



# PRAIRIE SMOKE

## Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter

Issue 24

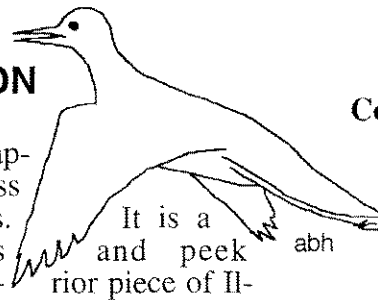
May 1, 1995

### CLOSE UP

#### 1994 BREEDING SEASON

By Ann Haverstock

Another breeding season is approaching and the serious business of replenishing the species begins. It is a pleasant tedium to track these birds into their life cycles on this superior piece of Illinois.



It is a and peek

Over the years I have often mentioned how I find birds by their song. Most of the time Nachusa is wonderfully quiet and you are truly able to find many species in this manner. Recently, I have read that what removes avian researchers from the field is a hearing loss and not their aging eyesight. I am sure that the single most important skill to finding breeding species is recognizing a birds' song.

In this review of the 1994 breeding season, I will focus on some of their vocalizations. I hope this will give more depth to your next visits to Nachusa.

**Great Blue Heron** - We still have not checked out this rookery, but apparently from the noise it is growing. Many times this summer when I was near Wade creek and Kittentail Knob I could hear the loud clacking of bills. This is because great blue herons use bill clapping as a greeting when entering a nest area. A real effort to count the nests in 1995 should be made. Any volunteers?

**Northern Harrier** (Illinois endangered) - I was falsely excited at the beginning of my census season to find a female harrier perched and hunting in one of my plots (29 May). Sadly, she nor any other harrier was seen for the rest of the breeding season. You may recall that in '93 a pair was using Nachusa as part of their hunting territory during the breeding season. It may be that the very successful burn of



much of the main complex pushed this species elsewhere.

**Cooper's Hawk** (Illinois endangered) - Finally this bird spent time hunting near the main complex. It may have nested in the pines just south of the entrance. It was sighted there on most occasions and several people were able to watch it hunt and chase prey.

**Upland Sandpiper** - Randy Nyboer, an IL Dept. of Conversation biologist, was able to confirm at least one successful nest of our prairie sandpiper. On 28 June he chanced upon a nest with two hatched young and 3 eggs. Although the young are able to walk from the nest very soon after hatching much like poultry chicks, on the day of the hatch they are most vulnerable to predators. It is difficult to verify how many actually fledged, grew and flew to the pampas of Argentina. The best way to catch a peek at this species is to listen for a "wolf whistle". You remember, the kind of whistle that a fella uses for a passing pretty girl. Well, be sure to look up if you hear it on the prairie.

**Barred Owl** - This bird called its "Who cooks for you...who cooks for you allllll" in the west savanna (29 May).

Over the last five years we have met all the Illinois owls except the *barn owl* (IL endangered), and from what I understand there have been barn owls in northern Ogle county. Keep your eyes open. It loves open spaces, too.

**Whip-poor-will** - This species is still pleased with our savannas. It has returned to sing each summer evening. If you want to hear it sing, park near the Stone Barn Rd. entrance and wait until dark. It sings its name.

**Least Flycatchers** - One singing male throughout June and July.

**Willow Flycatchers** - 3 singing males were holding territories in early May at Coyote Point, but by 17 June only one was easily found. One was seen carrying nesting material as late as 10 June.



## From the Preserve Manager Bill Kleiman

*Projects of this Spring and Summer*

**Propagation Nursery:** If you worked all day long harvesting just prairie gentians you might fill up a film canister with the fine seed. A few plants occur here and there, perhaps a few hundred plants on the preserve in total. Your search for the plants would be rewarded by their beautiful blue flowers. But we need a lunch bag full of gentian seed so that we can have the flower blooming in lots of other areas here. A watered and fertilized garden will produce prodigious quantities of gentian and other seed year after year. Our nursery plans are being guided by our own Dennis Lubbs and Kathy Motto of Genesis Nursery in Tampico. We have plans for a small, relatively easily maintained outdoor garden. Genesis has generously offered to get us started with seedlings of various uncommon local species ready to be put into the garden. We also have plants that Enders Greenhouse in Rockford started for us last year. The propagation nursery will have perhaps thirty to fifty species annually and will be a nice boost to our seed harvesting efforts. We will need a few volunteers willing to come out once a week or so to help care for the garden. Give us a call, 456-2340, if you can help out.

