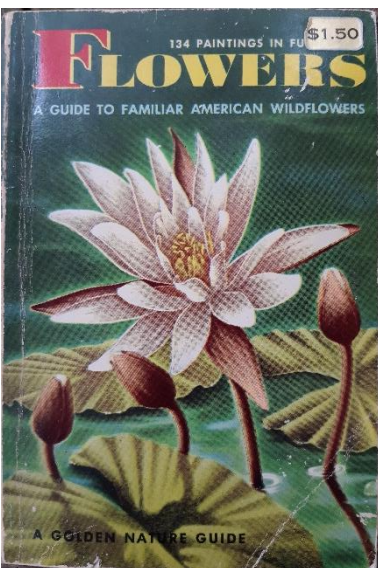
Step two: introduce non-fiction or informational text to children.

For those squirmy or bored by the emotionally packed language of fiction, perhaps it isn't books they don't like, but the type. A pivotal book I received from a neighbor was the Golden Nature Guide: Guide to Wildflowers (see photo below). I now had a new mission - to learn the names of all of the wildflowers in my woods and to find all of the flowers in the book. A second game-changing book was on herbs and the discovery that one could eat wild plants. Plant foods no longer



Black and yellow garden spider in Laura's garden.

came from just the garden or the store. Let your kids eat unwashed foods straight off the plants. Of course, know what you're eating first. Take a child mushroom hunting for morels, hen or chicken of the woods. Provide for the wonderment that are seeds. A teeny tiny life can be nurtured into a delicious food that can be plucked straight from the vine, warmed by the sun and quench the thirst of a feral wild-child beast.



Step three: Provide guidance, opportunity and the spreading of wings.

Even with a father as a high school guidance counselor, I did not know what I wanted to study in college, where to go or even what jobs existed. When it came to picking a major, my dad suggested Environmental Biology (EVB). I didn't even know what that was and when I asked, he said, "It's what you do in the woods." That was enough. Upon learning there was something called Botany, I decided I especially wanted to know more about plants and chose that as a minor.

At Eastern Illinois University, the EVB majors were required to complete an internship. When I received the catalog of opportunities from the Student Conservation Association, in every known and never-heard-of-by-me park, preserve, forest and refuge it was like getting the Christmas catalog.

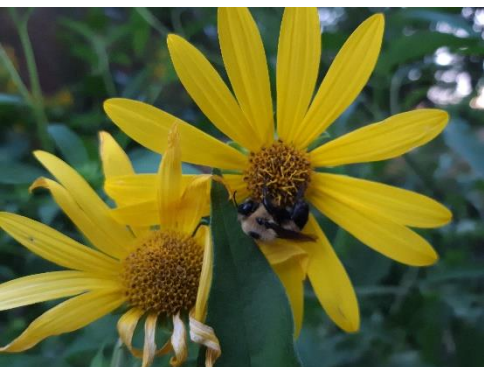
I had no idea there were all of these jobs in the natural world. At the time, I knew I wanted to take a risk and leave Illinois. I chose to apply for two jobs in California. One was working fire breaks in the redwood forests of Northern California at a place called Happy Camp and the other was in Environmental Education at what was then the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.



Summer Azure butterfly on American Bellflower

I received offers by both and selected the Bay, where I got to live in a trailer, in the refuge, on a whopping \$25 per week. Living in a refuge was money enough for me. Life was rich. When the gates closed to the public, imagine the backyard I had to explore again! I was in a new environment, with new friends, in a strange place and for the first time, teaching. I'm pretty sure I wasn't good at it, judging by my evaluation, but I loved being there and sharing nature with kids. Teaching was never a career I had considered, but that internship led to my next education-oriented job as a Ranger at Riverlands in Alton. After finishing graduate school I was offered an Instructor position in the Education Department at the Missouri Botanical Garden. That job solidified my niche in teaching and I went on to receive another MA in Education. After ten years with the Botanical Garden I met Bob Weck while attending a class he was co-leading on karst topography and he asked if I'd be interested in teaching Botany at Southwestern Illinois College. Twelve years later I'm still there.

