



Nature Notes

Journal of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society

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President's Corner

By Ann Earley

Many thanks to Jack Harris for taking WGNSS members on a virtual tour of the flora and fauna of the LaBarque Creek Watershed at our March general membership meeting. Jack updated members on past and planned changes in the area, its conservation plan, and WGNSS' continuing involvement in researching and documenting the natural features of this unique place. After enjoying Jack and Pat's great photographs from the area, everyone in attendance certainly had spring fever and was looking forward to a future visit!

The **April general program meeting** will be held at **7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 7** at Powder Valley and will feature a presentation by **Timothy Lescher** on his **snapping turtle research**.

Studying at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Tim received the 2009 Mickey Scudder Scholarship from WGNSS for his research project "Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrocheilus temminckii*) and Eastern Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) Population Trends, Distribution, and Habitat Utilization in Southeastern Missouri." Join us on April 7 to hear Tim's update on his field biology work! This meeting is the Society's annual membership meeting, and members will vote to elect Society officers and Board members, to be installed at the May banquet. Opportunities remain to participate and serve the Society on the

WGNSS Board. If you are interested in serving on the Board, please contact me.

Also at the April general meeting, WGNSS members will have the opportunity to vote on revisions to the Society Constitution and By-Laws. These documents were last revised in 1999. The Board has been reviewing both documents in recent months to change them to better reflect current practices, use of electronic communications, and to make both documents more usable by Society and Board members. The proposed revisions and additional information are included elsewhere in this newsletter.

We are very pleased to announce that our speaker for the **WGNSS banquet** to be held on **Thursday evening, May 13**, will be **Professor David Wagner**, author of **Caterpillars of Eastern North America**. He will be speaking about the many defenses caterpillars use to avoid predators, especially birds, and how birds have evolved to overcome these defenses. Save the date for this special event, and watch for additional details, including registration information, on the website and in upcoming email announcements and next month's issue of *Nature Notes*.

Jackie Chain deserves special thanks for agreeing to oversee the distribution of *Nature Notes* following Marjorie Richardson's recent retirement from this position. This "behind-the-scenes" job is critical in maintaining the Society's communications with its members, and in making sure each newsletter reaches its eager readers in a timely manner. We greatly appreciate Jackie's

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willingness to take on this responsibility, in addition to her duties as leader of the Thursday birding group. Thank you, Jackie!

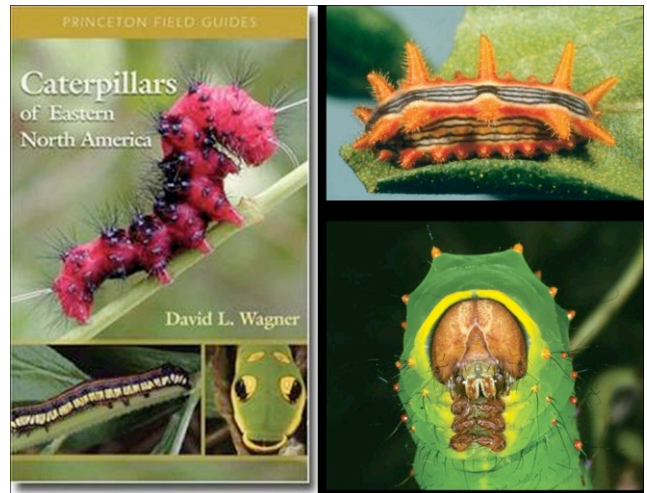
WGNS Scholaship Recipient to Speak at April General Meeting

The WGNS April general program meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 7 at Powder Valley and will feature a presentation by Timothy Lescher on his snapping turtle research. Studying at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Tim received the 2009 Mickey Scudder Scholaship from WGNS for his research project “Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) and Eastern Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentine*) Population Trends, Distribution, and

Habitat Utilization in Southeastern Missouri.” You won’t want to miss Tim’s update on his field biology work! This meeting is also the Society’s annual meeting, so we will be electing Society officers and Board members and voting on revisions to the Society’s Constitution and By-laws. Please plan to attend and vote on these important matters!

WGNS Banquet to be Held on Thursday, May 13—Save the Date!

Mark your calendar for Thursday, May 13, the date of this year’s WGNS banquet! In a presentation suited to all nature lovers, Professor David Wagner will show the wonderfully deceitful ploys that caterpillars employ to dupe birds and other would-be predators. His talk will feature a menagerie of bizarre and beautiful creatures, many featured in his book, *Caterpillars of Eastern North America: A Guide to Identification and Natural History*. The talk will include a superb set of images that will give all a greater appreciation for the early stages of Missouri’s moths and butterflies. Along the way Dr. Wagner will touch on silk, spices, perfume, and other matters that you'd never associate with a bunch of bugs! Dr. Wagner will be selling and autographing copies of his book – already in its 5th printing and the winner of a national book award in 2006.



