

Seed Collecting Time Is Here

From now through November is prime time for seed collecting. It's easy work and a great way to get an introduction to restoration. It's also a great time for volunteers to get out into all parts of the preserve and see the best parts of the site up close while we gather. We collect native seeds from areas with healthy plant populations to later put where those species were historically, but have been wiped out, usually due to man, and where there are small populations of the species that we wish to increase. See our workday schedule on Page 3 for times and details.

Flooding Control Working

If you have been reading our newsletters, you know that we have been working with one of our landowners, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, to reduce flooding along Poplar Creek, which forms part of our western border. This year, despite all the rain, we saw significantly decreased flooding in the entrance area during the spring. Even late summer, after 6 ½ inches of rain in one day, the flooding was reduced. It still certainly flooded our entrance wetlands and our entrance bridge, but that will always happen. However, at the highest flood level, it was still below what it was last year. Also, the water level dropped much more rapidly than before. With that much rain, we did see logs, trash, and other debris shooting down Poplar Creek, causing a new debris dam to form. But the FPD is on the job. They'll get their heavy equipment out there again this fall and get that dam and any others they find out of the creek before beavers can move in. Yes, beavers are native, but we are a small preserve (100 acres). We simply don't have enough room for beavers to build dams. If we let them, they'd happily turn the entire Fen into a lake!

Kevin Collins: Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen's New Co-steward

Kevin Collins has been a volunteer now at the Fen for quite a few years. He brings quite a horticultural background to our group as an active member of the DuPage Wild Ones. In fact, he is doing some serious gardening for us, tackling more difficult species like New Jersey tea among many other species. He is also working with co-steward Doug Taron on sedge transplanting in several degraded wetland pockets.

He first met volunteer Roger Hotham while walking at the Fen. They got to talking plants, and Roger snuck in an invitation to our workdays. Kevin got hooked pretty quickly, and has been a huge help on many workdays, as he is also a power lifter at home. Nothing like a big, strong back on a volunteer to brighten up our head steward's day! And to have someone with extensive plant knowledge, too, is a real boon to our small group. Now that he has learned restoration methods and ideology through our workdays and some conferences, he is ready to join our Restoration Committee.

This makes him the 5th FBSF Co-steward. Leon Halloran has been our fearless leader and head steward since 1981. Doug Taron soon joined him in 1982. Mel Manner was the third one, joining in 1991 after the 1990 Healy Road transplant. Rick Manner eventually succumbed to gentle persuasion, and accepted the title in 1997. He had been doing the work of a co-steward for several years; he just had never been formally appointed. We are thrilled to have Kevin Collins join our ranks, and look forward to his input on planning the current and future management and restoration of Bluff Spring Fen.

Newsletter issues are available in pdf format on our website at www.bluffspringfen.org. If you wish to receive email notices when new issues are posted, contact Mel at bluffspringfen@gmail.com.

Please note our new email address: bluffspringfen@gmail.com.

Monitoring Update

Bluff Spring Fen is being extensively monitored nowadays. Volunteers Roger Hotham and Kevin Collins are tracking a group of threatened and endangered plant species through membership in the Plants of Concern program. Head steward Leon Halloran is also monitoring an orchid transect, and has been from the late 1980's. Margaret Mechtenberg and her side-kick Cheryl Hayes monitor birds through the Bird Conservation Network. Doug Taron has been monitoring butterflies since 1987 as part of the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network. Marlins Bowles and Steve Packard do periodic tracking of plant diversity on Healy Road Prairie. The US Geological Survey has an extensive system of monitoring wells studying the Fen's hydrology and tracking any changes in it. And our most recent addition to the monitoring team, Alison Richards, is keeping track of our dragonflies and damselflies as a member of the Dragonfly Monitoring Network.

Bird monitoring is done year-round. Yes, even in the dead of winter! The other monitoring is done during the growing season, mostly in June and July. Here are some preliminary results for this year. We also have some more in depth information from butterfly monitor Doug Taron and bird monitor Margaret Mechtenberg on Page 4.

Butterfly Monitoring: Fantastic year for many species. See explanation on Page 4.

Total Individual Butterflies: 507; Average Individuals per visit: 101.4

Total Species Seen: 30; Average Species per Visit: 16.4

Total species was about average. Average species per visit was high. Certain species (including red admiral, azure, monarch, buckeye) had extremely strong years. Little Yellow experienced an irruptive event throughout Illinois this year, and two sightings of this species were recorded.

This species had not been recorded before on an IBMN transect at the Fen.

Bird Monitoring: Breeding season data only - 2010 was an average year. Comments on Page 4.

64 species sighted during breeding months (April-July); 33 species confirmed nesting at the Fen.

Dragonfly Monitoring: Average year

17 species counted in June and July. July count may have been low due to cloudy conditions while monitoring. Eastern red damselflies continue to be seen each spring.

Plants of Concern Monitoring: Some doing well, some in serious trouble

Species names below withheld to protect populations. Exception is small white lady's slipper orchid which is already well-known to occur at Bluff Spring Fen.

2 orchid species: 1-Healthy, small, compact population; 2-Only a single plant this year, previous years have averaged about 4 plants, species will likely die out unless a restoration method can be discovered.

