Notes from the Field
Vol. 6, No. 1 / Winter 2020

Planting native species in a pollinator garden can provide critical food and shelter for a great many backyard visitors. In the garden the chickadee picks caterpillars from the cherry tree, and bumblebees pull nectar and collect pollen from wildflowers that once painted northern Illinois in broad strokes of blues, yellows, and purples. A restored prairie is a place that magnifies that impact, tens of observations can easily become tens of hundreds. We are still mystified about some interactions that occur in our wild spaces, but every day our sea of knowledge deepens and we are greeted with a tide of ecological awareness.

Humbling though this universe can be, great joy can come from taking stock of what is happening around us in nature. Searching the treeline for song birds or spotting a bobcat with a trail camera (or a white-tailed deer) can help us understand our place in the land, and grasp the importance of conservation in Illinois. Such a glimpse can cause us to look inward as well, it can help us feel that primal connection we consider a sense of place.

Making wildlife observations and recording them allows us to reflect and make plans for future restorations together. Understanding who visits natural spaces can tell us a lot about how well we are doing in restoring our prairies, wetlands, and woods. Of course, we can’t make all of those observations alone, we need your help! For example, the Swamp Darner, a dragonfly that thrives in wooded areas with ponds and streams, was seen and recorded by one of our volunteer monitors, Joyce Gibbons, at Kyte River Bottoms Land & Water Reserve.

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Northern Illinois Native Seed Exchange December 2019

NLI staff took part in the annual Northern Illinois Native Seed Exchange in December. Members from more than a dozen participating conservation agencies throughout northern Illinois come together every winter to share native seed that they’ve each collected throughout the growing season. The seed network members meet in the exchange that winter. The seed network gives land stewards access to species that they may not otherwise have on their own preserves. What may be rare in one county or property could be common in another, and the exchange saves the members the time and expense of searching for or buying the seed they need.

This network was started in 2015 by former NLI Restoration Ecologist Ed Cope and is now being managed by staff from other member conservation districts. This year’s exchange started off with a potluck lunch and some catching-up between attendees before everyone converged on the tables of native seed like Black Friday shoppers. NLI staff brought home bags of seed from more than 30 different native species which we’ll use to interseed NLI preserve prairie and woodland restorations this winter, and grow plugs in the greenhouse this spring.

Looking for Connections continued

Our trainings and volunteer events are good ways to get out and become familiar with the natural world around us. You can learn what to look for, and we may potentially be able to contribute our observations to larger networks who are trying to piece together a more accurate picture of this planet in order to make more informed decisions. We are, after all, striving to make this world a better place. Looking around a little bit can provide a lot of insight, and we invite you to walk with us down the road of discovery. Please contact NLI’s stewardship staff if you want to know how to help.

Stewardship Wish List

- ATV 4-Wheel or 6-Wheel Tractor 100hp+
- Construction materials
- Metal shelving • Rope/chain
- Banquet tables
- Snow blower • Tools
## Welcome New Staff

**Tyler Pellegrini**  
**Restoration Ecologist, Full Time**  
As NLI’s new Restoration Ecologist, Tyler assists the Director of Stewardship with all aspects of managing NLI’s preserves; including native seed collection, invasive species control, prescribed burning, greenhouse cultivation, and developing management plans. Tyler is originally from Sandwich, Illinois. He trained as a mechanic after high school, served 4 years in the U.S. Air Force, and then obtained a degree in Environmental Science from Northern Illinois University. Tyler started out his habitat restoration career at Nachusa Grasslands and currently resides in Creston, Illinois with his wife Jaimie and 7 month old daughter Hadley. In his spare time, Tyler enjoys canoeing, hiking, gardening, and serving as a volunteer Firefighter/EMT with the Creston Fire Department.

**Laura Helmich**  
**Stewardship Technician, Full Time**  
In Laura’s role as NLI’s Stewardship Technician, she will work primarily at preserves using her training and experiences in harvesting and cleaning seeds, prairie restoration, native and non-native plant identification, performing species surveys, and conducting prescribed burns. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from Iowa State University (Major: Forestry, Minor: Animal Ecology) Laura served two terms with AmeriCorp (Iowa DNR) where she worked with volunteers and organized volunteer events. Laura most recently worked for Agrecol as a Native Seed Specialist. Laura is an active volunteer in the communities where she lives, is an amateur entomologist and herpetologist and competes in timbersports (lumberjack competitions).