The banquet will also feature the announcement of this year’s WGNS scholaship winners and presentation of the Lifetime Achievement

Award. Save the date for this special event, and watch for additional details, including registration information, on the website and in upcoming email announcements and next month's issue of *Nature Notes*.



January Bird Report

Compiled by Jim Ziebol

Sightings: A large flock of Pelicans and 100 White-fronted Geese were found at RMBS on 1/23-WGNSS GRP., DB. On 1/24, 2 Pied-billed Grebes and 2 Pintails arrived at HL-FH. Frank also had a Wood Duck there on 1/1. A visit to RMBS on 1/21 produced 250 Swans (6 Tundra), 3 Black Ducks, 1 Pintail, 12 Bufflehead, 1 Green-winged Teal, 1 Redhead, 20 Canvasbacks, 100 Com. Mergansers, 1 Hooded M. and a Snow Goose-JM, KP. Dan Kassebaum found a Laughing Gull at CL on 1/1. On 1/18, a 1st W. Glaucous Gull and several Cackling Geese were seen at RMBS-Bru. Bill also found an ad. Glaucous at HL on 1/26. Four Snipe, a Killdeer and a Green-winged Teal were seen at the Hwy. 143 slough on 1/14-JC, DC.

A Harlan's and a dark morph Western Red-tailed Hawk at CB on 1/2 were photographed by Bill Rudden. Another dark Red-tailed occurred at Howell Is. CA on 1/14-RAB. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen at Clydesdale Pk on 1/14-JM. On 1/5, Dick Coles found Rough-legged Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike and 50 Lapland Longspurs along Hwy. 50 west of Trenton. Two Peregrine Falcons were seen harassing a N. Harrier at CB on 1/2-CA.

A Great Horned Owl was observed at Boschertown Rd. on 1/18-JM. E. Phoebes were found in Jeff. Co. on 12/27 and 1/16-MP. Mark also had a Sapsucker in late January. Hairy Woodpeckers were found in TGP on 1/12-SMcC, and on 1/23 at BCA-WGNSS, DB. Two Red-shouldered Hawks were also seen at BCA on 1/28.

A flock of 20+ Yellow-rumped Warblers wintered along Layton Rd., HL-Bru. Connie Alwood also reported 8 Yellow-rumps and 12 Cedar Waxwings at BCA on 1/1. An unusually large number of Lapland Longspurs, numbering in the thousands,

were joined by a Snow Bunting at CB on 1/8-KP, mob. A Merlin stalked these birds for several days-JE, Bru. In early January, a flock of 40 Lapland L. were found on Bruns Rd.-FH. Ann McCormack found 50 Lapland L., plus 6 Creepers, 7 Lincoln Sparrows and 6 Turkey Vultures at BCA on 1/8. On 1/1, 40 Great-tailed Grackles, 12 Rusty Blackbirds, 6 Eurasian Collared Doves and 4 Brewers Blackbirds were reported from St. Charles Co.-CA. Dick Coles showed the group a Brewers Bb at Baldwin Lake/Peabody CA on 1/28.

Backyard Birds-Comments: John Vogel reported two Hermit Thrush at his Hillsboro home this winter. Connie Alwood has a Red phase Screech Owl and a Great Horned Owl at his Ferguson home. On 1/27, two Eurasian Collared Doves were courting outside his yard-JZ. A hybrid duck, Com. Goldeneye X Merganser, was found at RMBS-Bru. A Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow appeared at HL on 1/16-Bru, TB.

Contributors: C. Alwood, D. Becher, R A Bodman, T. Borman, J. Chain, D. Coles, J. Eades, F. Holmes, D. Kassebaum, A. McCormack, S. McCowan, J. Moe, K. Paradise, M. Peters, D. Rogles, B. Rudden, J. Vogel, J. Ziebol

Abbreviations: BCA, Busch Conservation Area; BP, Borrow Pit HL; CB, Columbia Bottoms Conservation Area; CC, Clarence Canon NWR; CL, Carlyle Lake; FP, Forest Park; HL, Horseshoe Lake; LCCL, Little Creve Coeur Lake; mob, many observers; RMBS, Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary; TGP, Tower Grove Park.



January Botany Report

Compiled by George Van Brunt

January 4, 2010—Due to a predicted (and realized) morning temperature near zero with below zero wind-chill, the WGNSS botanists decided to stay home and study botany books.

January 11, 2010—**Katy Trail, Research Park Access**, St. Charles County, MO (contributed by George Van Brunt).

