



Prairie Smoke

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 6

JULY, 1990

PRAIRIE'S PROGRESS

APRIL 12

Piqued by my desire to see the newest addition to the Nachusa Grasslands complex, I stopped by Meiner's tract on Saturday, April 12th. Although I'm not very knowledgeable about sedge meadows, the site looks like a true "jewel in the rough". I've never seen such an extensive sedge meadow that has so much potential for recovery. The feeling of openness is panoramic and very obvious. The topography is incredibly unique. In two meters, you can literally walk from a spongy slough almost vertically up onto a dry gravel knob or ridge of glacial moraine.

The spring burn back in March had a tremendous effect on the recovery of the intact species and communities still hanging on despite years of ecological neglect and disruption. It looked like 90% of the multiflora rose on the upland areas were top-killed.

Even though this site appears to have been heavily grazed over the years, it nonetheless is relatively "clean" from potentially problematic species such as box-elder and gray dogwood. This factor in itself should hasten the ecological recovery of the site that much sooner. Species already in the sedge meadow include Angelica, Cup-plant, Cordgrass in the east-central slough, "inverted pools" of Carex tricarpa, and ancient elevated hummocks of Carex stricta (tussuck sedge) - this place is sedge heaven!

The upland dry knob and ridge to the south of the 3-trunked oak already have Shooting Stars, Bird's-foot Violet, Blue-eyed Grass, Violet Wood Sorrel, Penstemon, Spiderwort, Starry False Solomon's Seal, Little Bluestem and Big Bluestem.

Now it's time to bring on the propagules! Using the techniques of successional restoration, we need to start reintroducing suspected missing species. As nice as this tract already is, one day the sights, scents, and textures of Queen-of-the-Prairie, Marsh Phlox, Cardinal Flower, Prairie White-fringed Orchids, Small White Ladyslipper, Sweet-scented Indian Plantain, Fringed and Bottle Gentians, and Wild Hyacinth should return. Who knows what exciting discoveries lie in store in the coming years?

Back at the main complex of the preserve, the Bird's-foot Violet on "Tim's Half-Knob West" was a beautiful, iridescent mass of

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lavender-blue in the diffuse light of a rainy afternoon. Kittentails were also in bloom. Cream False Indigo and Bastard Toadflax were just beginning anthesis. Words alone cannot begin to convey the privilege of being witness to the recovery of a natural ecosystem.

The fire ripped through the brush on the west-central edge of the wetlands and did a marvelous job in opening up the ground-level canopy. Along the trail I was pleasantly surprised to find Prairie Violet (*Viola pedatifida*) on the elevated "lip" just before the land grades down into the wetlands. On the way back (I didn't have time to make it over to the NW corner of the preserve), I noticed Blue-eyed Grass on the SW-facing slopes of "Trash Knob"

By the way, would someone please remember to burn the two potholes in the center portion of the preserve either this fall or by next spring?

PRAIRIE'S PROGRESS

JUNE 20

On a quick June 20th walkabout of the Grasslands, I was elated to find that our restoration efforts over the past three years are finally bearing fruit (or should I say seed!).

In the NW corner of the preserve, Bottlebrush grass, the wild ryes, and native bromes are growing riotously in the savanna (can the forbs be far behind?). This is especially good news in light of Ron Panzer's exciting new discovery of a certain Hystrix-feeding *Papaipema* moth that was recently discovered in neighboring Franklin Creek State Park.

Seedlings of wild lupine (spot-seeded last summer) were found growing on the sandy ledge below the elevated knob in the NW corner of the preserve, as well as on the ledge above the white quartz blow-out of "Tim's Half-Knob West" in the main complex of knobs of the preserve.

In the large "87" seeded area just west of the main complex of knobs, compass plant seedlings looked vigorous, and there are probably thousands of Pale Purple Coneflowers ready to make their successional move by next year - I even found a solitary one already in bloom! I also spotted about 3 clumps of Penstemon in bloom; stiff goldenrod should bloom this season as well. Grasses appear spotty - I only found one clump of big bluestem, although Canada wild-rye is coming in nicely.