**Shelby Best**  
**Land Conservation Specialist, Part Time**  
Shelby Best will be continuing her transition to the conservation world at NLI. A reformatted digital marketer, project manager and strategist, Shelby brings a fresh pair of eyes to the Land Conservation Specialist role. Shelby has been an avid volunteer at NLI since 2017, and comes to us with a recent Master’s degree in Environmental Technology from Imperial College London. Shelby has worked with other land trust organizations in the Midwest, including Gathering Waters and Geneva Lake Conservancy in Wisconsin. When not working on land conservation projects, you can find Shelby exploring one of the many stunning nature preserves in the area.

**Kent Wolfe**  
**Facilities Maintenance Coordinator, Part Time**  
Kent brings many skills and experiences to his role as Facilities Maintenance Coordinator. He is a former electrician and has carpentry experience. Kent provides janitorial, plumbing, general maintenance and lawn care services with attention to detail and care for the 1903 historic house that serves as the NLI office. His organizational skills have been very beneficial in helping reorganize storage areas in the office. Last summer Kent moved, assembled, and painted a storage shed in the rear yard and did it within the Historic Preservation guidelines required for the neighborhood. He also helps at preserves with mowing and site preparation for events and assists the stewardship staff with vehicle maintenance.

## Land Stewardship Community Stewardship Days Schedule

Call or email staff or the site steward for more information and to confirm participation.

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<th><strong>Location</strong></th>
<th><strong>Schedule</strong></th>
<th><strong>Staff/Site Steward</strong></th>
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| Burr Oak Valley Preserve      | First Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.,  
Every Thursday, 9:00 a.m. – Noon | Staff: Tyler Pellegrini, 815-970-5012  
tpellegrini@naturalland.org  
Site Steward: Position Open |
| Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve | For scheduled days contact  
the Site Steward | Staff: Tyler Pellegrini  
Site Steward: Chris Reisetter  
reisetterc@gmail.com |
| Silver Creek Woods Preserve   | Third Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 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. | Staff: Zach Grycan and Tyler Pellegrini  
Zach, 920-912-4338  
zgrycan@naturalland.org  
Site Steward: Position Open |
| William & Gayle Keener Nature Reserve | Fourth Fridays, 9:00 a.m. – Noon | Staff: Tyler Pellegrini  
Site Steward: Position Open |
Help NLI kick off the 20th Anniversary celebration of Nygren Wetland Preserve (3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton, Ill.) by attending Wander at the Wetland: Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike on Thursday, February 6. Come anytime between 4:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

NLI will hold this FREE outdoor winter event for all ages with or without snow. Experience the winter landscape of the prairie and wetland when you take a hike, snowshoe or ski the trail lit by hundreds of luminaries, sponsored by NorthPointe Health & Wellness Campus. You can head out on the trail on your own or follow a tour guide who will tell you about Natural Land Institute and Nygren Wetland.

Mark your calendar for the 2020 Annual Dinner and presentation of the George and Barbara Fell Award on Tue., March 24 at Giovanni’s Restaurant (610 N. Bell School Rd., Rockford, Ill.). The social hour starts at 5:30 p.m. with dinner at 6:30. The program will start at 7:15 with the award presentation, guest speaker Andy Bacon, former NLI Director of Stewardship, and a celebration of Nygren Wetland Preserve’s 20th Anniversary.

Tickets to the Annual Dinner cost $60 each for non-members (includes a one-time, one year introductory membership) and $45 each for NLI members. Tables of 10 are available for $600 (non-members) and $450 (NLI members). A Table Sponsorship is available for $1,000. Call 815/964-6666 for more information and to order tickets or purchase online at www.naturalland.org by March 18, 2020.

Places to warm up include the winter themed greenhouse with hot cocoa and snacks and two bonfires. Snowshoes will be available to rent for a $10 donation to NLI and are sponsored by Rocktown Adventures. You may also bring your own snowshoes or skis.

Please register for this free event by Wed., Feb. 5 online at: www.naturalland.org or call 815/964-6666 for more information and to register.

Workshop: Prescribed Burn Training
Sun., March 29, 2020, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Location: Nature at the Confluence
306 Dickop St., South Beloit, Ill.
Cost: $60 (Includes manual)

NLI will present this workshop based on Chicago Wilderness’ Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Manual. The morning session will include instruction by Zach Grycan (Natural Land Institute) and Melissa Grycan (The Land Conservancy of McHenry County) and review of the manual, followed by lunch on your own, and then participation in a prescribed burn, weather permitting. Please register for this workshop online at www.naturalland.org by Fri., March 27.