

The Nature Conservancy, Nachusa Grasslands
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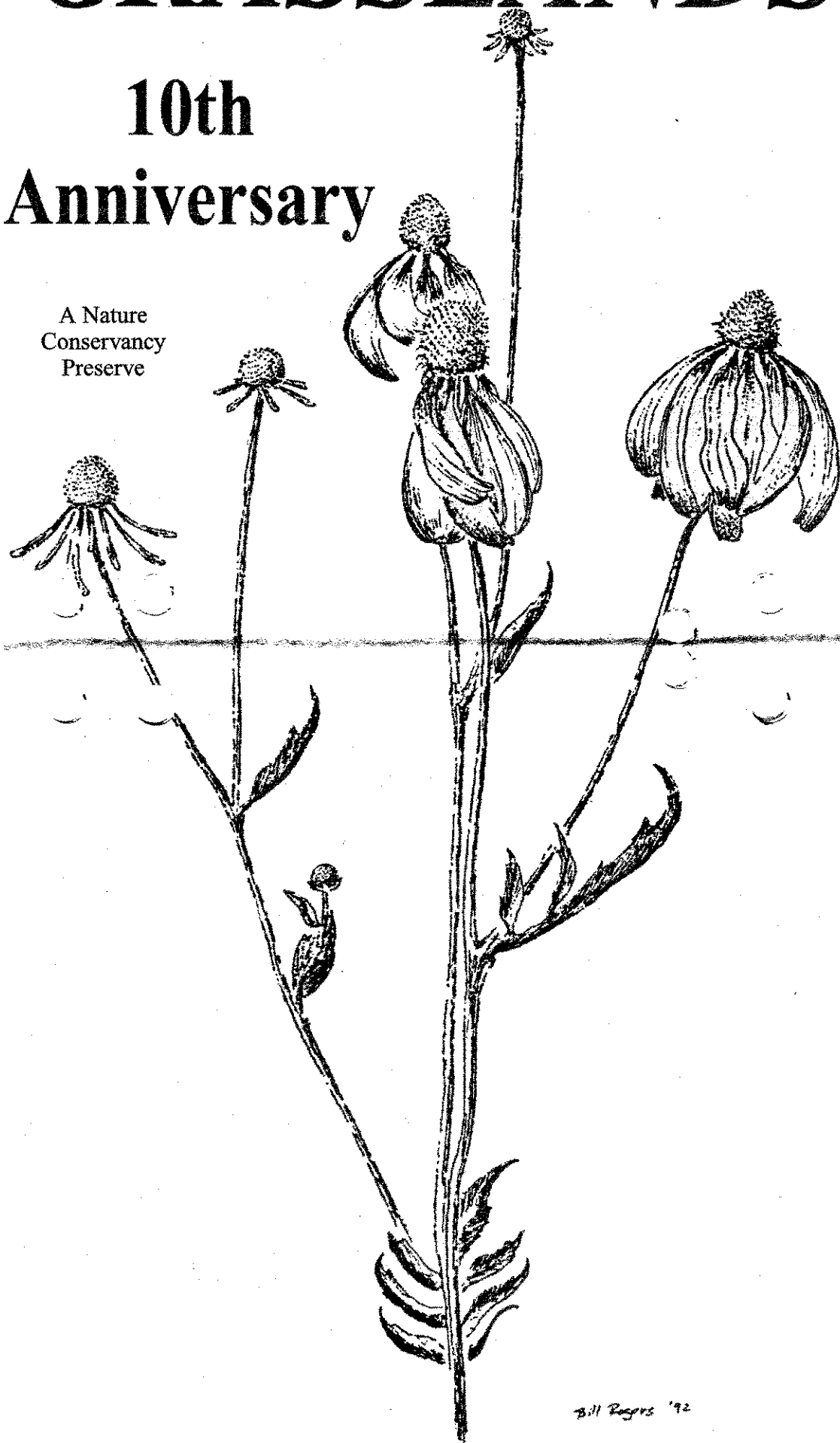
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NACHUSA GRASSLANDS

10th Anniversary

A Nature
Conservancy
Preserve



We could have lost it. Nachusa Grasslands might easily have succumbed to the forces of progress which have claimed so much of our native landscape.

Had the rocky topography rolled a little less, or the mantle of the soil been a bit thicker, this tract would probably be in row crops now.

But its early proprietors regarded the land as fit only for pasture. Decades of grazing altered the face of the prairie. It became fragmented, with small islands of original flora scattered over the denuded range.

The Grasslands looked dramatically different, but enough of it remained intact in 1965 to catch the attention of Doug and Dorothy Wade.

(Continued on Page 2)

INSIDE

Autumn-on-the-Prairie
festivities coming Sept. 21
at Nachusa Grasslands

— Page 2

You're invited to Autumn-on-the-Prairie on Sept. 21

Autumn-on-the-Prairie this year will again be the third Saturday in September — the 21st — from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Nachusa Grasslands. There are no entrance or participation fees.

Many varied tours are scheduled — they will leave about every 15 minutes.

There will be an entirely new tour route, from Stone Barn Road through the northwest part of the area, then curving, which will enable people to see the "other side" of the thousand-plus acre preserve.

One tour will take about three hours, covering several habitats in the northern half of the preserve.

Susan Kleiman will provide many things for kids to see, touch and do.

Thelma Dahlberg will help the youngsters understand life in presettlement days with an Amerindian corn grinding demonstration, as well as her display of Amerindian life.

Tom Grimes will also provide an Amerindian display. Dot Wade will pro-

vide books for sale, and there will be displays regarding birds, butterflies, alien plants — weeds — and small mammals, and Floyd Sellers will demonstrate flint knapping.

John and Shelia Holboe will display photography and pictorial art, and prairie plants will be for sale. Chris Bronny will present his interpretation of Amerindian life.

And there will be a silent auction of many items, from Nature Conservancy Tee shirts to an outdoor bench, to prairie plants.

There will be plant identification "self tours." There will be motorized assistance to the tent area for those people in need of it. Snow White Bakery & Deli will cater food.

Heritage Strings, of Rockford, will provide traditional music. Prairie art, Tee shirts and books will be for sale.



Heritage Strings, an instrumental folk music group, features the hammered dulcimer, lap harp, guitar and string bass. Members include Bob and Laurene Logsdon, Jerry Clausen and Esther Crandall. The group plays from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sept. 21 during Autumn-on-the-Prairie.

(Continued from Page 1)

It might be reaching a little to say that the call of an upland plover led to the establishment of the largest upland prairie in Illinois, but that, in a roundabout way, is the story. The Wades, intrepid prairie-hunters, heard the call one day on a nature outing. Knowing the habitat requirements of this bird, Doug and Dot searched the surrounding pastures and found what they were looking for. This single event, a vagary of chance, was a turning point for Nachusa Grasslands. Through the Wades, the word got out. Others came to see the prairie. As they marveled at its remnants and imagined its potential, they did not realize that the Grasslands had yet to face the most serious threat to its existence since the retreat of the glaciers. That threat was development.

