

# Prairie Smoke

Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter

Issue 9

May, 1991

## SEED PROCESSING PARTY

*Dropseed (Joanna Woolman)*

Max Baumgardner

On March 23, a seed processing party was held at the home of Dennis Lubbs in Walnut. Prairie and savanna seeds that were gathered in the fall of 1990 and seeds obtained from other sources were mixed and prepared for planting. They were divided into mixes suitable for dry prairie, mesic prairie, and sedge meadows.

Workers included Lubbs, his parents Bill and Joyce, Hazel Reuter, Isabel Johnston, Max and Sally Baumgardner, Ed and Karen Pleskovitch, Kathy Motto, and Bo Dziadyk.

The winter gloom was chased away with steaming bowls of "Stone Soup". The group enjoyed the fairy tale, " Stone Soup" read by Sally.



From left -- Isabel Johnston, Dennis Lubbs, Sally Baumgardner, Hazel Reuter, Ed and Karen Pleskovitch, Bo Dziadyk, Kathy Motto.

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## WEEDS PATROL

An aggressive program to eliminate weeds (white sweet clover, garlic mustard, wild parsnip) will begin in 1991. This is a new area where volunteer help is needed. We plan to pull and cut weeds before they set seeds.

There are no plans for the use of chemicals at this time. By 1992, we should have enough data to set work days well in advance. For now, contact Max and Sally if you are willing to join the Weeds Patrol. Previous knowledge is not necessary. On-the-job training will be provided.



brings you **Prairie Smoke**, the Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter.  
 Illinois Field Office, 79 West Monroe,  
 Chicago, IL 60603 -- Phone 312/346-8166

**MEINERS**

**WETLANDS**

**PROJECT**



On April 7, 1991 Jeff Meiners, Mike Hays, John Bivins, Max Baumgardner, and Dennis Lubbs met to discuss the Meiners' Wetland project. Out of this meeting and several discussions with Tim Keller and Steve Packard, a plan was developed.

The goals of the plan include increasing waterfowl habitat, enhancing the native plant community, and creating shallow water areas. These goals will be met by damming two drains into Franklin Creek. Because the area is next to Franklin Creek, permits for wetland restoration are needed and will be applied for when completed. Mike Hays is putting together and submitting the application.

Hopefully the proper permits, surveys, and construction will be completed this summer or fall. Jeff Meiners and several of his neighbors have agreed to look into a survey at the area and to find a suitable contractor for the project. Dennis Lubbs has experience in wetland plant restoration which will be invaluable when reseeding and reestablishment of native plants start. As always, Tim Keller has acted as a guiding force in getting this project off the ground.

Volunteers will be needed as the project moves into the native plant reestablishment phase. This area has been burned twice in the last two years and will continue to be burned until the cool season grasses (bluegrass and brome) are suppressed. Of course, volunteers will be needed to do the annual spring burn and seeding.

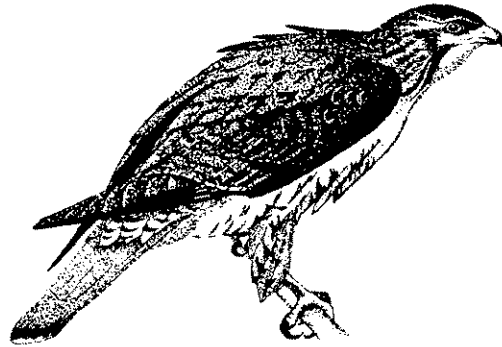
Right now the project has gone from a goal setting process to the final stages of planning. Very soon the project will be in the permitting and survey phase. In a few short weeks we hope to see construction begin.

Thanks to this committee's timely work the Meiners Wetland project is off and running!

## **THANKS!**

To Crest Foods, Ashton, Illinois for preparing our newsletter labels. This month they also prepared labels for the seed scattering cards. This is the type of thing that makes working at Nachusa Grasslands special!

Thanks, too, to those whose names we don't know but contribute to the Grasslands in other ways.