**Stewardship planning:** We are updating our plan for the work we will be doing for the next three years. The unit stewards and I have hiked around their management units and written on maps what and where and how and when. For example: With Mike Crowe, the East Heinkel unit steward, we tromped up and down hills with sandstone outcroppings, strategized how to do in the alien multiflora rose and honeysuckles, but we delighted in finding the remains of a prairie under some planted white pine trees. There was not much showing, just a few little bluestem plants, some indian grass, an unknown sedge. We hope that with the introduction of fire to this unit (likely the first fire since the 1830's) we will see many other plants emerge that were hidden in the pine needles or dormant in the seed bank. Goodbye Pinus strobus. For Mike's unit the plan includes a fair amount of brush thinning, non-native plant removals, seed harvesting and planting, the delicate use of a bulldozer, a few fires, and lots of careful observations. Each Steward is forming a team of



people that they can contact to come to their workdays. This is a good opportunity for becoming involved at an easy level. Show up at a scheduled workday or call us.

**Hydrology work:** Old field tiles will be removed from the Prairie Potholes and Shafer Unit and an old drainage ditch filled. These plantings will become rather wet and some wetland plants will emerge from the seed bank to get us started on the restoration. We will plant more seed in these areas annually.

*Winter work accomplished (December-February):*

**Stone soup seed processing day:** Over 80 species harvested. Good turnout had a dozen working with Mike Adolph clearing under oaks on Main Unit. David Edelbach, Ellen and Don Baker, John & Sheila Holbo, Andy & Kim Jackson, Kevin Kaltenbach, Mary Ann Hoeffliger, Hazel Reuter, Dean Weidman, Bob Parenteau, Sally & Max Baumgardner, Carol Sumners & students, Jack & Tom Darin.

**Northeast Unit** - Max Baumgardner removing old fence and posts and tree removal by Rock River Valley Fishing Club.

**Fen Unit** - Cleared under more oaks and Kevin Kaltenbach and Chris Matson cleared more alien brush and burned brush piles.

**Main Unit** - Last of the wire, posts and and brush removed along fencelines. Mike Adolph.

**West Heinkel Unit** - Removed quarter mile of fence.

**East Heinkel Unit** - Removed wire and brush along a fenceline by Pussytoes lane.

**Schafer Unit** - Lots of boundary clearing and brush stacking and burning.

**Clear Creek Unit** - Removed interior fence & cleared brush, Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County.

## AOTP 1995

Autumn on the Prairie 95' chairman is Mike Adolph. Planning meeting May 13 at 1:30 at the Yellow House. We have four positions filled and two positions left that we need volunteers for: Coordinating the welcome tent and the demo tents. Call Mike Adolph, 708-897-4792, or Gene St. Louis, 815-756-8747, to RSVP or express interest in helping out. Gene is coordinating the tours so call him if you can lead one this year.

### Correction

The Jay Meiners Wetlands did not shrink from 80 acres to 8 acres, as reported in the last issue. We regret the error.

# Badger!

By Sally Baumgardner

The mere mention of this harsh-sounding name seems to imply something dreadfully bad. After all, isn't that the first syllable? Bad.

When an adult badger and three young were seen by a dozen of Nachusa Grasslands' Stewards last May, interest and awareness of these incredible digging animals exploded. We felt our efforts to restore and reconstruct this Illinois ecosystem were, indeed, getting marvelous results.

On Valentine's Day, Max and I found massive mounds of freshly spewed out sand and gravel at four easy-to-reach locations on our prairie as well as Nachusa's. Could one of the badger young sighted last spring be our new neighbor? Naturally, this greatly intensified my curiosity and sent me hurtling to the library to research the documented badger accounts by recognized wildlife biologists.