Four botanists (Fr. Sullivan, John Oliver, Jan Stark, and George Van Brunt) came out of hibernation after a week-long deep freeze and

met at the Research Park Access to the Katy Trail in St. Charles County. The sky was cloudy with snow flurries, the temperature was in the 20°F's, balmy compared with the preceding week, and the ground was covered with a few inches of snow. We walked the Missouri Research Park Trail and then turned east for a short distance on the Katy Trail and returned by the same route. By the end of our 2+ hour walk, the sky had cleared and it was sunny.

Our excursion was mostly an exercise in identification of senescent herbaceous plants. Most of the same summer/fall features are present, but they generally are brown and shriveled. Remnants of stems, leaves, and fruits make identification a somewhat interesting challenge. Around the parking lot we found *Ratibida columnifera* (Mexican hat), *Arundo donax* (giant reed), *Scrophularia marilandica* (late figwort), *Mimulus alatus* (winged monkey-flower), and *Penthorum sedoides* (ditch stonecrop). *Arundo donax*, uncommon in Missouri, is a native of Southern Europe, southern Asia, and Northern Africa. Presently it is found in scattered counties across the southern United States, south of 40° latitude. We found a small stand of this very tall grass in a ditch by the side of the road; we estimated its height between 15 and 20 feet.

On the Missouri Research Park Trail, we found *Cunila origanoides* (dittany), *Agalinis tenuifolia* (narrow-leaved false-foxglove), *Verbascum thapsus* (mullein), *Dasistoma macrophylla* (mullein foxglove), *Polystichum acrostichoides* (Christmas fern), *Hackelia virginiana* (stickseed), *Elymus hystrix* (bottlebrush grass), *Lindera benzoin* (spicebush), *Boehmeria cylindrica* (false nettle), *Aplectrum hyemale* (Adam-and-Eve orchid), *Tilia americana* (basswood), *Campanula americana* (tall bellflower), *Carya cordiformis* (bitternut hickory), *Acer negundo* (boxelder), *Acer saccharum* (sugar maple), and *Verbesina alternifolia* (wingstem). The winter leaves of *Aplectrum hyemale* were buried in snow, but we found the dried remains of 3 of last year's fruiting stems bearing the empty remains of their capsules. These stood out against the snow and were easier to spot than usual in the generally brown ground cover of winter. The common names of this orchid, Adam-and-Eve and putty root refer to their corms, short, vertical underground stems that are characteristic of this

species. Each corm lasts 2 years and gives rise to another corm connected to the first by a short, horizontal underground stem called a rhizome; this is reminiscent of the Genesis account of Eve being formed as an extension of Adam, from his rib. A single plant may form a string of connected corms over a period of years. It is only the youngest corm of each plant that forms one fairly large leaf (4 - 5 inches long) in the late fall. This leaf lies flat on the ground and photosynthesizes all winter, storing food in the corm. It withers in the spring after which the corm sends up its flowering stem. The strategy of producing its leaf in winter allows the plant to be exposed to sunlight without shading from taller plants. The species name *hyemale* means "belonging to winter", referring to this winter leaf. The corms contain a mucilaginous substance which early pioneers used as glue, hence the other common name, putty root. This species ranges over the eastern half of the United States and Canada and can be found in rich bottomland forests.

On the Katy Trail we found *Ulmus rubra* (slippery elm), *Cercis canadensis* (redbud), *Staphylea trifolia* (bladdernut), and *Dioscorea villosa* (wild yam). The slippery elm can be distinguished from the American elm (*Ulmus americana*) by its buds which are rusty-colored and hairy, while those of the American elm are smaller, light brown, and smooth. The common name of *Ulmus rubra* comes from the mucilaginous nature of the inside of its bark. Mucilages are a group of large (>200,000 daltons; a dalton is the weight of one hydrogen atom) plant molecules that form slippery dispersions in water; they don't dissolve, but are suspended. Most plants form varying amounts of mucilage in different parts of the plant, but some plants like *Aplectrum hyemale* and *Ulmus rubra* form more mucilage than others. *Ulmus rubra* bark has been, and still is, used medicinally. It may be steeped in water to form a tea for throat ailments, powdered for use in poultices for wounds, boils, ulcers, burns and all inflamed surfaces, or chewed as a thirst quencher.

Along the Katy Trail, we saw a Carolina wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) foraging in the leaf litter. A white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) was hunting in its characteristic head-down position

on a tree trunk, while a Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*) sat on a nearby branch. They were beautiful in the sun-dappled snowy landscape. A white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) ran away in the distance.

January 18, 2010—Lower Meramec County Park, St. Louis County, MO (contributed by Fr. James Sullivan).

