

Notes from the Field

Vol. 5, No. 2 / Summer 2019



Photo: Rob Clark

An Eastern Bluebird mama sits on her eggs in a bluebird box at Nygren Wetland.

Volunteers Monitoring Our Preserves

Natural Land Institute relies on volunteer monitors to observe and record species that live in our preserves. This is an important process in evaluating and understanding if our management plans and practices are working and provides the necessary feedback to tweak the management strategies for a specific area.

Thank you to our volunteer monitors for their time and commitment to this process. They have been discovering threatened and endangered species in the Raccoon Creek watershed corridor where NLI owns two preserves. Sometimes while looking for one species they will spot others and let us know what they saw.

Bluebird Monitors

The bluebird monitors at Nygren Wetland have been a dedicated group for

many years and have seen the ups and downs of such endeavors as counting the number of fledges, maintaining and replacing the bluebird boxes, finding other bird species inside boxes, and observing the number of Eastern bluebirds that inhabit the prairies at the preserve. This summer the bluebirds were slow to show. In early July **Rob Clark** reported seeing some bluebird activity in two boxes, along with a wren in one box and a family of tree swallows in another. He also mentioned in his email to the other monitors, “the Preserve is also fully in bloom right now. Butterflies and dragonflies are all over the place. It’s gorgeous out there!” A couple of weeks later **Rich Toppe** said, “Following up on Rob’s report the two boxes with BB eggs now have very young birds. Although our BB season hasn’t been highly fruitful, it appears to be a good year for Monarchs. There were at least a dozen when I walked the trails at Nygren Wetland. In recent years, I’ve only

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Photo: Sue Heinke

L-R: Rob Clark and Rich Toppe co-hosted the Bluebird Learning Station at Family Nature Day.



seen one or two at this time of the summer.”

Back in the early 2000s Rob was searching for nature related activities and attended a talk at Rockton’s Talcott Library about bluebird monitoring at Nygren Wetland Preserve. He said “I was inspired to help provide more habitat for bluebirds in this area, and signed on to help build/place/monitor the nest boxes that were first installed at Nygren Wetland.” Rob went on to say, “there is nothing quite like checking in on a family of bluebirds and monitoring their progress from eggs through their fledging. Every walk through Nygren Wetland is the best kind of church for me. The wide variety of animals, insects, birds, and wildflowers never ceases to refresh my soul. My bluebird monitoring visits are really just great excuses to walk around in nature with a smile on my face and forget about the world for a while. I also work with a great team of monitors. We each have our own weeks to monitor, so I don’t often see the others through the summer, but we do keep in touch through emails. We all care deeply about preserving natural spaces and helping the bluebird population in this area.”

Rich Toppe is currently the coordinator and scheduler of the bluebird monitors. He said he volunteers for NLI because, “I believe in the mission to protect land. What little natural land is left needs to be preserved and monitoring bluebirds is where I saw I could fit in and help. I continue to meet good people and have high regard for the staff and the team of volunteers at Nygren Preserve. The

people involved with NLI drive my commitment to volunteering.”

Thank you to Rob, Rich and the other two bluebird monitors, **Sue Heinke** and **Tricia Graham** for their continued commitment to Nygren Wetland Preserve.



Photo: Joe Gibbons

Joyce Gibbons with gear, ready to explore.

Joyce Gibbons

Joyce Gibbons is an odonate expert and has been monitoring dragonflies and damselflies in the Raccoon Creek watershed for the past two years and at other NLI preserves for several years. This June, she discovered several new species, including the “Skimming Bluet and Fragile Forktail damselflies, Common Baskettail dragonfly, and most interestingly, the River Jewelwing damselfly. The River Jewelwing is critically imperiled in the state and is on the state Watch List. To my knowledge, it has not yet been reported in Winnebago County so



Photo: Jason Ross

A Blanding’s turtle in Raccoon Creek.

the Raccoon Creek area represents the only site in the county where it is found (so far!).” This summer Joyce also reported seeing a Blanding’s turtle, on the state endangered species list, and a Giant Swallowtail, the largest butterfly species in North

America, in the watershed. She was the first to report seeing the Hine’s emerald dragonfly there, on the state and federal endangered species lists.

Now that her children are older, Joyce has more time to follow her own interests like spending time in nature and photography. “I feel a connection whenever I’m out in the woods or natural area. It’s my way of relaxing”, said Joyce, who has enjoyed wildlife since childhood. She especially likes dragonflies and said they “are such fascinating insects. The Air Force has



Photo: Joyce Gibbons

The Hine’s emerald dragonfly, discovered in the Raccoon Creek watershed, is on the State and Federal Endangered Species lists. studied them and their flight patterns. I love their colors, designs, and their capabilities.” She has also monitored dragonflies for the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County and Nachusa Grasslands. “The more I study these and other creatures the more I learn, and I like sharing my knowledge with others. Plus,” she said, “I have run into so many wonderful people who share my interests! This makes it worthwhile, too.”