In particular, I sought verification in well-known journals such as Smithsonian and Natural History. Articles like Partners in Carnivory, by Kathryn and Steven Minta, Natural History, June, 1991, took several years of field work for them to complete. Another authority, John Messick, head of the Biology Department at Missouri Southern State College, spent most of his three years as a graduate student studying the badgers of Snake River, Idaho.

Badgers are well substantiated as residents of the plains of the U.S. Their general range stretches from Indiana west to the Pacific, and from the lower half of the Canadian Provinces into Mexico.

Badgers are wide-bodied, short-legged members of the Weasel family. They weigh 15 to 25 pounds and are 18 to 23 inches long. Their thick, loose hides are covered with yellowish gray shaggy fur. The bushy tails are about six inches long. The face is patterned in black with white cheeks and a white stripe extending from the snout over the head. Early English-speaking people felt these facial markings resembled badges of heraldry. How "bad" can that be?

These top-of-the-food-chain hunters can kill or eat more or less everything they can get their jaws on. Mice, rats, gophers, and various ground squirrels make up most of the diet. With these choice foods available here, we can expect to find badgers on the prairie.

They also consume considerable quantities of insects including the larvae of bees, wasps and ants, whose nests they are able to rob safely because of their thick, loose hides. Other mammalian prey includes moles, shrews, rabbits, raccoons and fox and coyote pups they dig out of breeding dens. Badgers will enter the water to catch frogs, crayfish and fish in shallow lakes and streams. This sounds bad for small critters.

The most impressive tools possessed by badgers are the extremely long front claws, as long as a child's fingers. The claws enable these animals to hold the



title of Champions of the Diggers. Their big forepaws are webbed at the base and are used like shovels for moving and throwing dirt. Badgers are well adapted to get the job done and get it done well.

There's more to learn about our native badgers, as well as European badgers. In the next issue we'll look at the sport called "badger-baiting" and the source of our present-day word, "badgering".

## VSN Stewardship Award

Sally Baumgardner was recognized at a luncheon in Vernon Hills, Feb 18, for her education and field trips at the Grasslands and in the community. Sally touched the lives of at least 1,200 people last year, she managed the childrens' tent at our Autumn on the Prairie celebration, and she is a Unit Steward. Ben Tuggle, regional director of USFWS gave a talk about Chicago Region biodiversity. The Volunteer Stewardship Network is active in North and Central Illinois in restoring and protecting natural areas.

See Photo Page 6

## Managing Species Diversity in Tallgrass Prairie: Assumptions and Implications by Henry Howe

From the journal *Conservation Biology*, September 1994:

Conservation and restoration ecology efforts may conserve or restore a particular image of a community, a variety of plausible images, or maximum biological diversity. The choice is a policy decision that should reflect relevant history and sound science. Here I argue that common methods of conserving and restoring tallgrass prairie have a weak scientific rationale, are not consistent with plausible history, and threaten prairie biodiversity. Dormant-season burns and grazer exclusion are human interventions that may promote artificially consistent dominance of large grasses utilizing the C4 photosynthetic pathway [warm season grasses like big bluestem, indian grass, little bluestem], thereby relegating hundreds of other prairie plants to small populations that are vulnerable to local extinction. I recommend an experimental approach to large remnant conservation and restoration in which varied conditions alter dominance, thereby increasing short-term species richness. I also recommend prescribed burning during the summer, to simulate the timing of lightning fire, and light-to-moderate grazing by different ungulates, to simulate historical grazing history. Both should favor plants that are consistently infrequent or rare in many managed prairies. Varied regimes of burn season, burn interval, and large-mammal grazing should promote greater overall species diversity and should more realistically represent varied conditions under which grassland taxa evolved.

(continued from page 1 - 1994 Breeding Season)

These two Nachusa flycatchers are best distinguished by voice. The least says a sharp "che-bek", while the willow sings "fitz-bew". Next June you can sit at Coyote Point and listen carefully for both species.