I feel to learn about something is to care for it, to care is to share and to share is to protect it. I have an insatiable curiosity for the natural world around me and a desire to share all of the amazing little intricacies that make up the ecosystem. If we don't share the natural world with children or others, then how will they know about it and ultimately feel compelled to protect it? Who would I be if I hadn't had all of the little opportunities that made me who I am today? Perhaps I'd be writing a different narrative in a much different place. I'm sure not all of my five-year-old choices were great, but I'm happy with the ones that led me into the wilds.



Bumble bee on native sunflower



Praying mantis on Sweet Coneflower



Grapevine beetle

Upcoming events...

Clifftop members will receive an event card containing details in the mail with our annual appeal letter later this year, but here is a preview of what we'll be offering in the way of seminars and field trips in 2020:

March 28: Bobcat, Illinois' Native Cat, presented by Jennifer Kuroda, founder of the Illinois Bobcat Foundation at the Monroe County Annex.



April 16 & 18: Birding 101. We'll partner with the Kaskaskia Valley Audubon Society to present a seminar at their monthly meeting on Thursday, April 16. On the following Saturday, April 18, there will be a field trip to Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve to observe some of the migrating species. Debbie Newman will be presenting.



June through September-Monthly Prairie Hikes. Led by Jim Hill on Saturdays June 13, July 18, August 8 and September 5 at 9:00 a.m. at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve.



September 13: Cicadas of Illinois: New Discoveries and Our Local Soundscapes, presented by Katie Dana, Entomology Scientific Specialist from the Illinois Natural History Survey at the Monroe County Annex.



October 24: Orionids Meteor Shower, presented by Mike Krawczynski, assistant professor in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve.



November 14: Autumn Art for Kids, presented by Nancy Weck and Sue Hezel at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve.



Eagle Cliff Prairie Nature Preserve Dedication

The Eagle Cliff Prairie Nature Preserve, adjacent to Miles Cemetery, was dedicated as a Nature Preserve on Saturday, October 19, 2019. It is the only Nature Preserve in Monroe County that is owned by the County. The prairie has been and will be maintained in its natural condition so that present and future generations can see the Illinois landscape as it appeared in the past. This living example of our natural heritage is valuable for scientific studies and may provide habitat for rare plants and animals.

This preserve protects an example of Grade A remnant loess hill prairie and a rare plant. Only about 500 acres of high-quality hill prairie remains in Illinois. This site is part of an important corridor, stretching from Prairie du Rocher to Dupou, that contains a mosaic of hill prairies, rocky bluffs, large blocks of forest and several threatened and endangered species.

Following are some photos from the event.



Above: Debbie Newman, Natural Areas Preservation with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, discusses how special this site is. Right: Pen DauBach, Illinois Nature Preserves Commissioner, speaks of the area's natural heritage. Far right: Bill McClain, Illinois Nature Preserves Commissioner, mentions the vast number of plants in this prairie (over 100).



In the photo at left, from left to right: Dylane Doerr, Mark Kaempfe, Charlotte Hoock, all Miles Cemetery trustees, Bill McClain, Debbie Newman and Pen DauBach, all with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, present the site sign to Vicki Koerber, Bob Elmore, current Monroe County Commissioners, Dennis FitzWilliam, site steward, and Delbert Wittenauer, former Monroe County Commissioner and current Clifftop Board Member.

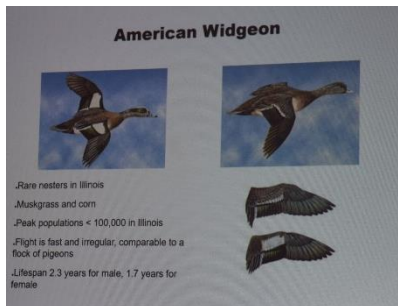
Photo gallery...



On August 24, Marty Kemper presented a seed collection/processing workshop at PWSNP. He showed us some innovative ways to process seed. At left, he uses a weed eater in a barrel to process milkweed seeds. On the right, he demonstrates using a meat grinder to process Illinois bundle flower seed pods.



Vona Kuczynska, far right, of Wildheart Ecology, presented a program on bats of southwest Illinois at PWSNP on Sept. 14. She and her crew spent several hours setting up 7 mist nets throughout the preserve to no avail. No bats were caught that night, despite staying out until after midnight.



Left, Carl Handel, IDNR Wildlife Biologist, and right, Gretchen Steele, Delta Waterfowl Foundation presented a program on the ducks and waterfowl of Southern Illinois on October 12.