Ten botanists (Jeannie Moe, Jane Deschu, Nancy and Wayne Clark, John Christianson, John Oliver, George Van Brunt, Burt Knoll, Jack Harris, and Fr. Sullivan) gathered at Lower Meramec County Park. The last time we visited here we were surprised to find *Quercus lyrata* (overcup oak) on the northernmost trail. Today we wanted to confirm that identification by finding the characteristic acorns. Most oaks have tough acorn cups, but overcup has its cup made of thinner material, and its cup encloses most of the nut. We didn't find any perfect acorns, but we found many of the empty cups. There are a few smaller overcup trees here, but the cups were under a taller tree in the wet area. The species epithet, *lyrata*, refers to the leaves being shaped like a lyre. They are narrower near the petiole, but they expand apically. Some lyres must have looked like modern electric guitars! *Quercus palustris* (pin oak) is common here, but these are not planted for ornament as they are in many of our parks. They are naturally occurring in the wet bottom woods. We also recognized *Quercus bicolor* (swamp white oak) leaves and fruits on the trail. The leaves are pale underneath and the acorns have long stems. Bottomland trees were everywhere: *Populus deltoides* (cottonwood), *Acer saccharinum* (silver maple), *Acer negundo* (box elder), *Carya illinoensis* (pecan), *Carya cordiformis* (bitternut hickory), and *Celtis occidentalis* (hackberry).

January 25, 2010—Clydesdale County Park (and adjacent parts of Grant's Trail), St. Louis County, MO (contributed by Jack Harris).

Time: 9:30–11:40am.

Conditions: Temp. 31–32°F, cloudy, wind a chilling 20 mph +/-, sporadic light snow and sleet throughout the morning.

Hardy participants: Rev. Jim Sullivan, Wayne & Nancy Clark, George Van Brunt, John Oliver,

Jack Harris, Pat Harris, Burt Noll, and Jeannie Moe.

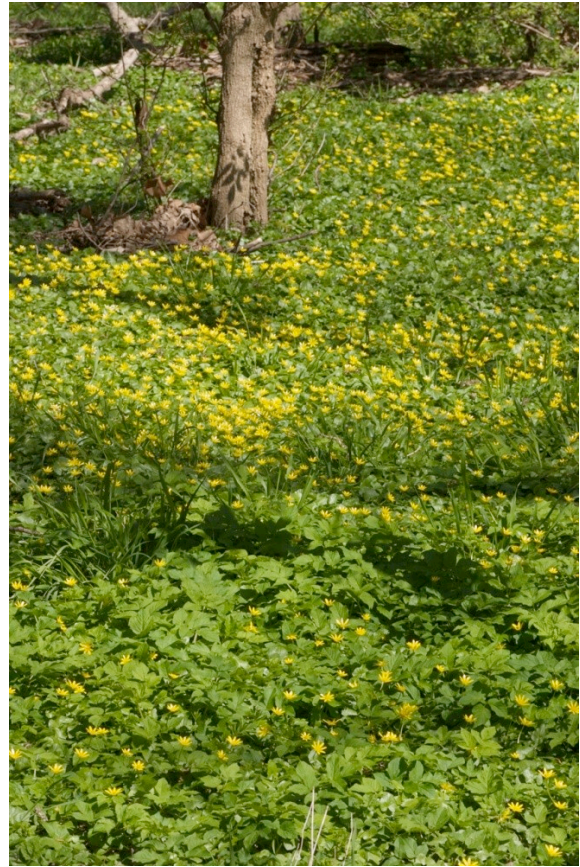
The route for the day led north from the parking area on the Fox Run Fitness Trail and around to the intersection with the Twin Bridge Trail which was then followed to Grant's Trail and over to and along the Bottomland Trail. The return route retraced our steps back to the parking area. The tall timber of the Bottomland Trail provided welcome relief from the chilling winds that swept the more open areas along the upland trails. Two small landscape areas along the Fitness trail are in the process of being restored (from what was once farmland) to native habitat by the County Parks staff. These areas have been cleared of weedy/woody growth, seeded with tall grass prairie species and subjected to prescribed fire – a welcome stewardship policy from County Parks that adds diversity to the visible habitat. Thus several species of native and non-native plants in their winter form were present along the circumventing paved walkway. The first challenge to our winter botany skills was a plant that some speculated might be a member of the genus *Penstemon*. Rev. Jim Sullivan corrected that by pointing out that the *Penstemon* fruit capsule is 2-parted, oval, brown, and splits along the septum, whereas the *Hypericum* fruit capsule is 3-parted, an elongated oval, splits along the septa, is red at first, then drying to brown. The plant in question was a member of the genus *Hypericum*. Along the way Wayne Clark advised us that the frequent occurrences of the feathery white inflorescences of goldenrod was the species *Solidago altissima* and that *Daucus carota* ssp. *carota* (Queen Anne's lace, wild carrot) was abundantly present. Interpreting the lore of plant litter lying on the trail, Rev. Sullivan also noted that the flat, star-like shapes lying on the path were the remnants of persistent calyces of *Diospyros virginiana* (persimmon/possumwood) fruits. The fruit itself had long since been consumed by a wide variety of winter-hungry wildlife. A small, trailside grove of persimmon trees with their bark of dark, knobby, small rectangular tiles provided corroboration. A large, pale brown, shriveled stem, brilliantly magenta in late summer, of *Phytolacca americana* var. *americana* (pokeweed) was still upright, supported by surrounding deciduous woody species. An old friend, *Oenothera biennis* (common evening