Seeds of bird's-foot violet and needle grass are ripe - Hill's thistle was in bloom, along with the dainty pink sandwort intermingling with the delicate low-growing early panic grasses.

Unfortunately, this wet season has apparently stimulated a bumper crop of sweet clovers, especially on the narrow "87" seeded strip in the north central portion and the extreme SE knob of the preserve. I also discovered an errant garlic mustard seedling trying to establish a beach-head in the NW savanna - vigilance!

....by CHRISTOPHER BRONNY



SPIDERWORT
Lennie Ashford

SPIDERWORT (*Tradescantia ohioensis*) blooms in the morning and fades away to fluid by mid-afternoon. The 3 beautiful blue petals with 6 stamens are topped by yellow anthers. It may grow from a height of 1 to 3 feet. They are found on a variety of prairie types. Ornate box turtles often use this plant as a food and moisture source.

A LOOK AT OUR GUEST BOOK

The Grasslands has hosted many guests since our last report. Guests come from far and wide. Nearby towns, Oregon, Dixon, Mt. Morris, Ohio, Polo, Grand Detour, Walnut, Rochelle are well represented. Geneva, St. Charles, De Kalb, Crystal Lake, East Moline, Sycamore, Creston and Malta also sent guests. Twelve members of the Du Page Birding Club visited on a rainy day. Their comment, "it was a 'wash out'". A member of the Spring Valley Nature Sanctuary states, "Saw many sandy soil plants new to a 'prairie restorationist'". Other comments: "Wonderful day to see, hear, and feel a prairie wind" "Wonderful hearing bobolinks, meadowlarks, bluebirds!". A comment from North Carolina... "Excellent preserve. Enjoyed it very much. It's a shame there's not more left." From London, England.... "this is why I came to Illinois man." We had two guest from England this one and one from Oxford. Several states were represented: Ohio, North Carolina, Wisconsin, New York, and Washington, DC. The bobolinks are very popular with everyone!

NACHUSA PRAIRIE INSECT STUDY

[Your editor will attempt to summarize Ron Panzer's insect study at Nachusa Grasslands. Please forgive me if you find errors in my summarization, insects are one area where I need lots of education!]

Ron Panzer's work continues to confirm that Nachusa Grasslands habitat is one of the richest assemblages of tallgrass prairie invertebrates that we know. Ron will continue his work this summer. He will be looking at the Meiner's tract with its sedge meadow wetlands. Work will continue on reintroduction of some of the rare prairie butterflies, grasshoppers, etc.

Mr. Panzer and his associates visited the Grasslands on 9 occasions in 1989 and managed to capture and identify 20 new species. "We managed to black light four times and recorded 3 new Papaipema moths within the Nachusa/Franklin Creek State Park complex, one is a new record for Illinois, and the other 2 haven't been seen here in decades!", states Panzer.

A permanent census route traversing both upland prairie and old field restoration plots was established on the south half of the preserve in 1987; censuses were conducted in 1988 and 1989. Aerial and sweep nets have been used to capture specimens.

Three hundred and sixty-five insects have been captured and identified to genus. Fifty-two of those captured were determined to be uncommon prairie and/or savanna-restricted species.

Mr. Panzer states, "Although intense grazing has degraded the upland plant communities on this site, Nachusa grasslands, by virtue of its large size, supports significantly more remnant-restricted insect species than do smaller "virgin" sites that persist in this region."

Many prairie and savanna-associated species have been found to occur on this site. The Regal fritillary, the Two-spotted skipper, the Baltimore checkerspot, and the Olive hairstreak are known to occur on less than 20 protected sites in Illinois and thus should be considered to be very uncommon elements.

