

Hickory Hills Highlights

Hickory Hills Chapter - Illinois Audubon Society

Stewards of H & B Wildlife Sanctuary

Hillsboro, Illinois

Summer 2024 Edition

Welcome to the Hickory Hills summer newsletter! Summer is half over, as August 1 is “cross-quarter day.” In this newsletter are articles about **volunteer activities**—both large and small—that have happened at Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary recently. Also included are events that will take place later this year. The authors of this newsletter hope you enjoy reading about the happenings at Bremer Sanctuary. We are always interested in hearing your thoughts.

Bremer Sanctuary was donated by Helen and Betty Bremer to the Illinois Audubon Society piece by piece until the entire 203-acre property was finalized in 1977. Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society was founded in 1980 and is responsible for caring for the property. Volunteers meet Tuesday and Thursday mornings to maintain the property for the benefit of the plants and animals that call the sanctuary home. All activities are guided by the management plan composed by the Bremer Board and approved by the Illinois Audubon Society’s Board of Directors. We continually welcome members of the chapter and of the society to join us at the barn to help with our daily and seasonal chores as well as the special events that take place periodically. New volunteers are always welcome.

Spring 2024 Wildflower Walk - by Ken Schaal

Approximately a dozen visitors participated in the Spring Wildflower Walk on April 27. It was a nice morning, a little warmer than average. In fact, the warmer than normal spring had a lot to do with the lack of woodland wildflowers visible on the walk. Fortunately, we had a backup plan. The *prairie* spring wildflowers were also early, and we were able to enjoy them instead.

In the prairie areas that were burned earlier this year, the prairie wildflowers were easy to spot. We spent time observing them just south of the barn parking lot as well as in the West Prairie. The lack of prairie hay (due to the prior burn) left no mulch on top of the prairie and allowed the ground to warm up early. We



saw high-quality prairie plants such as Wood Betony, Cream Indigo, Golden Alexanders, Wild Hyacinth, Shooting Star, Blue-eyed Grass, and Virginia Spiderwort. The Virginia Bluebells were still in bloom as well as the Savanna Cream Star—they both were spotted in a portion of the burned woods next to the prairies.

The dark blue color form of the Virginia Spiderwort is a common occurrence. But close by were a few of the white forms and the rare pink form. All three of the color forms were growing side by side in the prairie. This diversity of color is always interesting to observe and can be seen in both the prairies and the open woods at Bremer Sanctuary.

We hiked into the woods along the nature trail north of the barn and past Turtle Pond. Along the way we viewed only a few woodland wildflowers. Several Wild Blue Phlox were in bloom. Common Violets were also present. Most of the Dutchman's Breeches were out of bloom, but the Common Trillium was not even seen during the walk—somewhat disconcerting. A good burn through these woods next burn season and an early wildflower walk next spring will hopefully allow hikers to view more of the Bremer Spring woodland wildflowers. (Images are compliments of Ray Luebbert and Ken Schaal).

Various color forms of the Virginia Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*).



Kudos goes to Bremer Sanctuary. Check out the July 9 post found on the Facebook page of the Illinois Audubon Society. Bremer Sanctuary received a nice shout-out from “*Only in Your State*,” a website that showcases the best places, attractions, and activities in every state. The headline goes on to say that Bremer Sanctuary “makes the perfect bird-themed day trip”. We were nominated for this award by ?? A nice thank you goes to whoever nominated Bremer Sanctuary.



Milkweeds at Bremer Sanctuary

Milkweeds are abundant at Bremer Sanctuary this year. While there are at least six species found at the sanctuary, four are quite common and easily spotted when they are in bloom. Butterfly Milkweed is the most conspicuous due to its bright orange color. It is also aptly named as many butterflies take nectar from the blooms. Bumble bees take nectar *and* pollen from the blossoms of all milkweeds and are necessary to pollinate them. Butterflies enjoy the nectar, but they are not built to *pollinate* milkweeds.

Even though milkweeds do not need butterflies, the monarch butterfly **does need** the milkweed ! All members of the milkweed family are host plants for the monarch, as they provide food for the monarch caterpillar.



Butterfly Milkweed
found in our prairies.



Purple Milkweed from
our savanna habitats.