In 1985, the owner decided to parcel the property out as building lots. Enter the Nature Conservancy. This organization specializes in the acquisition of natural lands, and it is very good at what it does. However, the sale was to take the form of an auction and time was very short. Normal funding processes could not be completed before the sale was to begin. Just as the fate of Nachusa Grasslands seemed sealed, a

The Botanist

If only s(he) can find some tree
Some shrub or flower or grass or
weed
That's rare or new or strange,
Or growing somewhat out of
range,
(S)he has reward in d

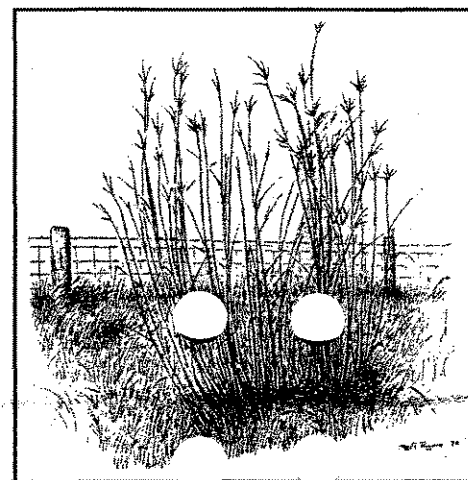
From *Gathered Leaves, Green, Gold,
and Sere*
by Ernest Jesse Palmer
William-Frederick Press, New York,
NY. 1958

flurry of eleventh hour negotiations and a little luck combined to make the money available, and the 125 acre nucleus of the preserve was virtually snatched off the auction block with minutes to spare.

Work commenced immediately to restore the prairie to its former vitality. Under the guidance of Conservancy officials and competent volunteers like Tim Keller and Chris Bronny, a small army of care-givers converged on the scene to cut brush, remove

fences and conduct burns. Subsequent acquisitions over the next five years increased the size of Nachusa Grasslands by over 400 acres. Through the generosity of the Jay Meiners family, Max and Sally Baumgardner, and Dorothy Wade, 195 acres were added. Slowly, the prairie's scars healed and its bruises faded. Now the veil of neglect has been lifted, and the transformation is wonderful to behold.

But Nachusa is more than just a charming relic of Illinois' ancient past. It is a modern well nestled in a mosaic of farm fields. It hosts an impressive diversity of ecological zones. Here, one can walk from cattails to cactus in just a few minutes. There is a plethora of prairie grasses and wildflowers for every season, all tantalizingly close to the timbered sandstone bluffs of Franklin Creek State Park. These tangible treasures aside, the real value of Nachusa Grasslands is more abstract. This preserve is one manifestation of a new environmental ethic which recognizes the natural, intrinsic value of wild places, and the right of such places to exist simply because they do exist. These acres yield no cash crop, yet visitors to Nachusa reap a bountiful harvest. It is wading through lush prairie to a sandstone



knob, vultures wheeling in a sunny sky, or a coyote pup nosing through little bluestem. The grand vistas, the small, hidden wonders, all these things touch us and evoke feelings of timelessness and continuity. This is the harvest of Nachusa Grasslands, and it is a resource that is infinitely renewable.

By Bill Rogers

Reprinted from *The Dixon Telegraph*,
September, 1990.

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Tim Keller's Tireless Crusade to Save the Prairie

If prairies could be saved by sheer determination and sweaty, back-breaking work, there would be no shortage of these native treasures in Northern Illinois. Unfortunately, other factors enter in. The greatest effort sometimes results in frustrating defeat as a prairie remnant falls prey to the massive strength of a bulldozer. The area becomes a parking lot or a housing development. Tim Keller has been among those striving to save the living history of the past for future generations. He is a member of a select group.

Around 1970, Tim met Dr. Robert Betz of Northeastern Illinois University while helping in a prairie burn at Vermont Cemetery. Tim joined Betz in his trek to inventory the old settler cemeteries in northern Illinois, meeting the local people and informing them of their treasure in an effort to have the area preserved.

In 1973, Tim traveled to a prairie conference in Kansas and met two true prairie legends, Doug and Dot Wade. Dot has commented, "We went all the way to Kansas and met Tim, who lived just south of us in northwestern Illinois." They served as further catalysts of Tim's prairie interests.

It was the Wades who, in the mid 60s, first discovered the importance of the area now known as the Nachusa Grasslands. In 1974 and '75, Tim and Doug put up four cattle enclosures on the heavily-grazed pasture to see if native species would come back. The reemergence of Hill's Thistle, Woolly Milkweed, Prairie Gentian and many other prairie species surprised those who didn't believe the plants would reappear after so many years of heavy grazing.

IN 1985, hope for the land's future as a prairie restoration was greatly threatened. Tim rallied the support of the Natural Land Institute, the Lee County Natural Area Guardians, the Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County, and the Nature Conservancy. It was a frantic time. A last minute phone call from Keller proved strategic. As later reported in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (3/22/87), "... a Nature Conservancy staffer dashed through Chicago traffic to arrive in Sterling, Ill. 15 minutes before 115 acres of the Nachusa Grasslands were to go on the auction block." The Nachusa Grasslands story as a wonderful success story as it has continued to grow and flourish through the efforts of a multitude of good prairie folk. One of the first tours of the season is the annual Skunk Cabbage tour led by Keller.

Tim's prairie mission was not confined to one area. In the late 60s, he began working on the Munson Cemetery in Henry County just north of Cambridge. He got permission to manage the area with burns and brush-cutting. It became an Illinois Nature Preserve in the 80s. His annual tours of the cemetery in the summer have been well-attended.

IN THE EARLY 70S, Tim began a one-man crusade to save the native prairie along an abandoned railroad spur between Agnew and Lyndon in Whiteside County, close to his home in Sterling. After many unsuccessful attempts, he was eventually allowed to personally lease the area from Burlington-Northern Railroad to protect and manage it. His efforts were greatly supported by the late George Fell of the Natural Land Institute, who helped with financial assistance and a lengthy round of correspondence with the railroad company. More help came when the Whiteside County Natural Area Guardians were formed in 1988. Success doesn't always come swiftly; indeed, with prairie, it seldom comes swiftly. However, in time the land was donated to the Natural Land Institute, and just recently, part of the railroad prairie became an Illinois Nature Preserve.

Tim used our nation's bicentennial to get others to take a look at our remaining prairies. He and Doug Wade approached the Ogle County Bicentennial Commission to assist in the formation of the Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County which became incorporated on Oct. 10, 1975. Tim also approached the Whiteside County Bicentennial Commission, which took up the project of erecting a Bicentennial Marker at the Union Grove Cemetery Prairie, dedicating it to the pioneers of Whiteside County. In 1989, during Whiteside County's Sesquicentennial, Tim put together a guide booklet of the county's natural areas with the NAGs. He was instrumental in establishing prairie plots at Thomas Park in Sterling and at Sauk Valley Community College between Dixon and Sterling.

