



Hickory Hills Highlights

Hickory Hills Chapter - Illinois Audubon Society

Stewards of H & B Wildlife Sanctuary

Hillsboro, Illinois

Spring 2025

Welcome to the Hickory Hills Spring Newsletter!

Spring is finally here! We had an old-fashioned winter, and we are glad it's over. In this newsletter there 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 plus some other articles we hope you find interesting. The authors of this newsletter hope you enjoy reading about the events at Bremer Sanctuary. As always, we are 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.



Finally Spring!

A Note from Hickory Hills Chapter President



Jim's moment. Ahh...spring! A time to embrace that renewed sense of energy and tackle projects we contemplated all winter. It is also a time when I enjoy sitting by our pond with a cup of joe and just be...whether watching a pair of geese that return each year or listening to the melodic resurgence of the many frog and toad species. It's like spa time for the mind.

The stewards of Bremer Sanctuary have been working hard at this amazing facility with many exciting programs to enjoy. Please join us for one of our community events or grab a cup of your favorite joe. Come out to the sanctuary and just be...

Looking forward to seeing you out here,

Jim

The 2025 Bremer Prairie Burn – by Don Krefft



IAS staff burn boss Jamie and a team of 10 Bremer volunteers conducted a successful burn on March 3. Illinois Audubon's own Brian "Fox" Ellis and Mike Kennedy joined our local volunteers to burn more than 40 acres of prairie, part of which had not been burned in 3 years. Many of the volunteers commented that it was the most thorough burn they had seen on that acreage in

a long time. We attribute this to the diversity of prairie grasses and forbs (wildflowers) that have been added over the last 10 -12 years. The burn plan for the fall of 2025 includes a controlled burn in the nature trail woods behind the barn.



Bluebird News - by Don Krefft

Bremer Sanctuary supports the East Central Illinois Bluebird Society whose motto is "Bring Back the Bluebirds." We just received the spring 2025 edition of their *Bluebird News*. Volunteers of the ECIBS monitor nest boxes in 21 Illinois counties, including Montgomery County. We learned that the fledging results for last year (2024) were favorable with 6,286 bluebirds fledged, the highest total since 2018. Included in this total were 498 fledglings from our county, many of which were from the 50 nest boxes at Bremer Sanctuary. Over the years we have learned that spring weather plays an important role in determining blue bird nesting success. Thanks to Nancy Redman for her efforts in monitoring the Bremer Sanctuary Bluebird Trail throughout the nesting season. Nest boxes are checked weekly from April 1st until September 1st.



Winter Activities at Bremer Sanctuary



Using Prescribed Burns to Manage Red-Headed Woodpecker Habitat



In the diverse ecosystems of the Illinois forests, the red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), a striking bird known for its vibrant plumage and acrobatic skills, plays a crucial role in maintaining the health of woodland habitats. However, the continued survival of this species is increasingly threatened by habitat loss and changes in forest management practices.

One of the most effective strategies to support red-headed woodpecker populations is the use of prescribed burns. Prescribed burns are a form of controlled fire that benefits ecosystems by removing competing vegetation, recycling nutrients back into the soil, and creating a patchwork of habitats that cater to the diverse needs of wildlife.

For red-headed woodpeckers, which thrive in open woodlands and savannas, these burns create ideal conditions. They rely on a mixture of mature trees for nesting and foraging opportunities, as well as open areas that provide ample space for insects, their primary food source. In recent years, fire suppression policies have contributed to denser undergrowth and an overall shift in vegetation dynamics, which negatively impact red-headed woodpecker habitats.



By employing prescribed burns, forest managers can mimic the natural fire regimes that historically shaped these ecosystems. This practice encourages regeneration of oaks and other hardwoods, alongside the development of open habitats necessary for the woodpecker's survival. Research shows that areas subjected to periodic prescribed burns experience an increase in insect abundance, directly benefiting red-headed woodpeckers. Moreover, open landscapes resulting from these burns feature a higher density of dead trees, called snags, which serve as crucial nesting and foraging sites. This alignment of ecological needs illustrates the symbiotic relationship between fire management and flourishing of woodpecker populations.