**Sedge Wrens** - They were most active in late summer. On 22 July as many as seven males were singing on site.

Don Kroodsma Ph.d., University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is interested in more information on this species. It would require someone who lives nearby to stop by a roadside each week and count the number of singing males. I am unable to be on the site during most of August and he needs August covered. Anyone interested?

**Eastern Bluebirds** - They are most easily seen around Sally Baumgardner's boxes. They are really happy with the insect population. Susan Kleiman lovingly moved most of the interior boxes to the edges of the property. This will make monitoring boxes easier.

**Veery** - (Illinois Threatened) We were most pleased with the rediscovery of this species along Wade Creek. Spring '94 had 3 singing males and each time we checked during breeding season we happily heard at least one bird calling. It sings its name "veer-y, veer-y, veer-y" in descending tones. The music is a healthy sign, although we still have not observed breeding behavior. On an overcast day walk the west fence line and you may be rewarded with a singing veery. Remember, if you should see it feeding fledged young or carrying food, you must give me a call.

**Wood Thrush** - Another woodland thrush with a great voice. He was singing all season in the west woods. The naturalist John Burroughs' mnemonic for this species is "O spheral, spheral; O holy, holy, O clear away, clear away; O clear up, clear up." Each time I'm lucky enough to be with children when I hear it sing I attempt to tell the Native American tale of "How birds received their song". When you're lucky enough to hear the wood thrush sing at Nachusa, call me and I will tell you the story. (Maybe, this will tease you to volunteer at Nachusa.)

**Loggerhead Shrike** (Illinois threatened) - The species has not been observed since the summer of 1990. I would love any information on this bird in Lee/Ogle counties (South of Rt.64 and East of the Rock River).

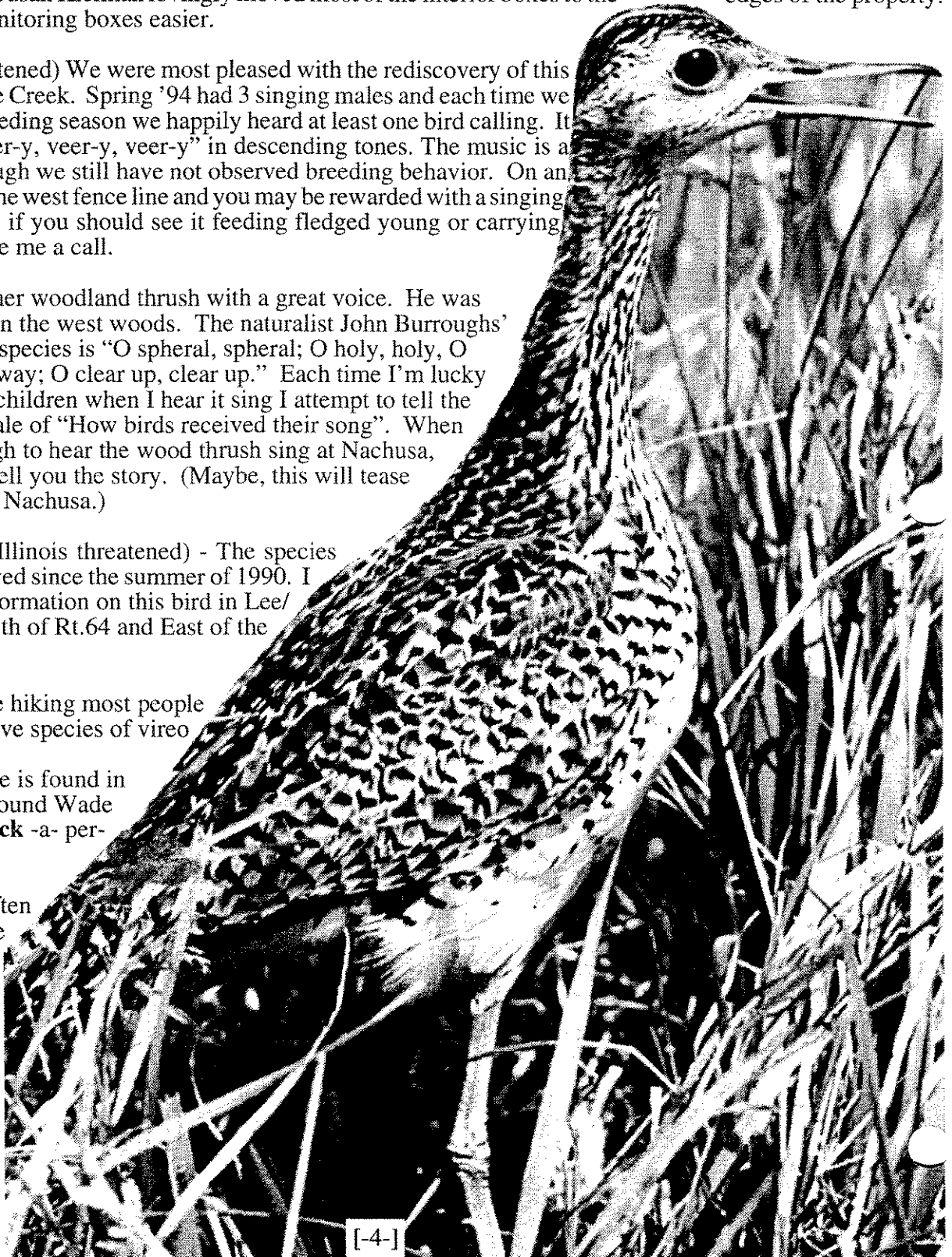
**VIREOS:** With some hiking most people are able to find the five species of vireo at Nachusa.

