

Hickory Hills Highlights

News from the Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, Stewards of Bremer Sanctuary, Hillsboro, Illinois

FALL 2022 EDITION

Who doesn't enjoy a wonderful wagon ride through our beautiful prairies in June? Our summer Open House was held on June 26th and was well attended by adults and children. The Education Barn was open for tours with knowledgeable Bremer volunteers answering questions from the public.

Following the Open House, our family program, "Aquatic Adventures" was led by Jim Hefley, retired IEPA biologist, and began with a class lesson in the barn. Topics covered included: Discussion with participants about terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates with examples, life cycle of invertebrates which include an aquatic larval stage, importance of keeping water clean and value of invertebrates as indicators of its health and how invertebrates fit into the food chain.



The workshop continued with a short hike to Turtle Pond for a demonstration of field sampling of aquatic invertebrates. Several specimens were collected and brought back to the barn, which included mayfly, caddisfly, dragonfly, damselfly, dobsonfly and predacious diving beetle larvae, water scorpions, leech, crayfish and water boatmen.

Back at class, a prepared aquarium allowed participants to observe the behavior of various invertebrates and ask questions. Bremer volunteer, Beth Groves, brought several microscopes for the participants to view the microscopic pond life from a water sample of Turtle Pond.



A Wildflower Walk through the West Prairie

by Ken Schaal

The annual mid-summer prairie wildflower walk took place on one of the hottest Saturdays of the year. The heat index for the July 23 event was 110 °F. Eleven hikers walked the West Prairie with me leading the group. A grandma and her grandkids took advantage of a wagon ride led by Nancy Redman, who described some of the interesting prairie wildflowers, while driver Bruce Redman gave the name of several wildflower species. The kids' favorite wildflower was rattlesnake master.



Rattlesnake Master

My group took the West Prairie trail. It was restored about twenty years ago using locally collected wildflower seeds that were donated by several members. The seeds were scattered out of the back of a pickup truck. We burn this prairie annually, and it has responded very well to our management plan, as there are always plants blooming. It is a diverse planting where pollinators like butterflies and bumble bees abound. A variety of wildflowers are in bloom in the West Prairie continuously from May into November.



Royal Catchfly

As we began the walk, I showed the group a non-native flower that has toxic properties; the wild parsnip is a roadside weed that can be phytotoxic. Touching its sap along with exposure to sunlight can cause a burn-like skin reaction as well as painful blisters. Hikers were warned not to touch this plant. I then pointed out a couple of woodland-savanna plants that were out in full sunlight and wondered how they are surviving without shade—so many things we haven't figured out...

As we continued the walk, we viewed the rare and gorgeous red Royal Catchfly. Some of the group touched the plant and learned why it is called *catchfly*. We also learned that there are only two red native wildflowers that bloom in our summer prairies. Both Royal Catchfly and Cardinal Flower are found at Bremer Sanctuary.

A few orange Butterfly Milkweeds were still in bloom. I pointed them out and explained the importance of all milkweeds to the rare Monarch Butterfly caterpillar and tried to figure out why they and so many other insect pollinators (other butterflies, bees— bumble bees and honeybees, plus so many other insects) have become uncommon. By one of the dry ponds, we found several Cup Plants in bud, and I showed the group why it is called Cup Plant.



Orange Butterfly Milkweed



Black-eyed Susan

Several people in our group were interested in learning about our CRP program and asked about our burning regimen. I gave them reasons why we conduct prescribed burns on the West Prairie every year and why we burn when we do. I also mentioned the safety precautions we take when we burn all our prairie fields. I showed examples of wildflowers that are considered *pioneer species* and why they have that title. Examples of disturbance areas were discussed and their importance to the health of the prairie ecosystem.

Off in the distance we viewed our relatively new savanna restoration project and saw several pioneer wildflower species, functioning perfectly in this newly disturbed site.