Using prescribed burns for forest management practices is essential for sustaining red-headed woodpecker populations in Illinois. By understanding the ecological role of fire, naturalists and conservationists can promote healthier, more diverse forests that support this iconic bird and the multitude of species that share its habitat. Continued advocacy for fire management practices is vital as we work to preserve these beautiful populations for generations to come.

Our goal at the sanctuary is to use prescribed burns in our woodlands this fall to help maintain the sizeable red-headed woodpecker population that calls Bremer Sanctuary home.

How Citizen Scientists Can Monitor Plant and Animal Populations

In Illinois, the delicate balance of our ecosystems is vital to the overall health of our environment. Citizen scientists can play a crucial role in monitoring plant and animal populations within our wildlife sanctuaries and can contribute significantly to conservation efforts. Their involvement not only enhances data collection but also creates a greater public understanding of local biodiversity.

Citizen scientists are everyday individuals who volunteer their time and effort to gather valuable data. With training and guidance, they can become skilled at identifying different species, recording sightings, and tracking population changes. This grassroots effort allows members of the community to take an active role in preserving their natural surroundings while promoting a sense of responsibility and stewardship.

The data collected by these volunteers is essential for conservationists. It helps in understanding population dynamics, identifying trends, and assessing the health of ecosystems. For instance, tracking the migration patterns of birds or monitoring plant growth can inform crucial conservation decisions and strategies. With increasing threats from climate change, habitat loss, and invasive species, having solid data allows for timely intervention to protect vulnerable species and habitats.

Citizen science also provides an invaluable educational experience. Volunteers gain hands-on knowledge of the native flora and fauna, learn how to identify various species, and understand their roles within the ecosystem. This education is vital in developing the next generation of environmental stewards who advocate for conservation.

By encouraging individuals to participate as citizen scientists, we strive for a healthier, more sustainable environment for all living beings. Promoting citizen science is important in protecting our natural heritage. If you would like to get involved or learn more about citizen science opportunities, please reach out. Together, we can make a difference for our wildlife and the ecosystems that support them.

April 22

Celebrate Earth Day!

Plant a tree, go birding, pull an invasive species. Do Something Green.

Spring Wildflowers at Bremer Sanctuary





2025 Calander of Events

April 12 7:00 a.m. ...Spring Bird Walk led by IAS' Matt Hayes - coffee & donuts to follow.

April 12 9:30 – 11:00 ...Community Workday. Bring gloves and a rake for mulching.

April 19 10:00 a.m. ...Woodland Wildflower Walk with refreshments afterward.

May 31 10:00 a.m. ...Spring Wildflower Seed Collecting.

June 14 7:00 a.m. ...Summer Bird Walk with coffee and donuts afterward.

July 12 TBD...Children's Program: "Circle of Life" in partnership with U of I Extension.

July 19 9:00 a.m. ...Prairie Wildflower Walk with refreshments afterward.

August 9 9:30 a.m. – 11: a.m....Children's program: "Outdoor Cooking" in partnership with U of I Extension.

August 16 TBD...Butterfly & Moths of Illinois with Ray Luebbert – Open to the public

October TBD ...Owl Prowl, wiener roast at 4:00. Owl activities with TreeHouse at 5:00

November TBD ...Open House and Potluck. Presenter TBD

More programs may be added later.

Dates are subject to revision.

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

Donations are always welcome.

Hickory Hills Chapter Board of Directors and Officers

Butch Durbin – Restoration

Jerome Epplin – Restoration

Jim Hefley - Chapter President, Restoration

Ron Gazda - Building

Don Krefft - IAS Chapter Rep, Treasurer, Restoration

Sonya Lockett - 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



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



Trail Map is available here.



If you are enjoying this newsletter, you are either an Illinois Audubon Society member (dues reminder are sent directly from the IAS) or you are a “Friend of Bremer”, in which case the annual dues of \$10.00 are due in January and can be mailed to: Hickory Hills Chapter PO Box 395, Hillsboro IL 62049



You can join or renew online at illinoisaudubon.org or scan QR Code.