1 threatened species: Healthy, scattered population

1 threatened species: Not seen in 6 years

1 endangered species: No longer survives at the fen

Small white lady's slipper orchid: historic transect report from Leon Halloran

Year	Blooms	Sterile stems	Total
1988 (1 st year)	211	498	709
2005	44	277	321
2006	11	258	269
2007	7	248	255
2008	20	163	183
2009	35	181	216
2010	26	199	225

Comments from Monitor: The disastrous de-watering of the fen a couple of years ago was a blip overlaid on a slow decrease in the population. The number of blooming plants has recovered somewhat, as has the total stems. I must caution readers that the picture is not as bleak as the numbers would appear to show. The transect is a small part of the larger whole, we see orchids pop up in many new places but not along the transect.

Editor's note: 3 other areas are monitored for this orchid species and do not show a similar decline. Preliminary data not available by time of newsletter publication.

Fall Workday Schedule - Seed Collecting Time is Here!

Sept. 4	Sept. 18	To get to Bluff Spring Fen, take US Highway 20 to the southeast side of Elgin. At the stoplight for Shales Pkwy/Bluff City Blvd, turn south onto Bluff City Blvd. The road will turn to the west. Follow it and look for the main entrance of the Bluff City Cemetery on your left. Enter the cemetery, and follow the road as it curves around to the small parking lot with the split rail fence.
Oct. 2	Oct. 16	
Nov. 6	Nov. 20	
Dec. 4	Dec. 18	

Our workdays are a great way to learn about the plants and restoration, while helping to protect a wonderful site. We provide the knowledge and the tools, but we need your hands to help us get all the work done. Children accompanied by a responsible adult are welcome on all workdays.

Workdays are on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month, unless very severe weather forces us to cancel. **We begin at 9 AM. DRESS FOR THE WEATHER.** Wear old, durable clothes, boots or old shoes, and long pants. Bring work gloves and bug-spray if you have them. Wear natural fiber clothing only to winter workdays, as synthetics such as nylon can melt to skin when hit by sparks.

Sept. through early Nov. is when we do seed collecting. It's very easy work and a great way to start learning plants. In mid-Nov. we switch to winter brush and tree clearing. This is harder work, but a lot of fun. We usually have a brush pile burning. We also teach you about general restoration, and are happy to answer any questions you have. You are also welcome to join us for lunch afterwards at a nearby restaurant. For more information, contact Rick Manner at bluffspringfen@gmail.com or 847-464-4426.

Fall Aster Walk

We have one more walk this season on Sat., September 18th at 10:30 AM. Asters should be blooming by then, and many summer plants will be in full seed. The walk lasts about 2 hours and is led by one of our experienced volunteers who can teach you the plants and answer your questions about the Fen and our restoration work. We will meet in the Fen parking lot. See our workday schedule for directions.

Private Tours

We get asked to give private tours on occasion. We are happy to do so for groups of 6 people or more. Given enough notice, we almost always have a tour leader available on weekends, but we can often accommodate you on weekdays as well. A standard tour lasts about 2 hours, but we can shorten or lengthen that time to suit your group. For more information, contact Rick Manner at bluffspringfen@gmail.com or 847-464-4426.

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen Donation Slip

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen (FBSF) is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Donations will go towards restoration supplies, matching funds for charitable grants for restoration, public outreach materials, and contracts with professional restoration companies for invasive species projects. For more information, contact FBSF Secretary, Mel Manner at 847-464-4426 or bluffspringfen@gmail.com.

Please fill out this form and send it and a check made out to "**Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen**" to: FBSF c/o Mel Manner, 41W039 Bowes Bend Dr, Elgin IL 60124-8325.

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Why was 2010 such a good year for butterflies?

Several environmental factors combined to make 2010 an outstanding year for butterflies. Winter of 2009-2010 featured prolonged periods of continuous snow cover. Snow improved winter survival of butterflies in several ways. It serves as an insulator that keeps the ground level from experiencing the coldest temperatures during frigid stretches. It maintains a higher level of relative humidity that keeps over-wintering stages from desiccating. It also provides a physical barrier that offers some protection to the dormant stages from predation.

As helpful as continuous snow cover can be, this benefit can be entirely wiped out due to prolonged cold, wet periods in the spring months. Immature stages are most susceptible to bacterial and fungal diseases. Not only does cold weather favor such organisms, it slows butterflies' development, keeping them in their vulnerable life stages longer. Spring 2010 was warm and, while not droughty, fairly dry.

The combination of the winter snow pack and favorable spring conditions got many species off to a very strong start this year. Strong butterfly numbers became apparent very early on when red admirals experienced a population boom starting in mid May. As the summer progressed, the weather continued to be favorable for a continued good year. It's been warm without being extremely hot. Precipitation has been fairly regular, with a few brief bouts of very heavy rain and no prolonged droughty periods. The butterflies have continued to respond favorably to these conditions, with many species showing very strong populations this year.

By Doug Taron

Summer birds at Bluff Spring Fen

The 2010 breeding bird season was an average one. As usual, red-winged blackbirds and robins are the most abundant species (too many to count accurately!). But 2 nesting pairs each of orchard orioles, willow flycatchers, warbling vireos, and red-headed woodpeckers were this summer's highlights. One pair of the woodpeckers seemed to have survived the blow-down of its nesting tree during one of the storms with high winds, and there seems to be a third pair in the finger lakes area (old gravel pits). That may be where the green heron nests also. A red-tailed hawk nested in the cemetery savanna. Even a killdeer found a spot to lay her eggs in the ever-disappearing open gravelly areas. And of course, the cowbirds were successful also, as evidenced by a common yellow-throat feeding a big, baby cowbird.

Editor's note: Cowbirds are notorious for laying eggs in other birds' nests.

Report by Bird Monitor Margaret Mechtenberg

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