Swamp Milkweed thrives
in moist, sunny spots.



Common Milkweed of
prairies and roadsides.

Like all butterflies, monarchs have a different diet during their caterpillar stage than they do as winged adults. As caterpillars, they feed exclusively on milkweed leaves of the genus *Asclepias*. North America has several dozen native milkweed species with which monarchs co-evolved and upon which they rely to complete their life cycle.

Milkweeds produce a toxin to deter animals from eating them, but monarchs have evolved immunity to these toxins. As they feed, the monarch caterpillars store up the toxins in their bodies, making them taste bad and deterring their predators. The toxins remain in their system—even after metamorphosis, protecting them as adults as well. As adults, monarchs feed on nectar from a wide range of native wildflowers like milkweeds as well as “tame flowers.” (National Wildlife Federation).

Bremer Sanctuary is proud to provide food for the monarch caterpillar and nectar for the migrating adults that pass through during their northern migration in the spring as well as their fall return trip to their over-wintering grounds in central Mexico.

If you are interested in growing a native wildflower garden for birds, butterflies, and other pollinators, see [page 11](#) for information on how you can get your garden certified as a **Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary** by the Illinois Audubon Society.

Some Activities Around the Barn



A big thank you goes to the guys who keep our trails open all summer. Dane Murphy, Dick Rompasky, and Jerry Prater are just three of our mower volunteers. We appreciate all the work they do. Other mower volunteers will appear in future issues.



Sometimes trees fall along the fence line or land on one of the trails and must be cleared. To the right are Bruce Redman and Bob Schwandner cutting and moving a fallen tree near our new east fence.

Bottom right shows Bruce Redman working with other members of the Bremer crew to clear a log that had floated onto the Cress Creek low water crossing. Leading to flash flooding, heavy rains often cause debris to collect here and must be removed.





To the left are members of the restoration crew at Pond #8. The pond is infested with an invasive wetland grass called Phragmites. Like many invasive species, if left alone it will completely take over and push the other wetland plants out of this ecosystem. Jerome Epplin and Ken Schaal are spraying the grass. Don Krefft is driving the gator that is hauling the sprayer.

On May 17, 100 students from Greenville Elementary 1st grade spent their afternoon at the sanctuary. Five classrooms of 20 students each enjoyed a wagon ride, barn tour, trail hike with scavenger hunt, and a coloring page station. The students had spent their morning at the Orpheum Theater in Hillsboro and brought their own picnic lunch to enjoy before setting off on their sanctuary adventures. The 1st grade teachers, Coulter, Eversgerd, Elam, Stoecklin and Volken all enjoyed our property as much as the students.

None of this would have been possible without the help of our awesome volunteers for the afternoon, Don Krefft, Jim Hefley, Ray Luebbert, Nancy and Bruce Redman, Lorraine Hetzler, Jeani Nobbe, Linda Meyers, Lisa Sanders, Diana Putnam, Beth Groves, Karyl Dressen, Angie Karban, Gail Schaal and Sonya Lockett. Thanks to all volunteers who helped to make this day successful.





The sign at the Bremer Memorial has been repaired and re-installed. According to past Hickory Hills Chapter president, Jim Kenney, the sign was commissioned by Dan Hoover and created around 35 years ago (estimated). Alma Tarran from Irving carved the sign with a single-bladed Stanley utility knife. The sign had begun to lean, as the posts were rotting away. The Bremer stewards removed the entire structure, put wood preservative on the carved sign, made a new frame and posts, covered the sign with plexiglass, and planted it in the same area around the memorial. The sign is as beautiful as ever thanks to the work of Bob Schwandner. Bob was assisted by Dane Murphy, Ray Luebbert, and Bruce Redman for its re-installment.



Ron Gazda and Jim Yount putting on the finishing touches to a rehabbed countertop in the meeting area of the education barn.

Erecting a Barn owl nest box was the highlight of the day Tuesday, April 23rd. The kit was purchased and installed—meeting the recommended requirements for an optimal set up. Barn Owls are on the threatened species list for Illinois mainly due to loss of nesting and foraging habitat. A donation from the Decatur Audubon Society made the purchase possible.