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2019 Volunteers of the Year

Thank you to our 2019 Volunteers of the Year for their hard work, time and commitment to helping NLI accomplish its mission.



JUDY BARNARD

Judy has coordinated NLI's silent and live auctions for many years as part of the Annual Dinner and Party on the Prairie fundraisers. She served as Event Chair for Party on the Prairie this summer (as well as many past Party events), which is an enormous job that she does very well. We don't know what we would do without her event planning skills and creativity. For many years she has been a member of several NLI committees, is past NLI President and started serving a new three-year term as Trustee in June. We appreciate her passion, commitment and dedication to NLI.



JOHN PRENOT

John has been a tremendous help at NLI events assisting with with set up, parking, tear down, and he goes above and beyond what is asked of him. It's wonderful to have him on our volunteer team and we appreciate his willingness to do whatever it takes to provide a successful experience for guests who attend our events and preserves. John has helped with the Foss Farm Meet & Greet, Wander at the Wetland, Fall Prairie Harvest Day, Family Nature Day and Party on the Prairie.



JOSH PRENOT

Josh is an amazing young man and he is like his father in that he goes above and beyond what is asked of him. He comes early and stays late to help with event set up, parking and tear down. You never know what skill he will show up with, but if you need something just ask. He can probably help you in some way. Josh has helped with the Foss Farm Meet & Greet, Family Nature Day and Party on the Prairie.



KAROL ROSMAN

Karol has been helping with volunteer stewardship at Silver Creek Woods Preserve for several years and with NLI events such as Wander at the Wetland, Family Nature Day and Party on the Prairie. She is willing to do whatever is needed and is a great problem solver. Karol's enthusiasm and curiosity are wonderful qualities that she brings with her to her volunteer duties.

Stewardship Wish List

- ATV 4-Wheel or 6-Wheel
- Tractor 100hp+
- Construction Materials
- Metal shelving
- Zero turn lawnmower
- Rope/Chain
- Banquet Tables
- Snow Blower





Natural Land Institute's Conservation@Home, Work and School programs give individuals, businesses, and schools, the opportunity to

contribute to conservation efforts and recognition for those that do. Call the NLI office at 815/964-6666 to get more information and to request a brochure or visit NaturalLand.org/Conservationatprograms.

Congratulations to Larry Swanson, Loves Park, who became a certified Conservation@Home participant in July. Thank you for your contributions to nature.

Volunteer at Land Stewardship Community Service Days

NLI is looking for volunteers with all types of skill sets, experiences (or none), and a desire to help nature. We also need help with carpentry, equipment maintenance and repair, and operating machinery like mowers, chainsaws and brush cutters. Bring a lunch if you plan to work

through the noon hour, water, and gloves. Wear a long sleeve shirt, pants and sturdy shoes. You are welcome to work for part of or the entire designated time. Call or email one of the contacts below for more information and to sign up to help.

Land Stewardship Community Service Days Schedule

Location	Schedule	Staff/Site Steward
Burr Oak Valley Preserve	First Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Second Mondays, 9:00 a.m. - Noon	Zach Grycan, 920/912-4338, zgrycan@naturalland.org Site Steward: Position Open
Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve	For scheduled days contact the Site Steward	Staff: Zach Grycan Site Steward: Chris Reisetter reisetterc@gmail.com
Silver Creek Woods Preserve	Third Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Site Steward: Dion Faith, 815/520-6916, DocFaith68@yahoo.com
Nygren Wetland Preserve	Every Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Zach Grycan Site Steward: Position Open
William & Gayle Keefer Nature Reserve	Fourth Fridays, 9:00 a.m. - Noon	Zach Grycan Site Steward: Position Open

Beginner Chainsaw Operation and Safety Workshop

Sunday, Nov. 3, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Location: Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton

Cost: \$35 per person. Register by Fri., Nov. 1 on our website calendar at NaturalLand.org.

Learn the basic function and operation of a chainsaw and how to handle it safely. This is a great workshop for volunteers, professionals, and landowners. Equipment will be provided. There will be a lunch break and

attendees may bring a lunch or visit a local restaurant.

The workshop will be led by **Zach Grycan** (Natural Land Institute), and **Melissa Grycan**, (The Land Conservancy of McHenry County).