Bee balm (Monarda)

As we completed the hike around the prairie, we came across a unique native grass, Eastern Gama Grass, a close relative of corn. I pointed out those traits that are like corn and why the two plants are related. After about 45 minutes we headed back to the barn to get a drink of water and to cool off. Several folks stayed to enjoy hot dogs on the grill. Stewards Ray Lubbert and Don Krefft assisted with the hike and the cookout.

Summer Children's Programs.....

While the crowd was small, their enthusiasm was big!!!! Wednesday, June 22 we hosted our first of 2022 children's programs, Totally Trees! Program coordinator for the Illinois Extension Office Beth Groves led the program. The three participants were introduced to the basics of tree identification and led on a tree walk through the sanctuary. They learned about many of the trees commonly seen in Illinois including oaks and hickories. They used a scavenger-hunt checklist to keep track of the different types of trees they saw. Leaves were collected and used to make a leaf and bark rubbing collage picture to take home. They also received a tree disc name tag to personalize. A transpiration experiment was set up on a maple tree branch demonstrating how water can be collected from leaves.



Bremer Sanctuary was all a BUZZ on Wednesday July 20th for our children's program "Bee Party". The interested adults in attendance almost outnumbered the students and a great time was had by all. Beth Groves, Education Coordinator for the U of I Extension Office led the program with a brief intro on bees and other pollinators. The group hiked the West Prairie trail to see our blooming wildflowers and pollinators in action.

Upon returning to the barn, Danny & Ellen Riemann demonstrated a bee keepers outfit and were available to answer bee keeping questions. Elaan Bader from 4-H visited to distribute Burt's Bees lip balm to those in attendance.

The highlight of the program was the honey tasting challenge. Beth explained the "honey wheel" which grades honey on its color and clarity. Everyone in attendance was able to taste-test 3 different types of honey and voted for their favorite. Honey # 1 was a store-bought dark wildflower honey which received 6 votes. Honey#2 was a medium color wildflower honey donated by Riemann Hemp & Honey and it received 12 votes. Honey #3 was a light-colored wildflower/clover honey provided by the Spratt family bees and it received 15 votes.

Bird Banding Event..... On September 17th, the sanctuary hosted the Lincoln Land Association of Bird Banders for the 6th year of bird banding.



This is from our Master Bander Tony Rothering;

It was another outstanding banding day at Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary!! The visitors seemed to enjoy the activities and the assistants (including the recruits for scribing, Frankie Huber & Jerry Prater, and running the Be-a-Bander activities Shawn Huber & Stefan Munker) were incredible! Sam Reif, Jim Mordacq and Nancy Redman assisted Prof. Rothering with mist net extractions and banding. We ended up capturing 81 birds (80 newly banded and 1 recapture) of 13 species (see below for specifics). The recapture was a male Common Yellowthroat that was banded as a hatch year bird in September of 2018. It is always exciting to recapture these long-distance migrants ... especially after so many years! Kudos to all the Bremer stewards for their hard work in preparing for this event and maintaining such an outstanding wildlife sanctuary! The birds thank you as well!!



Species (number banded): Red-bellied Woodpecker (2), Downy Woodpecker (1), Eastern Wood-Pewee (6), Eastern Phoebe (1), Black-capped Chickadee (7), House Wren (4), Magnolia Warbler (1), Black-and-white Warbler (1), Common Yellowthroat (23), Canada Warbler (1), Northern Cardinal (1), Indigo Bunting (6), American Goldfinch (26).



Montgomery County Master Gardeners group. With temps in the low 80's and a steady cooling breeze, the participants enjoyed a cookout and picnic under the pavilion followed by their business meeting. The group arrived at 10:00am and took a tour of the educational displays in the barn before embarking on a lengthy wagon ride through our prairies.



Girl Scout Troop 6133 had a great time learning all about nature. The eager learners toured the barn displays, took a wagon ride and scavenger hunt hike.

2022 NESTBOX TOTALS

	EGGS	HATCHED	FLEDGED	RATE
EASTERN BLUEBIRDS	163	107	92	56%
TREE SWALLOWS	52	48	48	92%
HOUSE WRENS	216	169	160	74%



The rate is calculated by dividing the fledged by the eggs.