Alliaria petiolata along KATY Trail, W of Boone Bridge on March 30, 2009. Image by Jack Harris

primrose), also was present. Tallgrass prairie grasses such as *Elymus canadensis* var. *canadensis* (Canada wild rye), *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian grass), and *Tridens flavus* (purpletop) were noted. The recent Park landscape tree plantings along the trails drew the attention of the trekkers. Several young trees with curling patches of papery white bark with rusty brown underside was indicative of *Betula nigra* (river birch), and closer looks found one with the nursery name tag still present. It was a cultivar of the river birch. Several new *Acer saccharum* (sugar maple) were also located along the trail.

Despite recent valiant efforts by the County Parks to clear non-native species, signs that several exotics were making the inevitable comeback were present, e.g., *Eleagnus umbellata* (Russian olive), *Lespedeza cuneata* (sericea lespedeza), *Lonicera mackii* (bush honeysuckle), and particularly abundant were new stems of *Albizia julibrissin* (mimosa, silk tree). Signs of a serious infestation of a non-native species were also abundantly present along the woodland trail in the bottomland of Gravois Creek. The



Ranunculus ficaria var. *bulbifera* smothers the surface at Grant's Trail Bottomland, Clydesdale Park in early April, 2009. Image by Jack Harris. For more info visit <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/rafi1.htm>

emergent winter leaves of *Alliaria petiolata* (garlic mustard) were ubiquitous, a bad omen for the future of any native species of forbs and grasses. At the time of this field trip there was no sign of another developing threat, *Ranunculus ficaria* var. *bulbifera* (lesser celandine) (see photos). The population is expected to be widely present in the area later in the early spring. This invasive species is spreading explosively and may even pose competition for garlic mustard? Those wishing to see a carpet of yellow flowers should schedule a trip to the area the first week of April.



February Entomology Report: Bugs, Bees and Butterflies...all about the Xerces Society

By *Richard S. Thoma*

Jennifer Hopwood, the Midwest Pollinator Outreach Coordinator for the Xerces Society, introduced herself to the WGNSS entomology

group and talked about new position in St. Louis. She works to provide resources and training for pollinator habitat management, creation, and restoration to agricultural professionals and land managers across the Midwest. Jennifer has a Master's degree in entomology from the University of Kansas under the guidance of Chip Taylor (Monarch Watch).

At the meeting, we learned that the Xerces Society is the only environmental organization dedicated primarily to the preservation of invertebrates. The society is named after the Xerces Blue, the first butterfly known to have gone extinct when urban sprawl in the San Francisco area eliminated its habitat. Much of the work done by the Society is devoted to prevent further extinctions of other endangered invertebrates.

Jennifer noted that invertebrates as a group tend to be poorly studied and as such little is known about their life histories, distribution and population trends. The problem is that the vast majority of invertebrates are small and inconspicuous and don't draw the attention like other organisms like the charismatic mammals and birds. Because they are not studied as much, invertebrates are underrepresented on the endangered species list. Jennifer estimates that there should be approximately 16,000 invertebrate species on the endangered species list. There are only 183 and greater than 50% of these are butterflies.

During this presentation, Jennifer talked about how valuable invertebrates are. Most invertebrates are the primary food source for many animals. Invertebrates are the primary pollinators of flowers. Many of the foods we eat are produced from insect pollinated flowering plants. It has been estimated that invertebrates were involved in one out of three bites of food people consume. Invertebrates also play a crucial role as decomposers in natural communities.

Despite their utility, protecting invertebrates is something hard to sell to the public. Few people are interested in preserving habitat just for a nondescript little beetle. The Xerces Society uses a multipronged approach to preserve invertebrates. First, the society collaborates with others. For example, if habitat needs to be preserved for a charismatic mammal or bird, the Xerces Society will add invertebrate data showing that several

other species would benefit too. Second, even invertebrates have charismatic species. People are very interested in preserving colorful butterflies. An example of this is the society's ongoing efforts to get the Taylor's Checkerspot on the endangered species list. This butterfly has been found in only 14 sites in Oregon and at each site less than 50 individuals have been found at any one time. In Oregon, there is public support to have the Taylor's Checkerspot listed as an endangered species primarily because it is such a beautiful butterfly. The Xerces Society also takes part in legal proceedings for the benefit of invertebrates. Finally, and this is where Jennifer comes in, the Xerces Society has devoted much of its resources for educational outreach. Jennifer travels around the Midwest providing resources and training to all who are interested in invertebrates.