Of course, Tim prefers to compare himself to others when setting off to accomplish something, but when he can't get any "doers," he tackles the project by himself. Frustrated

A Few Words About Tim Keller

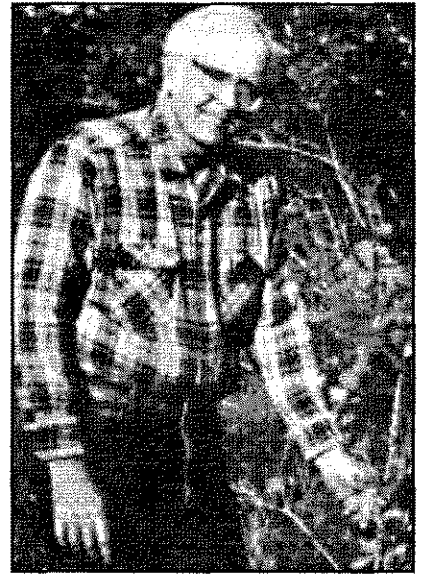
By Hazel Reuter

Tim Keller is a tireless, hardworking prairie sustainer in Illinois. I first met Tim about 15 or 20 years ago. Long before others were concerned about saving prairies, Tim was busy locating and burning prairie remnants, particularly in pioneer cemeteries.

Tim has unselfishly devoted countless hours to discovering, learning, and burning prairies in Illinois.

In my opinion, Nachusa Grasslands would not be preserved today without Tim's untiring effort.

We salute you — Tim and Carolyn. It's a privilege to call you my friends.



by "non-doers," Tim had great respect for the late Isabel Johnston, a retired Rock Falls teacher who was always ready to work. Tim also misses Doug Wade and George Fell, both inspirations to all who appreciate the natural world.

He tries constantly to groom replacements for these prairie folk, working with Boy Scouts, Eagle Scouts, and 4-H members. He firmly believes that we must instill the love of the land in these young people for the future.

There are those who say, "Gee, wouldn't it be nice if..." Then there are the few unique people who delve in and get the work done — people like Tim Keller.

The Virtues of Virginity

No hand but that of
God,
Only unshod feet that
trod.

Seed scattered by wind
and rain.

Nature's pure sanity
Untouched by human
vanity.

Let Illinois virgin
prairie reign.

dac

By Jay Stacy

Stop by the Steward's Barn any Monday or Wednesday morning at 8 a.m. and you will no doubt be greeted with a warm handshake by a 68-year-old gentleman with a twinkle in his eye.

Get to know him better, and he might even put his arm around you in a fatherly way and give you an encouraging hug.

He's our Gene Miller, a retired teacher who, with his wife Lucille, has lived in Oregon for many years.

Gene has a love for the natural world which he traces back to childhood hunting trips with his father; he takes a special interest in plants. His knowledge of the natural heritage of the Rock River Valley is extensive.

And he's a long-time friend of the Nature Conservancy.

Gene cheerfully performs whatever task we give him to do, whether serving as mop-up man on a burn line, planting Wild Columbine and Jacob's Ladder seedlings in a propagation nursery,

searching the Little Bluestem with scissors and collecting bag to find the tiny seed capsules of Blue-eyed Grass, or strapping on a herbicide backpack and keeping pace with the youngest of us in sweeps of the preserve for sweet clover.

At our lively lunches under the Hackberry tree behind the yellow house he readily joins in the amusing banter on any and all topics; a quieter moment might find him counseling a newlywed N.I.U. intern on strategies for a successful marriage.

If at times he exasperates us with his conservative questioning of the latest in restoration techniques, or if occasionally one of his botanical conclusions misfires -- so be it; things wouldn't be the same without him.

He has a great laugh, the happy laugh of a man at peace with himself and those around him.

So thank you, Gene Miller, for sharing yourself with us. We're glad to call you our friend.



A Warm Tribute to Gene Miller

Endangered Means It's Not Too Late

By Cassandra S. Rodgers, Ph.D.

When our ancestors settled in Illinois, they made vast changes in the landscape. Some of these changes degraded or destroyed the natural communities of the area and the species living in these communities. Before humans realized that the destruction of natural communities would affect all of us, many of our native species were at the brink of extinction. Others had already disappeared forever. Although this process is happening much faster in other parts of the world like South America, species are still being lost to extinction here in Illinois today. Many species of plants and animals need a very specific habitat or environmental conditions to survive. If this habitat which is usually contained within a natural community is lost, the species can no longer survive.

In an attempt to save the state's rare species, which were on the brink of extinction, Illinois passed the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Act of 1972, which only protected animals. In 1977, plants were added to the list, but protection of plants was not provided for until 1985 by an amendment to the Act. According to this Illinois Act there is an official state list of endangered and threatened species which is adopted by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. These endangered and threatened species are then protected by state law.

The Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board actually reviews all the available information on each species to determine its status on the Endangered and Threatened Species Lists. They review the following information: its range in the state (both present and historic), abundance in the state (total numbers), number of known populations and locations of where it occurs, number of these locations which are known to be protected from disturbance, the types of threats the species faces, and how fragile or sensitive the species is. Species on this list are then categorized as Endangered or Threatened, with endangered having the greatest risk of becoming extinct. The state's definition of an endangered species is "any species which is in danger of extinction as a breeding species in Illinois." A state threatened species is "any breeding species which is likely to become a state endangered species within the foreseeable future." There are 356 plant species and 141 animal species which are presently listed as endangered or threatened in Illinois. There is also a Federal Endangered and Threatened Species List which is based on similar definitions at a national level. To put it simply, endangered means it's not too late to save the species from extinction.

Why do we worry about protecting these species? Why do we care if they do disappear from the earth? These are questions often asked and there are so many answers. First of all, we are just beginning to learn about the relationships of so many of these species with other species, including humans. Just recently there was a story in the news about an extract from a native plant (paw paw) being tested as a drug for the treatment of cancer. There may be "cures" for many diseases within our native communities just waiting to be discovered. It would be a shame to destroy these potential "cures" or treatments before they are discovered. Many of these species act as a "barometer" of the condition of our environment. If a certain species can't survive in an area, is that environment a safe or desirable habitat for humans? Anyway, who are we to think that we should decide if part of God's creation should be eliminated from the face of the earth forever? Shouldn't we save some of our native species and communities for future generations to enjoy and understand?

Most of these endangered plants and animals require a special habitat or environment to survive. Some are so rare and so little is known about them that we don't really know the proper environmental conditions they require. Hopefully our management practices will save them. Hopefully, there will be time to learn about these species. Hopefully, large areas of natural communities, like the Nachusa Grasslands, will provide the proper habitat to protect many of these species and allow them to flourish. Endangered means it's not too late!

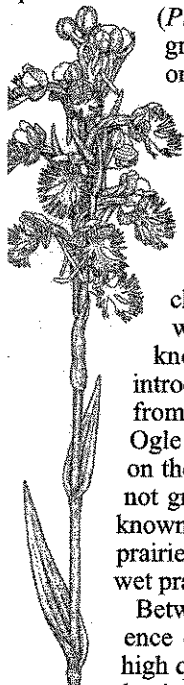
RECOVERING AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

By Todd Bittner

Few places remain of the wilderness that was once Illinois. Nachusa Grasslands provides a sense of that wilderness with over 1000 acres of prairies, wetlands, and woodlands. However, the preserve size that affords that feeling when you visit also plays an important role in maintaining diversity and rare species populations.