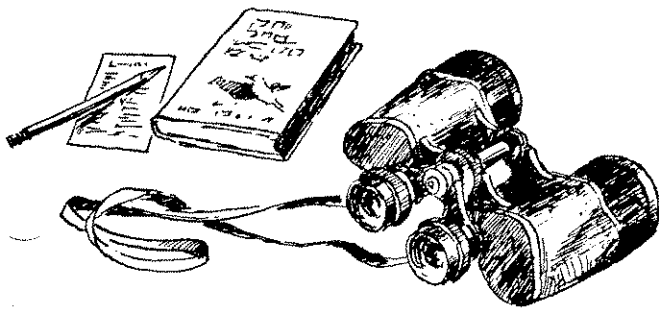


## **YUNGER RESEARCH REPORT**

The winter and spring raptor surveys (January through April) were a success. They would not, however, have been possible without the support of several individuals: Tim Keller, Debra Carey, Ann Haverstock, Ted Wood, Sally Baumgardner, Deanna Hollenberg, Robin Paterson and, especially, Larry Jones and Isabel Johnston, who never missed one survey ---- thank you. The survey area encompasses approximately 16 square miles, with Nachusa Grasslands at its center. Seven diurnal raptor species, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Bald Eagle, Northern Goshawk, and Cooper's Hawk, and five nocturnal species, Great Horned Owl, Common Screech Owl, Short-eared Owl, Barred Owl, and Long-eared Owl were recorded (one Northern Shrike was also observed). Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks were by far the most common (no big surprise). During January and February red-tails averaged approximately 1.1 individual per square mile and rough-legs about 1.2 individuals per square mile (these are minimal densities). There were also quit a few kestrels ---- about 0.7 per square mile.

Don't forget to keep your eyes open for raptor nests or roosts and any signs of carnivores (e.g. fox dens or feral cats). If you get gutsy and collect some carnivore scat, I recommend flipping a plastic bag inside-out and using the bag as a glove to pick up the scat. Just flip the bag back over and you never have to touch the stuff. If you have information on any of the above please feel free to give me a call: 815-753-7846 or, after 7:00 pm., 815-562-8052.

.....by JOHN YUNGER



## TWO SIMILAR BIRDS by Carol Jackley

There are huge amounts of House Finches in Illinois now and some people are having a problem distinguishing between them and Purple Finches. I hope these guidelines will help to decide which species you are observing. I know from experience, with practice it gets easier.

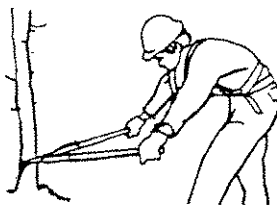
- 1.) Purple Finch males are burgundy-red to rose-red in color.
- 2.) House Finch males are a brighter red in color.
- 3.) Purple Finch males are red on the crown, nape, throat, breast, flanks, and even the streaked brown back is intermingled with streaks of red. No brown streaks appear except on the back. It has a white lower belly and undertail coverts.
- 4.) House Finch males are red on the front of the head but has a brown cap. Red continues on the breast and rump but it is clearly streaked with brown on the sides, lower belly, and the undertail coverts. The back is only streaked with brown.
- 5.) Purple Finch females are brown, heavily striped with a distinct white eyebrow stripe as well as a broad dark jaw stripe.
- 6.) House Finch females are dull, gray grayish-gray throughout, streaked indistinctly above and strongly below. The head lacks a conspicuous pattern unlike the Purple Finch female.
- 7.) Purple Finch have a notched tail and are larger therefore giving a plumper look. They also have a larger bill. I think they have a puffy head compared with a smooth head of a House Finch, but this was never mentioned in field guides as a point to look for, so it is only my observation.
- 8.) House Finch have a square tail and a smaller bill.
- 9.) Purple Finch song is an outburst of rich, bubbly, rapidly delivered notes on various pitches. Most notes are given in pairs or triplets. The flight note is a distinct "pick or pit".
- 10.) House Finch song is a scrambled series of rhythmic notes, usually lasting 3 or more seconds, often ending in a ascending raspy note. Flight note is a sweet "cheet".
- 11.) Purple Finch do not nest in Illinois so they are never seen here in the summer.
- 12.) House Finch do nest in Illinois and are seen all year long.