One of the major areas the Xerces Society has gotten involved in is the Native Pollinator Initiative. With honeybees declining due to colony collapse disorder, there is a great deal of interest for using native bees as pollinators. Native bees may even be better than honeybees because they tend to stick with one flower species at a time. This floral consistency is valuable to farmers growing monoculture crops. The Xerces Society has found that there is a direct correlation between the amount of natural habitat set aside and crop pollination. As a representative of the Xerces Society, Jennifer talks with farmers and farm groups about the benefits of installing pollinator habitat. In addition, she also gives talks about invertebrate conservation to natural history organizations such as the WGNSS entomology group. We in the WGNSS entomology group would like to welcome Jennifer to St. Louis and look forward to working with her in the future.



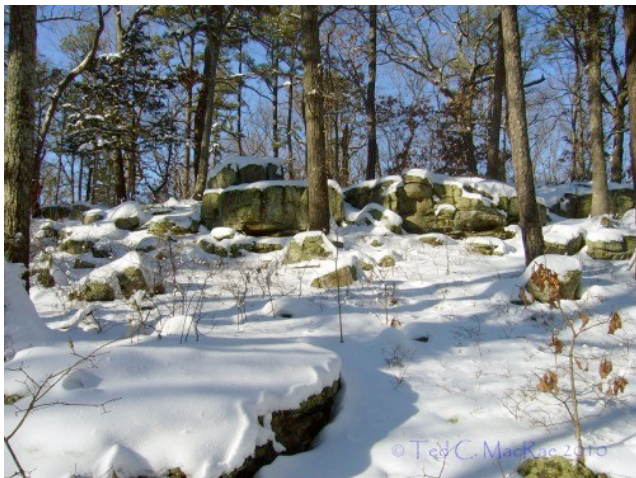
Hawn State Park – Winter Hiking at its Finest¹

By Ted C. MacRae

Two weekends ago we received another wave in what has been an unusually frequent series of

¹ Reprinted from an article posted February 14, 2010 on the author's website: <http://beetlesinthebush.wordpress.com>

snow events. I'm sure my northern (and Patagonian) friends are not impressed, but at our middlin' latitudes snow falls rather infrequently and rarely sticks around for long when it does. This winter has been different, with snowfall almost every week, it seems like, and temperatures that have remained cold enough to keep it around for awhile. While this latest snowfall measured only a modest 1-2 inches here in the St. Louis area, a 7-inch blanket (as measured by my hiking stick) fell in the Ozark Highlands just south of here. Coming as it did at the start of the weekend, I welcomed the opportunity to go for a hike — among my favorite wintertime activities — in a landscape that is rarely seen covered in deep, newly-fallen snow. My daughter Madison loves hiking as much as I do [even in deep snow](#), so the two of us headed off to perhaps my favorite of Missouri's public areas, [Hawn State Park](#). I have long adored Hawn for its premier hiking, fascinating [geology](#), and unusual [flora](#), and every time I visit I find something new to love about it.



[Lamotte sandstone outcrops on the White Oaks Trail.](#)

Such was the case on this visit, when Madison and I decided to explore the White Oaks Trail, a newer trail that I had not yet hiked. I was a little concerned whether we would even be able to get to the park, as the road leading into it had only been partially plowed (and we had already seen one car off the road, causing me to reach down and switch on the 4-wheel drive). Most of the park was snowed in, but we were able to reach the uppermost parking area, leaving our snow-covered trail-finding abilities as the last obstacle to overcome. After studying the trail map and looking at different route options, I asked Madison

if she wanted to hike 2 miles, 4 miles, or 6 miles. She immediately blurted out “6 miles!”, so off we went. I was disappointed to see that we were not the first persons to have the idea, as we entered the trail only to find two sets of footprints (one human, one canid) leading off in front of us. It did, however, make following the trail easier, and in fact I've had enough experience finding trails through the Ozark Highlands that I never felt like I needed the footprints in front of us to point the direction.