Invasive Species Workshop - by Ken Schaal



Chris Evans showing tool usage

Early last spring the local Extension Office contacted me to see if Bremer could be a venue for an in-service workshop on invasive species on the Bremer Sanctuary grounds. That program took place on Friday afternoon, June 14. Around a dozen people attended to learn about invasive species control options recommended by the U of I Extension Forester, Chris Evans. Ray and Ken represented Bremer during the program.

Chris discussed using various methods to control Bush Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive, and Sericea Lespedeza. A few other species were also mentioned. Different control techniques and tools were shown, and their uses were demonstrated. The program also provided hands-on opportunities for all who attended.

Mechanical control techniques include 1) hand pulling of herbaceous plants, 2) leverage aids such as weed wrenches and the “Extractigator,” and 3) the use of fire, which was not demonstrated. **Individual plant treatments** include 1) foliar spray, 2) basal bark, 3) cut stump, and 4) injection. The use of various herbicides was discussed with each treatment option. Some of these control measures were then demonstrated on our grounds using Bush Honeysuckle and Autumn Olive as the subjects.



Using the *Extractigator* on bush honeysuckle

Controlling Sericea Lespedeza was also discussed, and specimens were viewed at the East Prairie. The invasion of Sericea is a large problem in pollinator fields and prairies throughout the Midwest. The only control treatment is finding and then spot spraying with herbicides. One of the participants spoke about her research on Sericea as a part of her MS degree. She mentioned that Sericea will push out all native wildflowers and grasses with one exception. The only native species that can co-exist within a Sericea infestation is Indian Grass, which is aggressive enough to tolerate the invasive species. She said that ignoring a Sericea infested field will permanently destroy the wildflower and prairie grass habitat. Then the entire food web will collapse.

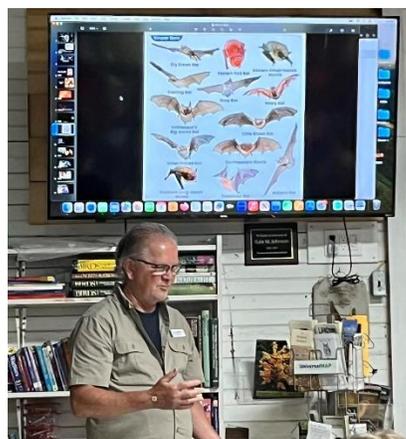
The audience asked a lot of questions, were engaged in the discussions, and were actively involved throughout the presentation. The leaders were grateful for the opportunity to visit and conduct the program at Bremer Sanctuary.

Cicadas, cicadas, cicadas...



The Periodical Cicada program held on Friday evening, May 10 was attended by 25 guests. Andrew Holsinger, horticulture educator for the U of I extension gave an interesting program regarding the emergence of the periodical cicadas. Brood XIII and Brood XIX cicadas emerged across central Illinois and southern Illinois and lasted about one month. Thanks to Holsinger's program, we now understand their cycles, habitat, life stages, and breeding components. We will see them again in 13 years!

All About Bats



The "Bat Program" on June 7 began with a packed house of about 90 people. The presentation was given by Bremer crew member and Master Naturalist Ray Luebbert. In the first part of his program, Ray showed slides of fossilized examples of early bats. He discussed how bats have not changed much from fossils that are millions of years old. He also mentioned the structure of the wings, which are composed of fingers and a thumb, wrist, forearm and an arm—all covered with skin—and how it compares to the human upper extremity. He also discussed mating, hibernation, diseases, migration, and the benefits bats bring to agriculture. He described white nose disease in bats, how it spreads, and the effects it is having on bat populations.

A question-and-answer period took place, followed by a short hike looking for bats with a bat locator. No bats were found, but everyone left the barn knowing a lot about bats.

Summer Prairie Wildflower Walk



The July 20th summer prairie wildflower walk was attended by 17 people. It was a beautiful day! Charter member of Hickory Hills Chapter, Jim Kenney was in attendance and led 13 guests on the walk around the West Prairie. Chapter members, Jim Hefley, Don Krefft, and Dane Murphy assisted with the walk.