Some facts about the House Finch are: they first appeared in Illinois in 1983. Originally it was a wild bird in the west. In 1940 they were illegally caught and shipped to New York as caged "Hollywood Finches". The US Fish and Wildlife Service stopped the traffic of the species under the Migration Treaty Act. Dealers not wanting to be caught released them into the wild where they spread rapidly until they covered the entire east by 1971. Now they have expanded their range to the central states and are into the northern states as far as South Dakota.

One of the reasons for their success is they have 2 - 3 broods a year with 3 - 5 eggs each time. They nest practically anyplace and have a longevity period of 7 - 8 years. They are becoming a pest in apple orchards and vegetable farms. More aggressive than the Purple Finch, they have actually driven them off in many areas. A local bander was quoted, "I banded 50 - 60 Purple Finch three years ago, in 1990 I only banded 15 - 20".

Someday man may learn to leave well enough alone but in the meantime we will enjoy these two similar birds.

Data from: National Geographic Society, Birds of North America - Field Guide to Birds by Peterson - Audubon Society, Master Guide to Birding - Audubon Society of North America Birds, John Terres - Field Guide to Birds Nests, Peterson

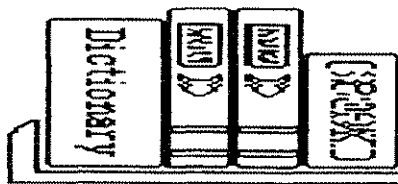


## LATE NEWS FROM KITTENTAIL KNOB

Kittentail Knob improves with a little help from some special friends. Mel Hoff and Herm Jensen, Allen Preiss, Sam Vercillo, Mitch Adamus, and Bob Claus, from West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group, came out to Kittentail Knob on April 27th to cut brush. They were well equipped with loppers and some power tools, all the right equipment to do an efficient job. The area will bloom "better than ever" this year, thanks to their efforts AS WELL AS the Easter Sunday Controlled Burn. We appreciate the fact that this group has adopted an area and plan two work days each year to help it return to its native state.

.....SALLY BAUMGARDNER

(Editor's note: Sally reports she finally saw the Birdsfoot Violets and Kittentails in bloom on Kittentail Knob.)



# For Your Information

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Thank you to the following people who took part in the Spring Prairie Burns led by Mike Crowe held in March and April 1991.

- Dave Crowe - Jeff Meiners
- Bo Dziadyk -- Joseph Dziadyk
- Jim Johnson --- Rich Rasmussen
- Max & Sally Baumgardner
- Mike Adolph -----Gene St. Louis
- Vicki Canon & husband
- Mike Koontz --- Ed Pleskovitch
- Ralph Pullin --- Larry Hill
- Kevin from Rockford
- Steve Robinson -- Earl Thomas
- Jason Welch and his friend Steve
- Mike Crowe

Franklin Grove Fire Department

Thanks to Gene St. Louis for providing three portable radios during the burns -- they were very helpful in improving communications! We are grateful to Jon Marcum of S & M Welding who donated parts and labor for flapper brackets. We are well equipped now, thanks to the generosity and involvement of these people.

---- Sally Baumgardner

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<p><b>EASTERN BLUEBIRD - (<i>Sialia sialis</i>)</b>  Common migrant and summer resident;  common winter resident in southern  Illinois decreasing northward</p>
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Several new bluebird nesting boxes have been constructed and put in place at the Grasslands. Two boxes already have occupants with eggs. By the time you receive your Prairie Smoke no doubt there will be hatchlings! Thanks to Jack Keigen for his work and interest!

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Max Baumgardner asks all volunteers to keep track of the hours spent working at Nachusa Grasslands. Also the approximate amount of monetary funds you spend; your time, phone calls, mileage, etc. It will be interesting to total up all the hours and funds donated to this fascinating project. Please get that information to Max on July 1 and Jan. 1 each year. You may wish to differentiate time on the site and time to the site.

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A number of Nachusa Grasslands volunteers were recognized by the Illinois Chapter of the Nature Conservancy on Feb. 23 at the volunteer appreciation luncheon held in Wheaton. Those named "Outstanding Volunteers" were Ellen Baker, Dennis Lubbs, Ed Pleskovitch, Max & Sally Baumgardner, Dot Wade, Ann Haverstock, Jeff Meiners, and Debra Carey.

"Volunteers are essential in the area of stewardship of the natural areas," said Al Pyott, Illinois director of the Nature Conservancy. "They're a dedicated group. They work nights and weekends." CONGRATULATIONS!