[Madison next to the root wad of an 83-yr old wind-thrown oak tree.](#)

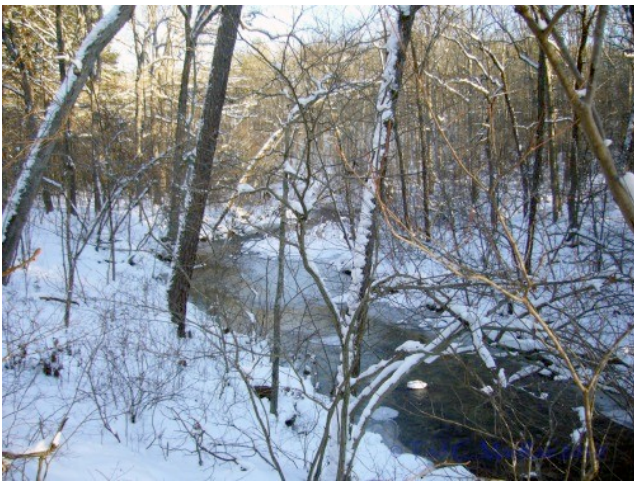
The White Oaks Trail followed nicely up-and-down terrain through mature white oak (*Quercus alba*) (appropriately) upland forest dissected by small riparian valleys before settling into relatively mild terrain through monotonous black oak forest. Just when I thought the trail wouldn't match the splendor of Hawn's Whispering Pines and Pickle Creek Trails, it wrapped around to the south at the far end and passed by a beautiful hoo-doo complex of Lamotte sandstone outcroppings supporting majestic, widely-spaced, mature shortleaf pines (*Pinus echinata*). The rock outcrops provided a perfect spot to break for lunch while looking out on the deep, snow-covered valley in front of us.

After counting a cut, wind-thrown black oak (*Quercus velutinus*) and determining a lifespan of 83 years, we took a connector trail down to the Whispering Pines Trail where it ran alongside the incomparably beautiful Pickle Creek. Our hope was to hike down to the igneous shut-ins, where hard, pink rhyolite channels the creek's clear, spring-fed waters through narrow chutes and



More Lamotte sandstone exposures along Pickle Creek, Whispering Pines Trail.

miniature gorges. Upstream from the shut-ins, Pickle Creek runs lazily through the softer Lamotte sandstones that overlay those ancient rhyolites, combining with the snow cover to create a scene as peaceful and serene as any I've ever witnessed.



Pickle Creek meanders lazily through Whispering Pines Wild Area.

Just above the shut-ins, Pickle Creek bends to the west, carving deeply into the soft sandstone. The porous nature of the rock allows moisture to trickle through and between the strata from the hillside above, creating seep zones that weaken underlying layers and lead to their collapse. The abundant moisture this winter and continuous cycles of daytime thawing and nighttime freezes have resulted in extraordinary ice formations along the bluff face and underneath the overhanging layers, the likes of which are rarely seen in our normally more open winters. Compare the scene in the first photo below with that in the second,



Ice formations along Pickle Creek, Whispering Pines Trail.



Same place as above in February 2009.

taken at almost exactly the same spot one year ago in February 2009.

Ice rarely forms over the small ponds and lakes that dot the Ozark Highlands, much less its creeks and other moving waters. The scene below of



Pickle Creek along Whispering Pines Trail.

Pickle Creek as it exits the sandstone gorge is a testament to the slowness of its movements and the unusually consistent cold temperatures experienced during the past several weeks. Only a short distance downstream, however, these lazy waters reach the bottommost layers of the erodible sandstones and encounter the hard rhyolite below. These half-a-billion year old layers of igneous rock are much more resistant to the wearing action of water, which rushes noisily through narrowly-carved chutes before fanning out in broad sheets over smooth, steep slopes below.

Sadly, there would not be time to visit the shut-ins. The short February day conspired with our snow-slowed pace to leave us with a too-low-sun by the time we reached the fork in the trail that led to the shut-ins, a mile in one direction, and our car, a mile in the other. Although we (both) had thought to carry flashlights (just in case), the last thing I really wanted to do was find myself stumbling over snow-covered trails through the dark with my 10-yr old daughter. Even had we survived the nighttime winter woods, I might not have survived the inevitable maternal reaction to such an escapade.



Arriving back at White Oaks Trailhead with a few minutes to spare.



Do You Have “An Inordinate Fondness”?

By *Ted C. MacRae*

When asked by an English cleric what his studies of nature’s diversity had taught him about the

Creator, 20th Century British geneticist and noted evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane reportedly quipped, “*He has an inordinate fondness for beetles.*” While there is some uncertainty whether Haldane ever actually spoke these words, no one can argue with their truth.



In fact, nearly half of all insects and one quarter of all described living species are beetles—350,000 and counting. They occur in virtually every habitat imaginable and exhibit innumerable, often brightly colored—

even iridescent—and architecturally elaborate forms. Their impacts on humans are also many, not only as pests and beneficial organisms, but also as cultural symbols and objects of passionate scientific and philatelic interest.