**White-eyed Vireo** - He is found in shrubs and trees around Wade Creek singing "chick -a- per-weeoo- chick".

**Bell's Vireo** - Found often in shrubs at Coyote Point singing, "cheedle cheedle chee?...cheedle cheedle chew!".

**Yellow-throated Vireo** - Found in west fence line savanna singing, "three-eight or ee-yay"

It was heard on 17, 25 and 30 June.



**Warbling Vireo** - This species has resided the last 4 years in the cottonwood by the yellow house on Lowden road. This the plainest of vireos sings the most complicated vireo song. It is a very musical, languid warbled phrase with the last syllable an upward "twee". The song is the most difficult to describe, so it is good that he is the easiest vireo to find.

**Red-eyed Vireo** - He is found in woods and savannas singing his very deliberate measured phrases, rather like a conversation "Here I am...up here...in a tree...see me...here I am...look here...in the tree...etc".

**Hooded Warbler** - On three occasions a pair was seen along Wade Creek and another nearby creek. They were last seen on 17 June by John Bivins. This is the first year that this species has been detected at Nachusa. I concentrate on the main complex during the census and I am unable to give the other habitats much attention, so if you walk the creek and woods please send me a copy of your observations.

**Dickcissel** - Another nice year for this species. At least 5 territories were noted in the main complex of knobs.

**Clay-colored Sparrow** (Illinois endangered) - I first noted this species singing his heart out from a thin shrub on 22 May. He was located about 30 yards north of the pine plantings (Benson Rd.) in the main complex. This single male sang persistently through 10 June and then disappeared.

Since I've mentioned bird song in this report, it may be of interest how I happened upon this species. I was checking my plot locations when I heard a golden-winged warbler sing "Bee-bz bz bz". I followed the call and was happy to see a male flitting through the shrubs. Pleased with myself I moved on to Plots 9, 10, and 11. Between plots 9 and 10 I heard "bzzz, bzzz, bzzz". I wondered why the golden-winged warbler was agitated and following me. The song was different but similar. Confused, I drew closer to this similar song and discovered a single male clay-colored sparrow. Each week I stopped to check on this bird. He sang constantly but never attracted a female. He finally gave up his territory.

**Field Sparrow** - The second most common sparrow species found in Nachusa's open habitats.

**Grasshopper Sparrow** - The grasshopper sparrow still remains the most common grassland species at Nachusa. Thirteen plus territories were found in the main complex. When you walk be sure to stop and listen for its song "pi-tup zeeeeeeeeeeee" and then a jumble of notes.