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"We need people and 5 gallon pails", was Dennis Lubbs answer to the question what do we need for our spring planting day. And that's just what he asked of those involved. The work was begun on May 4th and 5th. Dennis and our seed collectors have amassed about two thousand pounds of prairie, wetland, and savanna seed species.

Fifty to 80 acres will be planted. Seeds will all be hand broadcast. Pick-up trucks were used for transporting the seed. Dennis admonished, "Wear waterproof shoes or boots, the wetland seeds are going in wetlands". All volunteers were urged to bring a sack lunch and spend the day. The rain date is May 18 & 19. As usual, meet at the Nachusa Grasslands sign on Lowden Road at 10:00 am.

Hope you were able to attend, what a fascinating opportunity to take part in a historic project!

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**"We are looking for an enthusiastic, hard working, creative person to head up 'Autumn-on-the-Prairie' on Sept. 21", reports Max Baumgardner. The time will be here before we know it! This person is needed to coordinate activities of the day. Remember you have the right to delegate authority!! Please get in touch with Max or Sally if you are willing to take on this exciting responsibility. Call 708/655-HAWK.**



## THE PERFUME MAN by Judy Hill

The shooting stars of Nachusa Grasslands smell the same as the ones from my childhood. Only the time and place is different.

Tucky Raffensberger and my Dad (Harry) were plotting the approach of helping the bachelor backfire the prairie around his home. The bachelor's name was Lawrence Haller. Eunice told Mom the neighbors called him the Perfume Man because that is what he did for a living. He was a chemist at the cosmetic factory and he always smelled of perfume. After the neighbors left, I got a lecture from Mom. "If you must speak to this man, always call him by his name, Mister Haller. Never, ever call him the Perfume Man."

There were many occasions to visit Mr. Haller and his nearest neighbors, Phyllis and Clare Titus. These three people were friends from the same town in England. They enjoyed tea-time together. They talked of the war, gardening, life, and death. Sometimes there was the reading of tea leaves, accompanied by sounds of laughter, or most often, predictions from grave omens.

It was on one of the visits to Phyllis' home that I was given some jam and biscuits to take over to Mr. Haller. Mom and Phyllis were going to have a private talk (tea leaves). I was happy to do this errand because it would give me the opportunity to beg him again for some perfume that smelled like shooting stars. Mr. Haller's tidy, one-room home was made from salvaged wood beams on top of railroad sleepers. There were no windows, but on its East side was a long screened-in porch. He was a small and frail man in appearance only. He always dressed in a brown suit, white dress shirt with necktie, and brown shiny shoes. He smelled of perfume and so did his house. He had lots of flowers and some small apple trees. But, just outside his tree-branch fence was a wonderful dropseed prairie full of violets, phlox, stoneseeds, stargrass, and hundreds of shooting stars. He loved that prairie patch.

Mr. Haller never smiled much. He sat in a large wicker chair, its white paint worn and peeling. While he poured the tea, we argued which was best; wild strawberry jam (you need lots of berries for a small jar), or fox grape jelly. For the first time ever, he looked straight into my eyes and said, "Jood, fetch my shopping bag, please." The shopping bag was black needlepoint with two pink roses; one full petalled, the other a single. He rattled things around inside for a long time before bringing out a small clear glass bottle that contained the color of a prairie sunset. I carefully removed the tiny cork and took a whiff. We were eyeball to eyeball. "Mr. Haller, it's almost and not quite, but I'd like to keep it anyway, thank you very much." He smiled as Mom and I said our "so longs".

Time passes by and so do we. It was such a hot Sunday when we got back from church. Phyllis was at our house waiting for us in the kitchen. (Folks seldom needed to lock doors.) She was in tears while Mom took her baby and told me to get upstairs to change clothes. It was no problem for me to do so. I lay on the floor listening to the talk downstairs. I will never forget Phyllis crying out:

"He was sitting in his chair with his chin on his chest! But... "arry, it...is so hot and he was dead so long!" After a while I looked out the upstairs north window to see Dad put the pram in the car trunk and Mom hand the baby over to Phyllis. Dad drove away and Mom came back inside. The grasshoppers were making quite a dim when Dad got back home.