Most of the moths recorded thus far have been common, wide-ranging animals. The Lead plant flower moth, the Turtlehead papaipema, and to a lesser extent the Khunia flower moth, Eupatorium flower moth, the Guara flower moth, the Judith underwing, and the

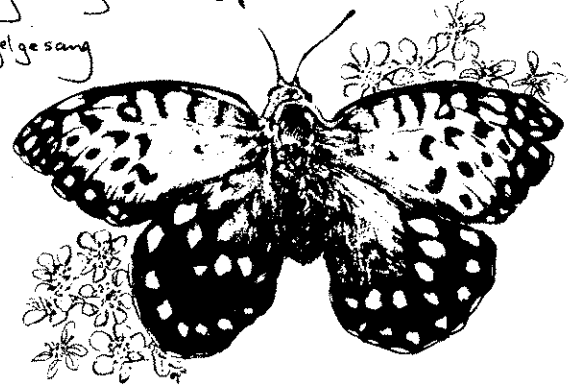
Wild indigo borer are notable exceptions. The Lead plant flower moth S. lucens, is known from few sites in Illinois. The Turtlehead papaipema is known from Nachusa Grasslands only. This is a new state record!

The katydid and grasshopper communities at the Grasslands compare favorably with those found on the largest and finest sand and tallgrass savannas in this region.

Seventy-six leafhopper species have been recorded. The bulk of these are common, old field species, however, 15 are thought to be uncommon, remnant-restricted species. Two uncommon froghoppers were found to occur in sizeable numbers.

Regal fritillary on goldenrod,

Jennifer Vogelgesang



Mr. Panzer recommends prescribed burning of at least 25% of the site each year. He suggests 50% of the upland prairie habitat be spared as a sanctuary for prairie insects and the food plants they require. Shortages of either nectar resources or requisite larval host plants can limit butterfly population. To remedy this situation Mr. Panzer suggests early plant restoration efforts should focus on plant species such as Milkweed, bird's-foot violet, leadplant, New Jersey tea, black-eyed Susan, pale coneflower, Hill's thistle, blazingstar, and prairie coreopsis.

(next issue: Nachusa Grasslands Insect Translocation)



NACHUSA GRASSLANDS

A taste of looking back

by Judy Hill

It takes a field trip to rejuvenate the crispness of a memory, to spark a prairie fire in the heart and mind of a nature lover, and it makes us strive to preserve what little true prairie remains.

I looked at a map in the Newsletter and saw Dot's Knob and Doug's Knob printed there. These names are familiar; just who were/are these people? The answer opened a door for me. The March 20th field trip, with Dot Wade as our group's leader, satisfied and yet aroused my curiosity about different kinds of prairie ecology. These two knobs are not far apart. Each contain some entirely different type of life in and upon them. There was the noticeable absence of the all too-often spring burn. Having grown up in a big bluestem prairie, I know there were places that the wildfire jumped over or detoured around. Perhaps there are prairie places that never experienced fire. Is this one of those places? Study what is above, below, behind, and then proceed with a light and careful footfall.

Mom and Dad bought a small lot (80' x 160') with a two-year old "shell" on it in 1943 for the sum of \$2,000, complete with an outhouse and new rainbarrels. I was two

a two-lane highway and it's deep wet ditches with ease. Nobody burned their land alone; it was a planned event. The entire prairie was never all deliberately burned. Why? I can only speculate.

Everyone had several rainbarrels. Some were the 55-gallon steel drums with the top cold-chiseled out. Some were wooden, washed inside with tar. But, always one just for soaking the gunny sacks, old cotton rugs and worn out corn brooms. No luxury of "flappers". Anyone living in these "sticks" soon made it a habit of scanning the horizon often and respond to the alarm of a certain scent in the air, day or night. There is no other odor on this earth like that in the smoke from prairie fire.

We were in its path on several occasions. If we had not backfired, we would have been gone from this earth. I know, because I disobeyed my parents and ran out to meet the wall of flames while hollering, "Stop! Please, stop!". I stood still in the burnt backfire area and all was silent for a moment. The wall of flames was about as high as our story-and-a-half frame cottage. All yellow, white, and dark red tongues vacuuming up exploding grass stalks into the blue sky, throwing them out at their tops. My hair was being pulled forward and my dress ballooned in front. I heard only the roar and felt the increase in heat of the approaching vortex. Standing calmly, there was no reason to listen for a human voice.