Nearly 200 acres at Nachusa are remnant, high quality natural communities. Within this "native Illinois," twelve species of animals and twelve plants of various federal and state endangered species status are present. In short, Nachusa contains one of the highest concentrations of rare species in Illinois.

Even though two dozen species are protected at Nachusa Grasslands, many other rare species in Illinois are in a perilous situation. Species like the eastern prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera-leucophaea*) was once the most common orchid in our tall-grass prairies, but is now a federally-threatened species. It is known from only 21 sites in Illinois where it reaches its greatest abundance throughout its range. Habitat destruction and the extirpation of its pollinators have reduced the numbers of this species to a fraction of what they once were.



To aid in the recovery and to help ensure the long term survival of the eastern prairie fringed orchid, Nachusa Grasslands initiated an introduction project to bring seed to appropriate habitat on the preserve. In order to correctly introduce the orchid, we needed to minimize the chance of failure by learning as much as possible about it and the areas where we would introduce it. In early 1996, after consultation with people knowledgeable about this species, its ecology, and history, we wrote an introduction proposal. It summarized the historical records (plant collections) from nearby counties; we know of three former populations from Lee and Ogle counties. The plan reviewed maps showing the soil types that are present on the preserve; eastern white fringed orchids prefer silt-loam soils and would not grow on the dry, gravel hill prairies. The introduction proposal also listed known associates (plants that commonly grow with other plants) of the eastern prairie fringed orchid. This list was compared to a species list of a high quality wet prairie at Nachusa. Over 60 species of plants were common to both lists.

Between the known historical occurrences of the orchid in the area, the presence of appropriate soils, and the presence of over 60 known associates in a high quality remnant prairie, we felt confident that we had an appropriate introduction site. The next obstacle was to find a donor site willing to let us take some orchid seeds. We were fortunate that the Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) was interested. After a permit was issued from the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and permission was given from LCFPD, volunteer in the area volunteered to begin monitoring the orchids at two sites. Once they reached bloom, one by one the orchid flowers were hand pollinated using a grass culm. The pollen sacks which are called pollinia adhere to the grass culm (stem) and are then inserted into the next flower. All hand pollination was completed in early July.

The seeds and fruits will be ripe early this fall when they will be collected. One flower can produce over 10,000 seeds the size of a grain of sand. The seeds will be brought to Nachusa and mixed with other materials so as to dilute the amount of seed since we wouldn't want to accidentally dump 10,000 seeds in one square foot. The seeds will then be hand broadcast into the best possible areas at Nachusa. If all goes well, and the symbiotic fungus that the eastern prairie fringed orchid depends on is present, then we may be seeing plants in about five years.

For some, this may seem like a tremendous amount of work to do for one plant that still may not even become established at Nachusa. But helping to ensure the long term survival and recovery of any rare species is well worth the effort. To what lengths would we have gone to save the passenger pigeon or the dusky seaside sparrow if we knew then what we know now? Hopefully Nachusa Grasslands can play a small part in keeping us from writing the epitaphs for the eastern prairie fringed orchid and the other rare life living here.

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GRASSLAND BIRDS

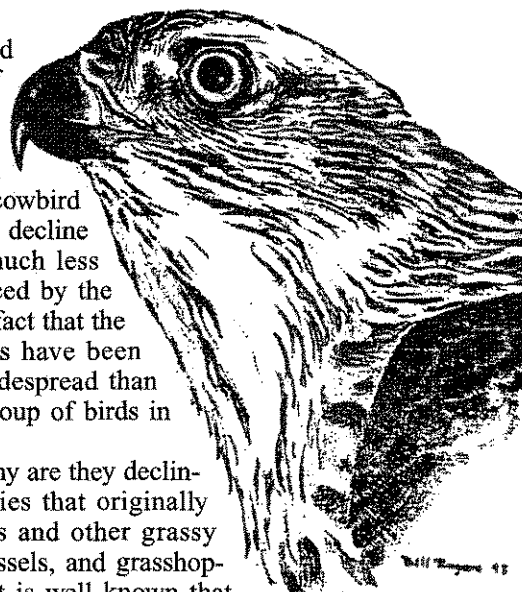
By James Herkert

Many of you have probably heard about the problems and declines of warblers and other songbirds that nest in our forests and migrate to the tropics for winter. They have suffered from loss and fragmentation of forests and cowbird parasitism of their nests. But a serious decline in our grassland birds has received much less attention and has gone largely unnoticed by the general public. This is true despite the fact that the declines exhibited by grassland birds have been steeper, more consistent and more widespread than have been the declines of any other group of birds in North America.

Who are these grassland birds and why are they declining? Illinois grassland birds are species that originally nested in the states extensive prairies and other grassy areas. Bobolinks, meadowlarks, dickcissels, and grasshopper sparrows are familiar examples. It is well known that very little is left of the once vast stretches of prairie that once blanketed Illinois. And although this loss of prairie habitat has been immense, the prairies were lost far too early to explain any recent declines in breeding birds. Most of the state's prairies had already been lost by the turn of the century. What then could be the problem?

One of the major difficulties that grassland birds face appears to be the result of changes in modern agriculture. Agricultural pastures and hayfields, the areas that once had served as surrogate prairies for a large number of prairie birds, have recently been disappearing at a rapid pace. For example over the last 30 years more than 2.7 million acres of agricultural grasslands have been lost from Illinois. This loss of grassland has resulted in a landscape that has little to offer grassland birds in many areas. What this also means is that grassland birds are becoming increasingly dependent on grassland preserves and conservation areas. Unfortunately there are relatively few large grassland areas that are protected from disturbances that disrupt nesting birds (Nachusa grasslands is a notable exception). Too many grassland areas in the state are either subjected to disastrous midseason cutting or are relatively small, many too small for breeding birds. As forest birds are sensitive to reductions in forest cover, grassland birds are also sensitive to reductions in grassland cover. Many grassland birds won't occupy grasslands under a certain size (a phenomenon known as area-sensitivity). For many grassland birds in Illinois, grasslands of several hundred acres are needed to sustain breeding populations for the long term. Unfortunately such large grassland areas are relatively scarce in Illinois. And this is especially true for non-agricultural grasslands. There is a serious need for more large grassland areas in the state.

What's in the future for grassland birds in Illinois is uncertain. Most of the grassland species currently showing the greatest population declines, such as the grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, and dickcissel are still fairly common in the state although their populations today are mere vestiges of what they were formerly. Others have fared much worse. The bobolink, believed to have a statewide population approaching two million individuals just 40 years ago, now likely has a statewide population which numbers in the tens of thousands instead of millions. On the bright side, however, is the fact that many grassland birds have shown remarkable resiliency in face of the tremendous landscape changes that have occurred in Illinois. And with the heightened conservation attention that is currently being focused on this formerly overlooked group the outlook for the future is improving.