I sat in the bay window looking across our front yard. The white gravel of the road was backed by the great, green still wall of turkey-foot. Soon, the sheriff's car passed followed by the red and cream colored ambulance. There were no flashing lights nor sirens. Only the turkey foot waved good-by.

My current prairie patch is a few feet from my nemesis neighbors' property. They don't like weeds. A few years back I was grooming the shooting stars only to look up and see THEM a dozen feet away, looking down at me, their arms folded while whispering to each other. An awful odor entered my nose causing me to snort, lean over and take a deep breath of the wonderful shooting stars.

Straightening up and closing my eyes, I saw a frail, kind man wearing a brown suit, white shirt and a necktie, dusty brown shoes, and a smile on his face. He was sitting in his large white wicker chair with its paint worn and peeling. His chin rested on his chest. A door slammed shut in the distance. This is the way I prefer to recollect..... The Perfume Man.

I desire no future that will break the ties with  
the past. ----- George Elliot

# ACTIVITY CALENDAR

## 1991 NACHUSA GRASSLANDS VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES CALENDAR



- MAY 18 - GARLIC MUSTARD PURGE - Sally Baumgardner - 708/655-HAWK  
MAY 25 - MURDER MUTLIFLORA ROSE - Naylor Road area - Ed Pleskovitch  
JUNE 2 - BIRD WALK - Ann Haverstock - 708/232-9398 - 8 to 11:30 am; Meet at sign on Lowden Road; carry drinking water, bug/tick spray advised; 20 persons; please no organized groups!  
JUNE 8 - BRUSH CUTTING - Wetlands trail & surrounding area - Ed Pleskovitch  
JUNE 15 - SEED COLLECTING - Birds Foot Violet and WAR on sweet clover - Meet at TNC sign Sally Baumgardner  
JUNE 23 - BRUSH CUTTING - Wetlands trail & surrounding area - Ed P.  
JUNE 22 - TOUR - Focus on Coneflowers - Sonia Vogl & Dot Wade - Nachusa sign - 10:00 am - tour information on Special Tours - Ellen Baker - 815/456-2283  
JUNE 28 - BIRD WALK - Ann Haverstock - 7 to 9 pm - Start at Stone Barn Road  
JUNE 29 - BIRD WALK - Ann Haverstock - 7 to 11 am - Start at TNC sign - Bird identification by sound both days.  
JULY 13 - BRUSH CUTTING - at internal fences - Ed Pleskovitch  
JULY 13 - SEED COLLECTING - Porcupine grass and sedges - Sally Baumgardner  
JULY 19 - TOUR - Augustana College Research Project - Bo Dziadyk  
JULY 20 - STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING - "Little Yellow House on the Grasslands" - 9 am Please attend! Max - 708/655-4295  
JULY 20 - SUMMER PHOTO DAY - The Heat of Summer - Gene St. Louis - 9 am TNC sign - Lowden Road  
JULY 27 - SEED COLLECTING - sedges - Sally Baumgardner  
AUGUST 1 - NEWSLETTER INPUT - Prairie Smoke, 897 Union Rd., Amboy, IL 61310  
AUGUST 10 - SEED COLLECTING/more war on sweet clover - Sally Baumgardner  
AUGUST 15 - NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED  
AUGUST 17 - FENCE/POST REMOVAL - Ed Pleskovitch  
AUGUST 24 - TOUR - Flora/Seed picking/Blazing stars in bloom - Meiners Wetland - Ellen Baker & Interns  
AUGUST 31 - FENCE/POST REMOVAL - Ed Pleskovitch

**SEPTEMBER 21                      AUTUMN-ON-THE-PRAIRIE                      1 - 5 PM**  
**\*\*\*\*\*                                      TOURS - FUN                                      \*\*\*\*\***

*BLUE-EYED GRASS (Sisyrinchium campestre) -- prefers a dry prairie setting. The flowers are deep blue or white, with a yellow eye. This species blooms from May to June. It is said to have been one of Thoreau's favorite flowers. The delicate flowers bloom only on sunny mornings, close upon being picked, and produce pea-sized seedheads that contain many tiny seeds.*

blue-eyed  
grass

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897 Union Road  
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