Along the way the group spotted a total of 42 different wildflower species and discussed the importance of diversity in the West Prairie, which is one of the most beautiful places at Bremer Sanctuary. High plant diversity indicates the quality of the area, and higher is better. The goal at Bremer Sanctuary is to maintain the highest quality plantings that we possibly can, and our crew does what we can to reach that goal. High-quality plants lead to a host of pollinators—especially insects, which pollinate the flowers and become food for the many species of birds at the sanctuary.

Ray Luebbert and Jerry Prater lead another group on a wagon ride along the Bluebird Trail. Ray drove, and Jerry described the history of the pollinator field and pointed out many varieties of prairie plants along the way. Milkweeds, different sunflower species, and a variety of mints were spotted.



After the tour both groups returned to the barn and enjoyed refreshments. Cookies and soft drinks plus watermelon and cantaloupe, were savored by all.

Bird of the Month

The bulletin board at the sanctuary parking lot has been maintained by Sonya Lockett for many years. Among the items on the bulletin board is the “Bird of the Month.” The present bird of the month is the Indigo Bunting, a common summer resident at Bremer Sanctuary. In fact, it is found in all parts of the state and rarely may spend the winter in the southern part of the state.



It is a sparrow-like bird with a conical beak that forages on insects, seeds, and berries. In the summer when insects are plentiful and when extra protein is needed for the young, they hunt grasshoppers, beetles, cicadas, and a wide variety of caterpillars. They perch and sing in prairie fields, woodland edges, yards, and parks. You may also find them at your bird feeders!

The male has brilliant dark blue feathers during the breeding season and a mixture of blue and brown feathers the rest of the year. The female has brown feathers to be less visible to predators and cowbirds. The breeding season is from May into August. Built by the female, the nest is made of dried grasses, bark strips and twigs and is lined with grasses, feathers, and hair. Sometimes a snakeskin is used at the base of the nest (IDNR)! Despite the various types of camouflage, the nest is often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird that deposits eggs which the indigo bunting will hatch and raise, taking food and care away from its own offspring. Nonetheless, this bird is common throughout the state and also at Bremer Sanctuary.

Remaining 2024 Calendar of Events

August 7, 9:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. "Hummingbirds" a children's program in partnership with the U of I Extension. Ages 5 and up.

October 5, 4:00 p.m. Owl Prowl. Wiener roast begins at 4:00. Owl activities with Treehouse begins at 5:00 p.m.

November 3, 5:00 p.m. Annual meeting and Potluck. **IAS's own Brian "Fox" Ellis as John James Audubon.**

When attending events, please dress appropriately. Trails open dawn until dusk every day.

Donations are always welcome!

Photo credits for this issue go to Don Krefft, Ray Luebbert, Nancy Redman, Ken Schaal

Hickory Hills Chapter Board of Directors and Officers

Henry Eilers - Restoration

Ron Gazda - Building

Don Krefft - IAS Chapter Rep, Treasurer, Restoration

Sonya Luckett - Bulletin Board

Ray Luebbert - Restoration, Website

Dane Murphy - Building

Jerry Prater- Secretary

Bruce Redman - Building

Dick Rompasky - Building

Ken Schaal - Restoration

Bob Schwandner - Vice-President, Building

Jim Yount - Building

Adventures with John James

Audubon Storyteller *Brian "Fox" Ellis*

portrays Audubon in a dynamic performance that engages listeners in scientific inquiry and natural history.

Come spend an hour in the studio of one of America's greatest naturalists and wildlife artist. November 3 at 5:00 p.m. at the barn.



Trail Map is available here.

Bird & Butterfly Sanctuary Certification



Would you like to create a bird and butterfly sanctuary in your yard?

Your neighborhood?

At your local school, library, church or business?

Do you enjoy attracting wildlife to your home?

Do you maintain the four elements of habitat:
Food, Water, Shelter & Sufficient Space?

Would you like to have a beautiful garden blooming with native flowers from early spring throughout the summer and late into the autumn?

If you said yes to any of these questions, then your property can become a Certified Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary. Your sanctuary can be as small as a few native flowers arranged in a few pots on your patio or as large as a few hundred acres. You can also certify a portion of a local school yard, neighborhood park, library gardens, church yard, a farm field or grass strip, or an entire corporate campus. Approved applicants will receive a sign for display. For more info go to the QR code.