"Northern Goshawk,"
a winter visitor to the
wooded areas of
Nachusa Grasslands

More about the Birds of Nachusa Grasslands

By Ann Haverstock

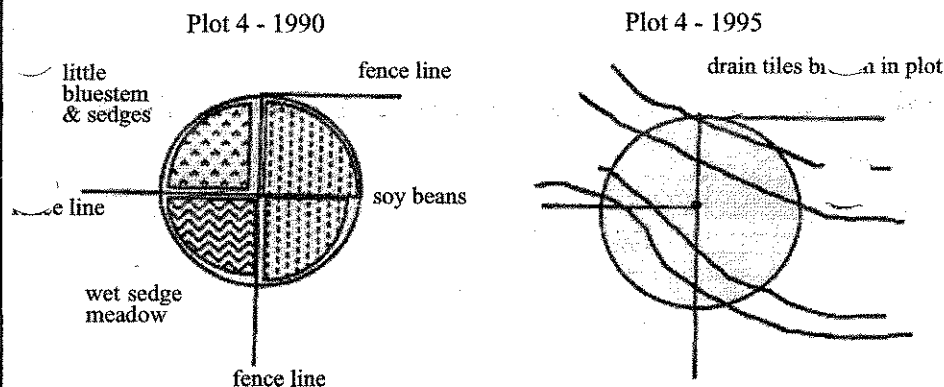
In 1989 the Illinois Nature Conservancy (TNC) expressed a need to census the breeding birds at Nachusa Grasslands (Lee and Ogle Co.). They had begun to manage portions of this prairie as early as '86 with enclosures, prescribed burning and removal of some non native and intrusive shrubs and trees. The native plants responded beautifully and soon TNC seeded adjoining crop fields with these prairie seeds. The need to continue these practices and possibly use other management techniques like spraying and removing drain tiles pressed the Conservancy to get more information on the birds of Nachusa Grasslands.

My initial survey and the following five yearly censuses found that 102 bird species were using Nachusa during the breeding season. When I walked my route for the first time I had a few expectations, one being that I hoped to find in this premier prairie the elusive grassland birds which were declining at alarming rates in Illinois (Droege 1991). With few exceptions that is exactly what I found.

It was wonderful to see that grasshopper sparrows are the most abundant prairie species at Nachusa, just as they were in the 1870's (Nelson 1876). Their numbers seem to be strong in the study area and to be slightly increasing. I am just as tickled to find that sedge wrens are now nesting in the restoration fields. These wrens were not commonly seen here until the very wet summer of '93. Now, the newly broken drain tiles and the large restoration expanses have induced more activity from this species. Bobolinks seem pleased with the unmowed fields and the upland sandpipers still whistle and putter from the swells and knobs. Although the upland sandpiper numbers have not shown an increase, I think the TNC has managed their habitat well with burns and shrub control. As if to give our stewards a pat on the back, in 1993 a pair of northern harriers (Illinois endangered) began using the grasslands as a hunting territory. It is likely they are nesting these last few years on property just east of Nachusa, for this is where they have flown carrying their prey.

We have had a few surprises over the years, a female long-eared owl, an Illinois Endangered species (Herkert 1995), with a brood patch was found dead. Although sad, it was well documented and gave us the first indication that this species was breeding in the area. Recently, the hard work at the Meiner's Wetland restoration has been praised by a couple of spotted sandpipers that choose to spend their breeding season in it.

A really dynamic area near coyote point contains one of my census plots. In 1990 I thought it was wildly diverse because it contained soy beans, three fence lines and a



damp sedge meadow. This was confusing to name, but I decided to refer to it as an "edge" habitat.

As the old fence rows were removed and the drain tiles crushed, the plot and surrounding area are becoming part of a larger wetter prairie component. An expected change in species variety has occurred. The indigo buntings, brown thrashers, catbirds and kingbirds have moved and we find our truly prairie species are encouraged by the newly unbroken expanses. Dickcissels, sedge wrens, savannah sparrows, grasshopper sparrows and bobolinks are now using the broadened spaces, while the Bell's vireos and willow flycatchers are still found in the shrubby saddles and willow breaks.

I recall seeing a soil/land map from the early 1940's in Amboy Illinois which showed the low areas below the oaks north of coyote point as being very wet. Now, half a century later it will soon regain its former personality. I'm very excited about this new development and can't wait to see how the birds will react to this return to wet prairie. Maybe, just maybe, those sandhill cranes we see in the spring will fall in love with Nachusa just as their ancestors did and choose it as home again.

So, if you want to gain an essence of Illinois as it was around 1850, grab binoculars, pack a lunch and spend a summers day here in the heart of this grand prairie.

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Compliments of

Sauk Valley Newspapers

Publishers of

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The Daily Gazette
Sauk Valley Sunday**

Volunteers at the Nachusa Grasslands

By Gene St. Louis

Illinois is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. This agricultural abundance is made possible by the original tall-grass prairie which once covered most of the state, and created the thick fertile soils which we now plant and harvest.

The North American tall-grass prairie is now one of the rarest ecosystems on earth. Today, only an estimated one-tenth of one percent of the original Illinois prairie remains. Much of what is left is in small, isolated remnants ranging from several hundred to only a few acres. Such small areas cannot preserve the original biodiversity of the original prairie. They cannot sustain the bird, mammal, and insect populations associated with prairies, nor can they maintain their full diversity of prairie plants. Nachusa Grasslands, with over 1000 acres, has retained many of its original prairie species.

The area is a haven for many grassland birds, including Upland Sandpipers, Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissels, and the Northern Harrier. Among plants, it holds onto the federally threatened Prairie Bush Clover, and the rare Fame Flower, Hill's thistle, Kittenails, and Downy Yellow Painted Cup.

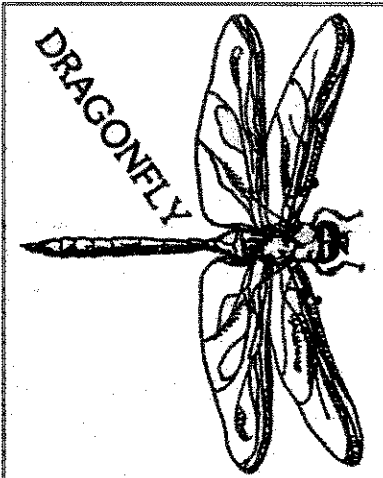
Volunteers are at the forefront of efforts to restore Nachusa to its natural state. Through countless hours of donated labor, volunteers have removed old fences, cleaned up huge mounds of refuse, removed trees, controlled brush and weeds, and collected and scattered seed. Volunteers have also monitored the plant, bird, and insect populations to gauge the health and status of the prairie.

