

# Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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## Do You Know Garlic Mustard?

By Joann Fricke

While I usually rail against bush honeysuckle (the bane of my existence) in this space, with this issue I am taking up the gauntlet against Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). To my knowledge, none of Clifftop's properties contain Garlic mustard, although, I am told, there was once a colony at White Rock, which has been eliminated.

Garlic mustard came to the U.S. from Europe and Asia in the mid 1800s for its herbal and medicinal qualities and for erosion control, but it has become increasingly invasive, to the point it is crowding out native wildflowers and trees. Much like bush honeysuckle, Garlic mustard shades the forest floor and prevents native plants from getting the sunlight needed to grow. Each plant contains thousands of seeds that if left unchecked, will develop into thousands more plants.

Garlic mustard is a biennial. As a first year plant, it produces small rosettes that do not flower. (See photo at top right.) Second year plants can grow up to three feet tall and flower profusely, as can be seen in the photo at bottom right where it is crowding out the native water leaf (circled).



Photo courtesy IllinoisWildflowers.info

How do we rid ourselves of this nasty invader? Pulling each plant up by the roots is the best method. Be sure that they haven't yet gone to seed or you will be helping to spread the seeds as you yank the plant out of the ground. Cutting off just the flowering portion of the plant is not a good idea because they can quickly produce more flowering stalks from lateral stems. Spraying Garlic mustard with herbicide early in the growing season or in its first year rosette form is also an efficient method.

Once you have cleared an area, don't think you are finished. The seed bank will continue to produce for several years. However, be patient, it can be done!



Photo courtesy Debbie Newman

Our colleagues at Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve have a Garlic mustard work evening planned on Thursday, May 2 from 4:30 – 7:00 pm, **weather permitting**. Please email [Debbie.Newman@Illinois.gov](mailto:Debbie.Newman@Illinois.gov) if you plan to attend.

# Seeing the Forest Through the Trees

Text and photos by Jacob Gyore

As a native of Monroe County, Illinois, the beauty of the Mississippi River bluffs was a familiar backdrop to my childhood. However, it wasn't until later in life that I began to understand and appreciate the unique ecology of this region. It was my girlfriend at the time and now wife (and Clifftop member), Jenny, that opened my eyes to just how special the hill prairies and sinkhole ecosystems are. As I learned about invasive species control, prescribed fire, and ecological succession I gained a deeper appreciation for the tireless work that goes into protecting our natural areas.

I eventually decided that I wanted to get more involved in conservation so I quit my job as a technician in a microbiology lab and started working at a prairie restoration site in central Illinois called Prairie Ridge State Natural Area. Transitioning to conservation work was both challenging and enlightening. At Prairie Ridge, my days were spent not in a sterile lab but under the open sky, engaging directly with the landscape. I gained hands-on experience with removing invasive species and prescribed fire. I also got a chance to participate in endangered species monitoring projects such as tracking the movements of the state threatened ornate box turtle and participating in prairie chicken surveys.



Ornate box turtle emerging from its winter burrow at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area.



Northern harrier and a greater prairie chicken facing off at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area.

This hands-on conservation work taught me a vital lesson: humans are not just residents of this landscape but active participants in its stewardship. For thousands of years, humans have been using fire to open woodlands to attract game and to promote the oaks and hickories that provided food in the form of acorns and nuts. Anthropogenic fire helped create and maintain the amazing biodiversity of Southern Illinois. Conservation is not excluding ourselves from nature. It involves understanding humanity's role in the patterns of disturbance to the ecological communities around us and using this knowledge to promote biodiversity.

Now, as a member of CLIFFTOP's Board of Directors, I hope to advocate for the conservation, preservation, and protection of the Mississippi River bluffs corridor across Monroe, Randolph, and St. Clair Counties. Our mission goes beyond mere preservation. We aim to engage the community, educate our neighbors, and empower local residents to join us in these efforts.



*Editor's note: Jacob is now a certified burn boss and has led prescribed burns at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, including the one pictured at right.*





Photo courtesy David Cappaert,  
Bugwood.com

## Have you noticed fewer fireflies over that last few years?

Habitat loss, pesticides and light pollution are all major contributing factors to the disappearance of fireflies. If a field where fireflies live is paved over, the fireflies don't migrate to another location, they just disappear—forever. You can help them by creating habitat in your own backyard. It's as simple as eliminating or reducing pesticide use, leaving leaf litter and wild edges for habitat and reducing light pollution so they can find each other during breeding season.

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## Storment Hauss Nature Preserve Update...

- Illinois Nature Preserves Commission/IDNR staff and Clifftop volunteers planned and conducted a prescribed burn on approximately 54 acres of the oak-hickory forest on March 21. Site conditions were excellent and it was a very successful burn. See next page for photos.
- We have completed and are now closing out an IDNR Natural Areas Stewardship grant that removed exotic invasive plants (primarily bush honeysuckle / multiflora rose) on approximately 50 acres of the oak-hickory forest. This grant also funded the purchase of a much needed side by side UTV with front and back seats for volunteer stewardship work.
- We are currently implementing an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Community Stewardship Challenge grant to remove exotic invasive plants on the approximate 20 acres of old fields on the northern portion of the preserve and restore the site to native prairie/savannah habitat.

## White Rock Nature Preserve Update...



Clifftop volunteers worked with AmeriCorps STL personnel to finish the trail on the 97.8-acre NP addition in early February. We have named it Spicebush Trail. It shoots off Ridgetop Trail, South (at the red star on the map) and heads down a long ridge to a ravine and some steps (at the yellow star), built by AmeriCorps STL, then goes up to a wide flat ridge that was once farmed. The trail makes a loop around that area and then backtracks to the starting point. In the map, at left, the blue star represents a seating area, which you might need after climbing the hill. There is no firm date on when the trail will be opened to the public (we're still tweaking it), but an organized, guided hike is planned for this summer.



The photo at left shows AmeriCorps STL building steps out of cut cedar logs to enhance the descent into the ravine. The photo at right shows volunteers erecting hand rails to make walking down the steps easier and safer.





# Our Winter burns... Paul Wightman Subterranean NP ~ 02/24/2024



Burning the prairie from G Road to the shed. Photos courtesy Susan Rick.



## Storment Hauss NP ~ 03/21/2024



Burning approximately 54 acres of oak/hickory forest. Photos courtesy Shane Kellogg.



## White Rock NP ~ 03/27/2024



Burning 3 prairies: Overlook (photos left and center) and Vulture (no photos) on the edge, and Copperhead (photo, right), interior. Photos courtesy Shane Kellogg.