" I...ran out to meet the wall of flames while hollering, "Stop! Please, stop!". I stood still in the burnt backfire area and all was silent...."

years old then. Dad was rejected at his Army physical, loved outdoors and city-bred Mom had no idea what was in front of her with him. We were in the "sticks"; no electricity, natural gas, running water nor many close neighbors. It was living on the edge. It was World War II with it's patriotism, rationing, and black markets. It was living in the face of Nature's sometimes angry temper. One part of her temper is fire.

Dad smoked roll-your-own cigarettes; Bull Durham in the little muslin sack with the gold loop drawstrings. He could roll his cigarette using only one hand and I'd beg him to blow smoke rings. This is how he tested the wind during those special times we backfired the prairie making a crude and not always effective firebreak during a "worry" season (which could be anytime except during snowcover or in a rainstorm). Ever see a green prairie burn? A violent westerly in July could help the flames jump

I had been cleansed of any fear. Suddenly, my feet were off the ground as Dad grabbed my dress at the back of my neck. I was pulled from that "room" in front of the fire. No, I cannot remember the hurt from being singed. Only the sound, the changing colors and soothing movement of the flames, and mostly the fragrance are most vivid in my mind. Those are the lures into it's trap. Fire demands humility, because mankind's ingenious plots do not always alter or stop Nature's acts upon her stages.

Some of our neighbors were consumed by fire, which is another story for a different time. Perhaps there are special places that should never see and feel fire. Thank all of you for Nachusa.



MEETING OF SEED SEEKERS

A group of seed seekers met at the Grasslands to make plans for this seasons seed collecting. Sally Baumgardner directs the group. All agreed that collectors should meet first at the Nachusa sign, and then travel to the collecting site. Collecting plans will be cancelled if it is too wet.

What seeds to plant/scatter on the same day they are picked and which seeds to treat before scattering was also discussed. Dennis Lubbs will be the guide in this area. The group will do their best in maximum diversity of plant life.

A bulletin board in Baumgardner's red barn in the first "room" along Lowden Road is seeding headquarters. Mark on a map where you are collecting and/or scattering. Leave the map and a note on the cork board. Tack it securely. If you don't have a map, use the large map on the white board. Use colored thumbtacks to mark areas. Please record the planting date also.

Specific persons were assigned species to collect. "We need a suicide seed collecting corps to get into wet areas and collect Marsh Marigold, pickerel plant, bluejoint, sweet flag, bog reed grass, bur reed, bulrush, sedges, rushes, sweet grass and the like", urged Sally. Sally is looking for volunteers. Why not give her a call?

Concentration of seed dispersal will be on the long, narrow area marked "Nov. 87" on page 5 of the April 1990 issue of Prairie Smoke.

All work days/seed collecting days should end in an enjoyable stroll of about a half hour, just looking at and learning more about Nachusa Grasslands and its unique plant and animal life.

"Go ahead and stop work 1/2 hour before quitting time", Sally councils.

Sally's last admonition is: **BE SURE** to gain permission to pick at off-site locations. Recruit friends, relatives, Scout groups, church groups, etc. and set up a seed collecting party! Allow time to "pay your volunteers" with a free tour of Nachusa Grasslands.

MORE FROM SALLY

"I want to thank Dot (Wade) and Isabel (Johnston) for their help!", proclaimed Sally Baumgardner. These seed seekers had two impromptu work days. They brought seeds and plants for the area

near the Nachusa sign. They put in beard tongue, yellow coneflower, kittentails, goat's rue, purple clover, side oats grama, and little bluestem, *Krigia biflora* and *Polygala seneca*. Porcupine grass seed was also scattered in the "Nov. 87" area.