We had 50 boxes this season-----45 boxes were used by one or more of the above species. Eastern Bluebirds used 23 boxes, Tree Swallows used 11 boxes, House Wrens used 26 boxes, 15 boxes were used by multiple species.

A new project was started at Bremer Sanctuary this spring with the banding of the nest box nestlings. Bird banding is a tool that enables biologists to obtain information about birds, much of which could not be acquired in any other way. Each nestling is fitted with a special, lightweight aluminum leg band that is inscribed with a unique nine-digit number.

The nestlings need to be 12-15 days old, depending on species, and currently acquiring their flight feathers. At this age, their legs are full size and since they do not add fat or muscle to this limb, the same size bands are also used for the adults.

Putting bands with unique numbers on birds allow scientists to keep track of each individual bird when it is caught again. Some of the questions bird banding allows are: How long do birds live? Where do birds go (migration)? What birds are present at this site? How are bird population numbers changing over time? How many young birds were hatched each year?

Banded nestlings in the nest for the Bremer Sanctuary 2022 season included Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. This is not a tally of our total nest box seasonal contents; it is only representative of the birds banded. Tree Swallows (TRES) banded, 44 nestlings in 12 boxes (all in different boxes) and 1 adult in 1 box (sitting on eggs).



Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) banded include 72 hatchlings in 14 boxes. The EABL recorded 19 clutches total. A clutch is a group of eggs produced or incubated at one time. Monitoring data shows 4 of the 14 boxes held multiple clutches, box #3 housed 3 EABL clutches. Boxes #12, 29 and 49 each housed 2 clutches of EABL and one nest box, #6, housed Tree Swallows in June and Eastern Bluebirds in August. Photos of two newly banded nestlings: Eastern Bluebird (L) and Tree Swallow (R). Notice the bands on the left leg.



Straight line winds on the morning of June 17th felled many trees throughout the sanctuary, including a large shingle oak at the top of Pipeline trail. On a very hot first day of summer the Stewards of Bremer accomplished a lot!

Upcoming Events: Donations of bird food are welcome at our events!!

**H & B Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary
Open House**

Education Barn and Meeting Hall will be open for tours.

Enjoy our many hiking trails, woodlands & prairies.



June 26th & October 16th 1:00-3:00pm

Come check out the many splendors our property has to offer. Our volunteer stewards will be available to answer questions about the sanctuary. An easy hike or wagon ride around the barn area will leave at 1:30 & 2:30 that will discuss the history and future goals of the sanctuary. Family Friendly. Donations welcome.

Native Seed Collecting Workshop

October 16, 3:00-5:00pm

(Immediately after Open House)

Join us for an educational program on collecting native wildflower seeds. Participants will learn when and what to collect, how to store seeds and when to plant them.



We will begin with an informative video presentation regarding the importance of prairie restoration. Followed by a guided hike into our prairies to collect seeds for use at Bremer late this fall. Since the public is not allowed to collect seeds at our sanctuary, we are making an exception this day and allowing you to take home part of your harvest to start your own pollinator garden.

Things to bring: garden gloves, strong scissors or clippers, bucket and water bottle. Wear long pants, sturdy shoes and apply bug spray.



**The Hickory Hills Chapter of the
Illinois Audubon Society Board of
Directors and Officers**

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**H & B Bremer Sanctuary
Annual Meeting**

Sunday, November 6th

5:00-7:00pm



Join us for our annual meeting & potluck. This year's guest speakers are beekeepers Danny & Ellen Riemann from Riemann's Hemp & Honey. Program will feature a presentation on honey bees, honey extraction and products made from beeswax. Products will be available for purchase.

5:00-program

5:50-Bremer meeting

6:00-potluck.

Bring your own drink, table service and a dish or two to share.



Door Prizes! Donations Welcome.

A much need project was completed, a new roof for the barn. A 2 inch thick insulation panel was placed over the whole roof and new ivory colored metal was placed on top. New soffits and fascia were also installed.



Photo credits this issue:

Don Krefft, Ray Luebbert,

Nancy Redman & Ken Schaal