One of the most important techniques for prairie restoration is the re-introduction of fire. Fires help clear away the accumulated thatch to promote new growth, and release some nutrients back into the soil. It also controls native woody plants which are part of the natural prairie ecosystem. Since European settlement and the suppression of prairie fires, these native brushy plants have become far more abundant than in the original prairie, and are now shading out the native grasses and forbs. Many prairie plants are composed primarily of roots, which can form up to 60 percent of the total plant. Some roots can go down 15 or more feet into the soil. These plants can easily handle being burned off at the top. Plants such as Hungarian Brome and other European grasses have found a new home among our own native plants. Lacking the natural controls they had in their native environment, they can spread across the prairie and choke out the native species. Fortunately, many of these species have shallow roots which are not adapted to fire, and can be driven out by periodic burns. Healthy prairie areas are only burned once every three or four years. Excessive burning can impact the popula-

tions of pollinating insects, to the detriment of the plant community. More degraded areas without significant native populations may be burned more frequently to force out Eurasian weeds.

This most necessary of restoration activities is also one of the more dangerous. Prescribed burns, so called because they are used as a remedy to control prairie problems, must be very carefully planned and coordinated with special attention to weather conditions, wind intensity and direction, humidity, and fuel conditions. An EPA permit is required before conducting such burns. Many volunteers are required to control the ignition and spread of fire on the preserve. Flappers, fire brooms, and backpack water tanks are all used to control fire lines to contain the burn area. The preserve's pickup truck and all-terrain vehicle have also been outfitted with tanks and power pumps to provide water for fire control.

Many woody plants, such as multiflora rose and young cherry trees are able to hang on despite fires, and must be cut down in order to destroy them. Some native woody species have also spread to the point where fire will no longer control them, and must also be controlled through cutting to restore a natural balance. Brush cutting is done with powered clearing saws, hand bow saws and loppers. After being cut, the stems are stacked to be burned after drying. The stumps of woody plants are usually treated with herbicide to prevent re-sprouting next year.



Other aggressive plants such as White and Yellow Sweet Clover, Bird's Foot Trefoil, and Canada Thistle are not readily controlled by fire either. These plants must be pulled by hand, or sprayed with herbicide to stop their advance across the prairie. The use of herbicide may seem out of place in a nature preserve, but it is applied with great care to selected target species only. It is similar to fighting an infection of the human body with drugs. When ill, you take chemicals in the form of drugs to combat the illness invading your body. Your doctor will prescribe specific drugs for your illness. We use herbicides to control specific problem plants. Without chemicals to control many of these weeds, we would quickly be overwhelmed by these very aggressive non-native plants. The most common method is to use a three gallon backpack sprayer, powered by a hand pump.

Throughout the year, volunteers collect seed from native plants both within the preserve and from nearby areas with prairie remnants. They are then replanted into appropriate areas where they no longer occur. Most of these seeds must be picked by hand, requiring many volunteers to search through the prairie for the desired plants.

Plant, bird, insect, and herpetological monitoring is also needed to track the suc-

Nachusa's Neighbor

By Elmer Stauffer

Site Superintendent, Franklin Creek State Natural Area

Franklin Creek State Natural Area is located in Lee County, one mile northwest of the village of Franklin Grove and eight miles east of Dixon, just north of Illinois Route 38.

The beautiful Franklin Creek flows throughout the 520-acre park. Several large natural springs, hardwood forests, bedrock outcroppings, and a large variety of flora and fauna comprise a pristine ecosystem.

The park contains a 180-acre nature preserve which is an outstanding and diverse natural area in a uniquely beautiful setting.

High, rocky bluffs shelter a perennial creek and create an environment in which a rich flora and fauna thrive. The preserve represents the initial acquisition by the State of Illinois in the area and, therefore, has been the cornerstone upon which Franklin Creek State Natural Area is built.

With its dedication as a nature preserve in 1970, it became the 24th nature preserve in the State of Illinois — a nature preserve system which now includes over 140 areas.

The occurrence of vegetation is influenced by soil characteristics, topography and moisture. Low lying areas along the creekbed support a bottomland forest dominated by silver maple and hackberry. Slippery elm and Kentucky coffee tree also occur here.

Ravines support mesic (intermediate between wet and dry) upland forest characterized by sugar maple and basswood. Paw paw, an understory shrub of more southern distribution, is found here.

On drier sites, a dry-mesic forest of white oak, red oak, black oak, shagbark hickory and hop hornbeam is found.

A small glacial drift hill prairie remnant is present in the preserve. Indian grass and tall dropseed are characteristic plants of this habitat. Other prairie species present include false toadflax, flowering spurge, and hoary puccoon.

High quality, undisturbed cliff communities are present on the bedrock outcrops. Canada yew, an evergreen shrub of more northern woods, is common here. Bladdernut, bishop's-cap, and shooting star are also found here, as well as several species of ferns.

The forested areas provide habitat for many species of nongame wildlife. Woodpeckers, flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, and warblers are among the breeding birds on the site. The area provides critical stop-over habitat for many more species during migration. Great blue herons and green herons have been observed here. Mammals utilizing the area include raccoons, chipmunks, gray and fox squirrels, beaver, and deer. Shrews, white-footed mice, weasels, and fox may also be seen. Nineteen species of fish have been recorded from Franklin Creek.

Recreational activities include picnicking, a grist mill restoration project, trails for hiking, equestrian, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing, fishing and hunting.

Success or failure of our restoration efforts. One of the maxims of any restoration effort is "Do no harm", meaning do not destroy what is already there while trying to rebuild the ecosystem. We need to know whether the native flora and fauna are continuing to thrive and expand their range, or whether some species are declining in spite of, or possibly as a result of, our restoration efforts. Monitoring is a critical activity that requires particularly dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers.

It would be natural to ask when all this restoration work will finally be complete. In

a broad sense, never. Nachusa Grasslands is surrounded by a vast, ever encroaching urban and agricultural network. It can never be truly "wild" and left to fend for itself undisturbed by man. The human species and its technology have advanced so far beyond living in a "state of nature" that we must now accept our responsibility as the ultimate guardians of the natural world. Invasive plants will continue to be brought into the prairie by the wind, birds, and ground-dwelling animals, or even on visitor's shoes. The prairie will continually

(Continued on Page 7)

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The Nature of the Work We Do

By Bill Kleiman

Preserve Manager of Nachusa Grasslands

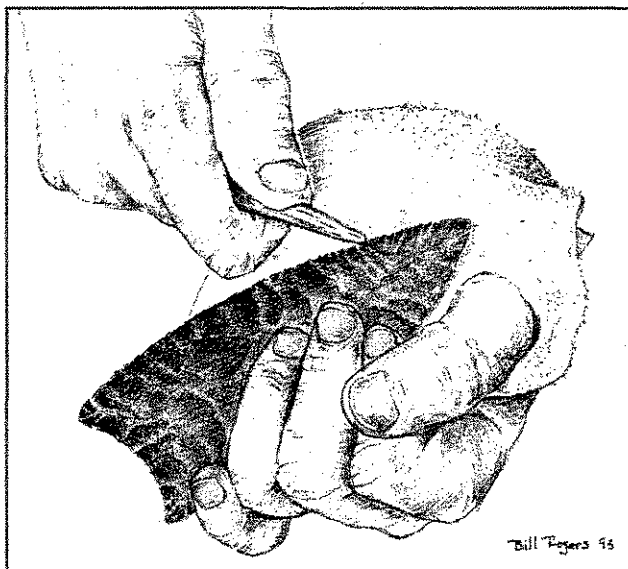
Humans actively returning the health of damaged natural communities is called Ecological Restoration. The ecological restoration movement has grown rapidly in the Midwestern United States.