**Henslow's Sparrow** (Illinois threatened) - One singing male was seen and heard on 22 July. This species

prefers prairies which have not been burned for several years. He was found in an area which was not burned in '93 or '94. A very quiet hiccupping "tsi-lick" is how the Peterson guide describes his meager song. That is what caught my attention.

**Bobolink** - 3 males posturing aggressively on 30 June. They were noticed often in the '91 field east of Coyote Point. (The year '91 refers to the year it was seeded to prairie.)

**Orchard Oriole** - Three males were observed in May but only one pair was successfully feeding fledged young at the end of July. Be sure to look in a guide and note the two possible and very different male plumages. It was a "first summer" male that had the successful nest in plot 8.

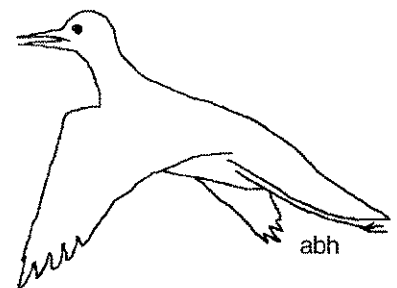
If you are interested in native bird songs, there are several nice recordings available to you. I personally enjoy the Cornell compact disk. I can easily find any song in question.

*A Field Guide to Bird Songs of Eastern and Central North America.* Cornell  
Laboratory of Ornithology, New York: Mark Records, 1983.  
(records \$19.95; tapes \$25.00; Disc \$25.00)

My curiosity rushes as these birds settle into their routines. It is "their" routines which for centuries racked naturalist and scientist with questions. Some questions have been answered, like the ones about migrations and flight, but many are left unanswered. So, each year our little bits of information help the view of the larger picture of Nachusa Grasslands and the even larger picture of the health of Illinois' prairies.

Remember, if you bird Nachusa Grasslands, send your observations to me:

Ann B. Haverstock  
724 Hawthorne Lane  
Geneva, IL 60134  
(708) 232-9398



# Photo Page



*Laurel Ross Sally Baumgardner Steve Packard*



*Students from Highland College working in the Clear Creek Unit*



*Gene St. Louis, NIU students (Amy Knight, Dave Rocks, Rodd Schick), Bill & Susan Kleiman after clearing under oaks in savanna. Not shown NIU student Chuck Deans.*



*Rock River Valley Fishing Club on March 4, 1995.  
And the trees come a tumbling down!*



*Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County  
at Clear Creek  
Mary Blackmore and Bob Piro*

# Calendar

## May

- 6 Saturday: Workday at Main Unit with Mike Adolph
- 7 Sunday: Workday at Kittentail Unit with West Chicago Prairie Stewards - raking in seed.
- 10 10:30 Wednesday: Potluck & Potting Party! Genesis Nurse in Walnut.
- 13 Saturday: Workday at NE Unit with Sally Baumgardner - Sweet clover and wild parsnip eradication - **POTLUCK LUNCH 1:30 AT BAUMGARDNERS FOLLOWED BY A SHORT, BUT IMPORTANT, MEETING FOR ALL FRIENDS AND STEWARDS OF NG.** AOTP committee meets after general meeting.
- 14 Sunday: Mother's Day
- 20 Saturday: Workday on Coneflower Unit with Mary Ann Hoeffliger
- 21 Sunday: Field Trip with Sonja Vogel - "Mid Vernal Experiences"
- 27 Saturday: Workday on Jay Meiners Unit w/ Jeff Meiners - removing multi flora rose/ cedars.
- 28 Sunday: Deadline - Summer Prairie Smoke Submission to Editors
- 29 Monday: Memorial Day Workday on the Clear Creek Unit with the Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County

## June

- Prairie Smoke Editors meet the first week
- 3 Saturday: Savanna plant identification hike with Dennis Lubbs. Discover plants from one of the rarest communities in the world.
- 10 Saturday: Workday at NE Unit with Sally Baumgardner
- 11 Sunday: Workday at East Heinkel Unit with Mike Crowe
- 18 Sunday: Father's Day
- 24 Saturday: Workday at NE Unit with Sally Baumgardner. Also, TNC members hike and seed collecting field trip.
- 25 Sunday: Workday at Main Unit with Mike Adolph