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Dan and Barbara Williams

Dan and Barbara Williams have spent quite a bit of time at Nygren Wetland Preserve this summer observing a variety of species on their visits. In July Dan was able to document a family of Common Gallinules, two adults and three chicks. This crow-sized marsh bird is on the Illinois Endangered Species list so it is exciting to know that this bird family is finding refuge here! A few days later Dan saw a Black-crowned Night-Heron, also endangered, fly into the wetland at dusk. During that same evening he said in an email, "I saw 21 Sandhill Cranes, 29 Great Blue Herons, more than 200 American White Pelicans, heard two Marsh Wrens singing and the Double-crested Cormorant numbers are building." Dan led a group of walkers on the trail to the wildlife overlook at the beginning of August and said he was able to point out "a Bald Eagle, Osprey, three White Pelicans, some Sandhill Cranes and Great Blue Herons, a Belted Kingfisher, and several other birds."

Barbara was there with Dan to witness all of these wonderful creatures and to do bat monitoring. She saw "a pretty good selection of bumble bees and the bats put on a good show." During the course of 50 minutes her acoustic bat monitor detected: 21 Big Brown Bats, 4 Eastern Red Bats, 16 Hoary Bats, 4 Silver-haired Bats, 7 Evening Bats,

and 2 Tri-colored Bats. She said, "Evening Bats are at the northern edge of their range here in northern Illinois, so they are a good find. Tri-colored Bats have suffered a terrible population decline and it is good to have them show up at all. Six species in less than an hour is good."

Inset Photo: Allaboutbirds.org



A family of Common Gallinules, on the State Endangered list, found refuge at Nygren Wetland this summer.

Also an expert when it comes to dragonflies and damselflies, Barbara visited a Raccoon Creek site on the same day and said she "captured and photographed a River Bluet... that is a pretty unusual damselfly around here. In Raccoon Creek I photographed a male American Rubyspot, a bunch of Stream Bluets and Blue-tipped Dancers.

Silver-bordered Fritillaries were numerous in the hay field/meadow and there were a couple of Viceroy's and a Garter Snake."

Barbara said she likes to do species monitoring for NLI "because I get to do what I enjoy, and I

get to do it for a good cause. If I can help to preserve the land that I'm using and enjoying then I'm contributing to a worthy cause like NLI and the community at large. And it's fun! It's an adventure every time I go out. I never know what I'm going to find. You go out looking for one thing and you find another unexpected plant or critter. Often you find something really cool and interesting!"

Dan has been thrashing around fields, prairies and woods since childhood and is interested in more areas of an ecosystem than what he is known for, such as his bird expertise. He enjoys sharing his knowledge and said he volunteers for NLI "because I get to do what I like to do and at the same time contribute to the overall base knowledge of what is in a natural area. Sometimes I learn something new and sharing what I find can provide information about what changes have occurred over time. Take the Nygren Wetland

experiment, for example. It's a wonderful property where we learn something new every year. We can see how our restoration efforts have been tracking. We see species there now that weren't there 20 years ago because now they have habitat. It makes me feel happy to provide information about what I observe."

Photo: Kim Johnsen



Dan and Barbara Williams.

Photo: Dan Williams

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You can play a part in protecting nature with
your annual or monthly membership gift.
Visit: www.naturalland.org/membership today.

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Upcoming Events

For more information and to register go to the calendar page for each event at Naturalland.org or call 815/964-6666.

Nature Poetry & Prose

Presented in Partnership with Nature at the Confluence

Fri., Sep. 27, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Location: Nature at the Confluence, 306 Dickop St., South Beloit

Admission: Free for NLI members. \$5 for non-members (includes a one-time six month introductory membership to NLI). **Registration requested by Thu., Sep. 26.**

Be inspired while listening to more than 10 writers read their compositions inspired by the natural world.

Fall Prairie Harvest Day

Saturday, Oct. 5, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Location: Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton

Admission: Free. **Registration requested by Fri., Oct. 4.**

Help collect seeds from native wildflowers and grasses. Great for all ages and groups.

OAKtober Hike

Saturday, Oct. 26, 2019

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Location/Parking: Burr Oak Valley Preserve, located across from Cross and Crown Lutheran Church, 7404 Elevator Rd., Roscoe. Limited parking on site with parking also at the church.

Moderate to difficult level hiking.

Admission: Free for NLI members; \$5 for non-members (includes a one-time 6 month introductory membership to NLI). **Registration requested by Friday, Oct. 25.**

Take a guided hike through the rolling hills and oak savannas of Burr Oak Valley to celebrate OAKtober!

Giant Swallowtail and Swamp milkweed