Sally suggests these seeds be collected now; shooting star, any sedges that are loose and dry, bird's foot violet, lousewort, kittentail, June grass, and Hill's thistle. You may hold them for a short while or go ahead and scatter in that "Nov. 87" area. If you picked them in a high dry place scatter them in a high dry place. She suggests you wait for Dennis Lubbs instructions for the low, wet areas. Please avoid Dr. Dziadyk's study areas when gathering seeds at the preserve. They are all well marked.

"And we need volume!" is Sally's assessment of seed needs. Scheduled Work Days are:

MONDAY JULY 23 - 10 AM

MONDAY JULY 30 - 10 AM

SATURDAY AUG. 4 - 11 AM

SUNDAY AUG. 5 - 11 AM

MONDAY AUG. 20 - 10 AM

MEET AT THE NACHUSA SIGN AS USUAL
IF IT'S RAINING, ALL IS CANCELLED.

"Special thanks to Ed Pleskovitch", Sally added, "for all the spiderwort seed he collected". Now is an excellent time to get that species. Why not collect some for Nachusa Grasslands? We need volume!

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

All our readers should get a copy of "The Conservator", newsletter of the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. It has excellent information and pictures dealing with Nachusa Grasslands. That's the SUMMER 1990 issue. I was thrilled as I received Chris Bronny's news about the past seeding that is finally "bearing seed". And Ron Panzer's exciting discoveries about Nachusa's insects! I think perhaps, I should include Sally Baumgardner's phone number again. It's 708/655-4295. She has an answering machine so you are able to leave a message if you don't get Sally. Please support Sally with seed collecting, as she said, "we need volume". How about all those guests? I love the comments. And Dusk on Indian Ridge, although not written about Nachusa Grasslands, it is another site in Lee County. Visit Nachusa Grasslands and be one of the fortunate few who hear the coyote sing! Don't miss Judy Hill's exciting "A taste of looking back".

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GET A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Well, it has been incredibly uncomfortable clearing brush at the Grasslands this year. Saturdays, which are best for me, have been rained out on a regular basis, but lately we have had 100 degree days with 80% humidity. On June 30th we got a work crew together and got a considerable amount done.

Robert Baller and his friend, Mark Rich, came down from Beloit where they take care of scattered fragments of prairie. Rob also teaches botany. By the way, Rob, thanks for the tip about when to pick Ohio Spiderwort. I picked the following week.

Desmond Watt came from Naperville and gave a considerable amount of help trimming the fence line. Mike Adolph of North Aurora was of immeasurable help too.

Five of us leap-frogged along a stretch of boundary fence line near Doug's Knob and the northwest sedge meadow. The purpose for trimming the fence line is threefold; 1) to expose and mark the western boundary, 2) to make a foot path to the wetland, savanna, and sedge meadow, 3) to make a firebreak for the prairie burns. The tools of most use are loping shears, bow saws, and hedge shears.

We still need help anytime even if you only come for a couple of hours. You can talk to any of the people mentioned in this article to find out what and how we are doing the job, or call me, Ed Pleskovitch 815/626-8092 after 5 pm. Better yet, come out on Saturday. You will find me on the fence line.

Issue #5 of Prairie Smoke has a good map to help you get around. I should be to the west of the lower #8 on the map, just find the fence line and you will find some work.

Come on out, enjoy yourself, do a little work, and get a feeling of self-satisfaction. Besides the sunsets are stunning around 8:30 pm. Enjoy!

....by ED PLESKOVITCH



D. Hewett '88

DUSK ON INDIAN RIDGE by Debra Osmer

In the northeast corner of the marsh
a soft birdsong trills goodnight.
Frogs begin their evening court calls
as stars appear in the fading light.

A silvery moon rises slowly above
the blueberry barrens on the sand.
Bur oak branches cast night shadows
on this fragile and precious land.

Who then appears on Indian Ridge
as night unfolds its wings?
The fortunate few who treasure
moments when the coyote sings.

The
Nature 
Conservancy

BRINGS YOU PRAIRIE SMOKE,
THE NACHUSA GRASSLANDS NEWSLETTER.

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