The epi-center seems to be located here, in Northern Illinois, where there are thousands of volunteers involved in the good work of helping prairies, woodlands, and wetlands thrive.

We collect seeds of wildflowers, grasses, sedges, trees, shrubs - all to be spread into degraded areas to speed their recovery. We thin brush from areas that have had fire suppression since the 1830's so that the rarer sun loving plants can have some light. On summer days we are seen controlling difficult weeds that might damage a plant community being restored. We move rare insects from donor sites to new habitats where we hope they will thrive. We are ordinary citizens helping to heal damaged natural communities with our own elbow grease and enthusiasm.

The work we do is at times difficult, overwhelming, and yet we keep at it. There is something else being healed besides the land.

The work of Ecological restoration is returning us to the



landscape, creating a land ethic that includes humans. Thirty years ago we thought nature was a place to put a fence around and keep the humans out. Now, we understand that nature will not recover without our labor, our

sweat, our prescribed burning, seed spreading and weed control.

Just as the tribes of the Sac and Fox and Potawatami were a part of their landscape we are attempting to be part of ours. The Indians connection to this land was seamless. They knew the plants which were edible, which would heal the body. Their clothing, shelters, and spirituality came directly from the thriving natural communities surrounding them. Likewise, volunteers like Gerald McDermott and David Edelbach, who a few years ago did not know a fringed gentian from the flower rattlesnake master can now tell you what their seeds look like, where they should be planted, when they will bloom next; And if you come to their workday the enthusiasm they have will demonstrate this connection to the land.

The volunteer restoration movement has grown rapidly because the people involved have discovered that their nurturing of a place gives them back a connection to their home landscape that they find intoxicating. We hope that you will come out to one of our weekend or weekday stewardship work days and add to our continuing efforts. Our calendar is included in this issue. Call Gene St. Louis 815-756-8747, Sally Baumgardner 815-456-2083 or myself 815-456-2340 with any questions.

How the Redwinged Blackbird Got Its Name

Recounted by Sally Baumgardner

The Legend says there was a peddler. He walked through the countryside, to hamlets and villages, selling his wares. He wore a robe of black. He carried his goods on a yoke, on his shoulders.

He sold bright cloth and ribbons and fancy goods to people who lived in remote regions of the kingdom. The peddler announced his coming in a sweet and melodic song, and always gained the attention of all who heard it.

After many years of wandering and selling in the far reaches of the kingdom, the peddler realized he could charge any price he wanted for his cloth, even if it was unfair. So he did. Eventually, however, the King found out. He called for the peddler to be brought before him. "Stop this immoral action at once or I will punish you!" ordered the King.

The peddler agreed, and was released to go about his business. But soon his evil ways returned and he again raised his prices to unfair levels.

The King was informed and, as time, punishment

was swift, sure, and permanent. "I will banish you forever to the countryside! You will live and wander in the fields and marshes! You will no longer sing a sweet song, but from this day forward you will screech harshly!"

The evil peddler was transformed into a Redwinged Blackbird, and, to this day, he calls a loud "Konk-la-REE."

And if you look closely, you can still see some of the remnants of the yellow cloth he carried, under the bright red on his wings.

Volunteers ...

(Continued from Page 6)

require the cleansing effects of controlled fire. As the prairie matures, we will need to monitor its health and vitality and remain ever vigilant for new problems which could threaten to destroy this tremendous reserve of our natural heritage. If we act responsibly now to preserve this area, our descendants a millennium from now will be able to view what has existed for the past 10,000 years. Let this opportunity slip through our fingers, and it is gone forever.

One popular slogan of the environmental movement is "Think globally, act locally". Nachusa Grasslands offers a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the local restoration of a magnificent natural area within our nature-impooverished state. There are volunteer work days at Nachusa every weekend of the year. Many volunteers also work on weekdays if their schedule permits. A schedule of work days is published in Prairie Smoke, the preserve's news letter. To become a volunteer, you can contact Bill Kleiman, the preserve manager, at (815) 456-2340. His address is 2055 Lowden Road, Franklin Grove, IL 61031. You may also contact Gene St. Louis, one of the volunteer stewards, at (815) 756-8747, 220 E. Hillcrest Drive, Apt. 6124, DeKalb, IL 60115. Or, simply come out on any work day you are free. We would be most appreciative of any assistance you can offer.



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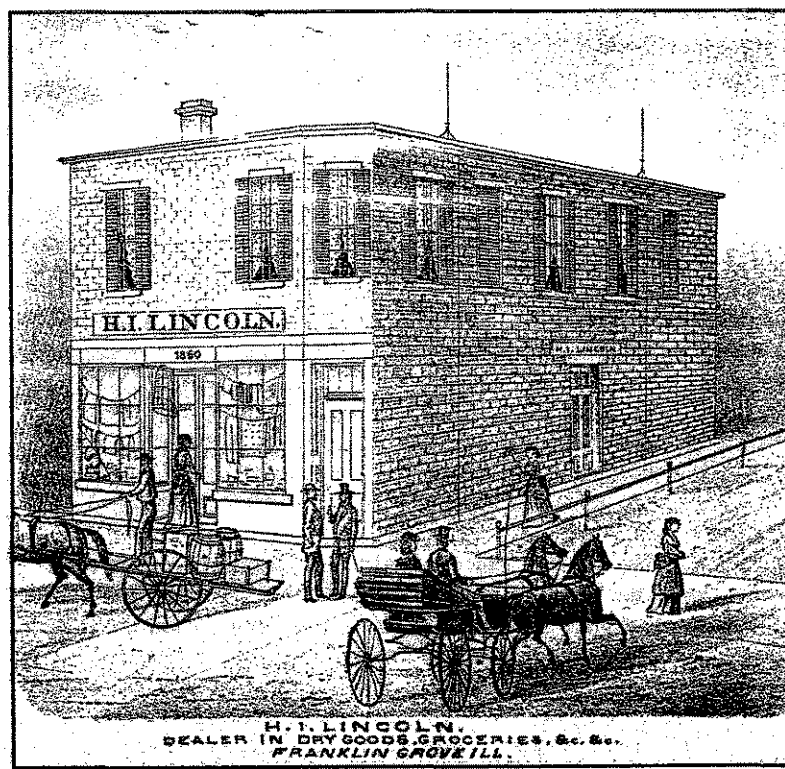
The historic H. I. Lincoln Building in downtown Franklin Grove is now being restored to preserve the heritage of our area and to provide a National Headquarters for the Lincoln Highway Association.

The Location of the Lincoln Highway Association in this area will bring tourism benefits to the Nachusa Grasslands, the parks and businesses of the Lee-Ogle area, as well as making more people aware of the attributes of our area.