## July

- 1 Saturday: Workday at Main Unit with Mike Adolph
- 8 Saturday: Workday on Coneflower Unit with Mary Ann Hoeffliger **FOLLOWED BY FRIENDS OF NG POTLUCK AND MEETING AT 1:30**
- 15 Saturday: Summer Volunteer Recruitment Day - various stewardship activities lead by Unit Stewards followed by Ice Cream Social

- 16 Sunday: Field trip with Kevin Kaltenbach, Fen Unit steward - vigorous hike - rare wetland plants, sore feet, birds, sweat!
- 22 Saturday: Workday at Main Unit with Mike Adolph
- 23 Sunday: Afternoon, 3:00pm! - Second plant identification hike with VSN regional ecologist Dennis Lubbs.
- 30 Sunday: Workday at Main Unit with Mike Adolph

\* **Registration required.**

## Wish list for Nachusa Grasslands:

- pto mount sickle bar mower
- picnic bench
- hand tools
- bit and brace
- flatbed trailer (5' wide)
- agricultural combine
- dissecting microscope
- old photos of the grasslands
- hay rack/wagon
- overhead projector
- portable gas tank for filling up tractors in the field, fitting in the back of the truck, 50-100 capacity

Donations are greatly appreciated & tax deductible.

## Thanks to donors for:

- √-Microscope - Roger Taylor
- √-Donation - Green Meadows Garden Club
- √-\$500 - Anonymous Donor
- √-Fax machine - Mel Sparks
- √-Installing at cost and free labor a new furnace system w/ducts - Dave Schonefelder of Beautiful Fields Heating and Cooling in Dixon
- √-\$4,300! - North & Western Committee of TNC for seed and the new propagation nursery. This new committee wanted to show their support - chaired by John Santucci.
- √-Building a closet for Yellow House - George Perkins
- √-Mailing list maintenance - Chris Pfoutz at Crest Foods (c/o Jeff Meiners)
- √-Benches - built by Bill Mayes

It's about that time of year!

## The Firefly

by Ogen Nash

The firefly's flame  
Is something for which science has no name.  
I can think of nothing eerier  
Than flying around with an unidentified glow  
on a person's posterier.

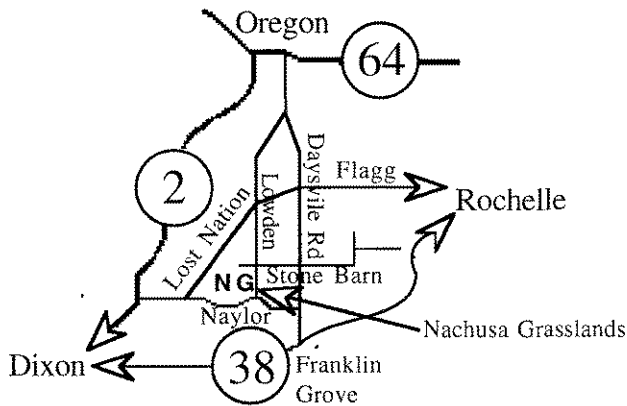
>>> **ALL WORKDAYS ARE FROM** <<<  
**9:30 - 1:30**  
Bring a bag lunch.

**Restoring and protecting** native Illinois is fun and meaningful work, join us for a few workdays this summer. Meet at the barn behind the Yellow House, 2055 Lowden Road.

<i>Editor-Publisher</i> _____	<i>Earl Thomas</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i> _____	<i>Dot Wade</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i> _____	<i>Bill Kleiman</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i> _____	<i>Sally Baumgardner</i>
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<i>Manager of Mailing</i> _____	<i>Ellen Baker</i>

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### From the Editor(s):

If you know something about Nachusa Grasslands, but no one else knows because you didn't share the information, then you are *GUILTY* of keeping secrets! Send me articles, photos, drawings, poems, cartoons, calendar dates (items of interest to the friends of Nachusa Grasslands). Articles on computer disk encouraged!



brings you **Prairie Smoke**,  
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