This program is supported by charitable contributions and you can participate for as little as \$20 by buying a stone and contributing it back to the building. Your stone in a location of your choosing will be a permanent part of the H. I. Lincoln Building and the National Headquarters for the Lincoln Highway Association.

You can: 1- Send \$20 and we will pick a stone for you.
2- Send for a free brochure on our complete Buy-A-Stone Program
3- Stop by the Franklin Grove Bank and personally select your stone from the master illustration.

Farming Heritage, Inc. • P.O. Box 21 •
Franklin Grove, IL 61031



Fall 1996 Schedule for Nachusa Grasslands

September

- 8 Sun: Workday on Schafer Unit with David Edelbach
 14 Sat: Workday on Big Woods Unit with Earl Thomas, seed harvesting. 10:30 a.m. volunteer meeting/noon potluck at Sally Baumgardner's home, RSVP 456-2083

☆☆☆ ☆☆☆

21 Sat: 7th Annual Autumn On The Prairie, Nachusa Grasslands 10 year anniversary

☆☆☆ ☆☆☆

- 28 Sat: Workday on Dot and Doug Unit with Gene St. Louis

October

- 5 Sat: Workday on Main Unit with Mike Adolph
 12 Sat: Workday on Dot and Doug Unit with Gene St. Louis
 19 Sat: Workday on Schafer Unit with David Edelbach or Prescribed Burning Workshop with Bill Kleiman, Weather permitting. RSVP
 26 Sat: National Make a Difference Day - Workday on Northeast Unit with Sally Baumgardner

November

- 1 Winter Prairie Smoke submissions due. Editors meet this week.
 9 Sat: Annual "Stone Soup" and Seed Blending Party 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 14 Thursday: Workday on Northeast Unit, seed collecting with Sally Baumgardner, 9:30 a.m. to noon
 16 10:30 a.m. Volunteer meeting/noon potluck at Genesis Nursery in Tampico, RSVP 815-756-8747
 17 Sun: Workday on Northeast Unit with Sally Baumgardner
 23 Sat: Workday on Dot and Doug Unit with Gene St. Louis
 30 Sat: Workday on Main Unit with Mike Adolph

December

- 7 Sat: Workday on Dot and Doug Unit with Gene St. Louis
 8 Sun: Woodland Restoration Workshop with Bill Kleiman
 14 Sat: Workday on Schafer Unit with David Edelbach

There are ongoing Weekday Workdays.

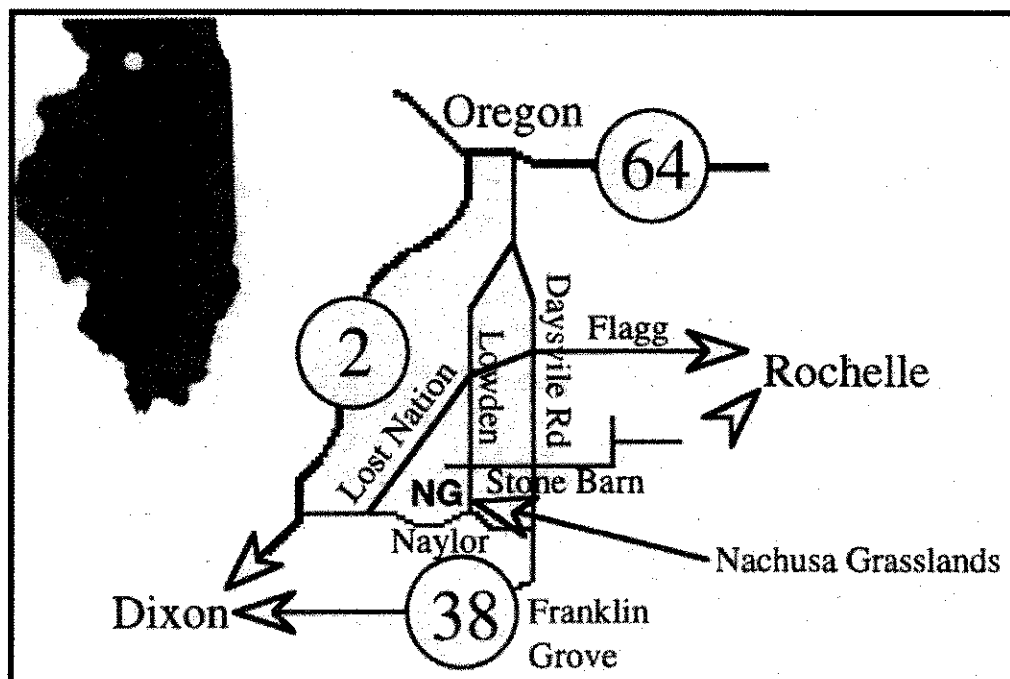
Call Bill Kleiman for details.

The Nature Conservancy is an international not-for-profit organization that uses its resources to find, acquire, and manage unique and significant natural areas and the wildlife that depends upon them. To date the Conservancy and its 520,000 members have been responsible for protecting nearly 3.8 million acres in 50 states, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

While some areas are transferred for management to other conservation groups, both public and private, the Conservancy owns and maintains nearly 1,000 preserves — the largest privately owned nature preserve system in the world.

The Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy is a statewide organization of 20,000 members and donors who have protected more than 20,000 acres of valuable habitat in Illinois.

A starting membership is \$15. If you wish to join, or give a gift membership, send your tax-deductible donation, along with your name and address, to the Illinois Nature Conservancy, 79 West Monroe Street, Suite 708, Chicago, IL 60603. Membership categories are: \$15 — Introductory; \$25 — Family; \$50 — Supporting; \$100 and more — Acorns of Illinois; \$1,000 — Life Member.



Nachusa Grasslands is a kaleidoscope of vital parts; mammals, soil, insects, birds, trees, air, flowers, fungi, reptiles and amphibians, water, grasses, and microbes and bacteria invisible to our eyes. Micro-environments abound on the 1000-plus acre preserve, including wetlands which provide habitat for Blanding's turtles and skunk cabbage plants. Savanna areas play host to interesting and beneficial spiders, and unusual plant species.

Caucasian rye is a relative newcomer to the cycle of Nature on the prairie. Its initial impact upon northern Illinois prairies, beginning in the late 1700's, has been negative.

We now have the opportunity to work with our native environment - Illinois prairie - and be a functioning part of the kaleidoscope of Nature. Become involved with Nachusa Grasslands; become involved with life!

Illustrations of a beetle, a Blanding's turtle, and a skunk cabbage plant. The turtle is labeled "BLANDING'S TURTLE" and the skunk cabbage is labeled "SKUNK CABBAGE".

Sheaffer Landscape Architects Environmental Services

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Wetland Delineation
and Restoration

Project Design &
Installation Management



Slope Erosion Control

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Our team of landscape, ecology, engineering, hydrology and soil experts uses native plants and bioengineering techniques to create cost-effective, sustainable, natural systems. For information or preliminary consultation, call Dean Sheaffer.

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