Given their unparalleled diversity and significance, I always found it puzzling that there were no nature blog carnivals¹ devoted to beetles. Nearly all other main divisions of natural history study do – [birds](#), [trees](#), [marine life](#), [plants](#), and recently [herps](#). Even [moths](#), another great insect order, have their own carnival, but the only available outlet for posts dealing with earth’s dominant taxon is within the broadly circumscribed [Circus of the Spineless](#).



All that has changed with my introduction of nature blogging’s newest carnival, [An Inordinate Fondness](#)—the monthly blog carnival devoted to beetles. The name honors J.B.S. Haldane’s perhaps apocryphal

riposte (made even more famous by the

¹ A “blog carnival” is a periodic, themed collection of permalinks to other blog posts – a sort of anthology where the works of multiple authors are compiled and presented to readers in a coordinated fashion.

² <http://aninordinatefondness.wordpress.com>

breathtakingly beautiful [An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles](#) written and illustrated by my friends and colleagues, Drs. Arthur V. Evans and Charles L. Bellamy). The [inaugural issue](#) posted in mid-February, includes 18 submissions by 17 contributors who have written about beetles from a diversity of perspectives ranging from ecology to photography to objects of art. Despite these different perspectives, all display an element of passion—a common feature among those who study beetles. Nobody displays this passion better than the late Frank T. Hovore, a widely known and respected student of longhorned beetles. The issue includes a video of Frank collecting one of the world's largest beetles, *Titanus giganteus*, in the Amazon forests of Ecuador. I hope you'll visit and savor the excitement that Frank displays upon encountering this enormous beetle, and then visit the sites of the contributors to enjoy the passion that they've shared in their individual posts.



St. Louis Zoo Lecture Series

By [Jim Jordan](#)¹

The St. Louis Zoo presents two lecture series: *Conservation Conversations* and *Science Seminar Series*. Both series are co-sponsored by the Academy of Science–St. Louis. Programs are **FREE** and open to the general public, no reservations required. Programs are held in the Living World, with free parking available in the North parking lot. Call (314) 646-4544 for more information.

¹ Curator of Education, Saint Louis Zoo.

CONSERVATION CONVERSATIONS

Adult lectures that focus on worldwide conservation issues and efforts supported by the Saint Louis Zoo.

Tuesday, April 13, 7:30–9 p.m.

ASI: Animal Scene Investigators

Dr. Laurel A. Neme, environmental journalist and author.

Go behind the scenes and explore the first and only Forensic Lab dedicated to wildlife with Laurel Neme. In her newly published book *ANIMAL INVESTIGATORS: How the World's First Wildlife Forensics Lab Is Solving Crimes and Saving Endangered Species*. Neme reveals how forensic scientists and the agents at the first and only animal forensics laboratory in Oregon are working to investigate wildlife crimes, protect endangered species, and stem illegal wildlife trafficking.

Killing wild animals is big business. While much wildlife trade is legal, a huge black market exists. Illegal wildlife smuggling can be worth as much as \$20 billion annually and ranks just behind drugs and human trafficking as the third largest illegal trade world-wide. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon is known as a “CSI of wildlife.” The lab investigates a wide range of cases and handles over thirty thousand cases. From polar bear rugs, tarantula paperweights, and crocodile-face ashtrays, to dried seal penises, bear paws and various potions and pills allegedly made to counteract impotence, to countless feathers, hides, bones, preserved animals, animal parts and full carcasses awaiting examination, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory feverishly works to solve crimes and forging a new field of science in the process.

Neme’s program provides new perspectives on animal forensic science while taking a fresh look at the trade of animal products and describing how it fits into the broader context of wildlife conservation. Combining mystery and science, this will be an absorbing and fast-paced account that takes readers into the cutthroat and complicated web of wildlife crimes and uncovers the hardworking animal investigators who are fighting to solve them and help stop the destruction of wildlife for profit.

Laurel A. Neme, Ph.D., is an international consultant specializing in natural resource management, who has worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of the Treasury. She writes for the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* and has written for the Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense Fund and World Wildlife Fund.

SCIENCE SEMINAR SERIES

St. Louis scientists present timely topics and/or recent "discoveries."

Wednesday, April 7, 7:30–9 p.m.

Salmon in the Trees:

Life in Alaska's Tongass Rain Forest

Amy Gulick, award-winning photographer and author, *Salmon in the Trees*.



Society Constitution and By-Laws: Proposed Revisions

By Ann Earley

The WGNSS Board is proposing revisions to the Society Constitution and By-Laws to be voted on by the general membership at the annual meeting in April. The existing documents have not been revised since 1999 and in some areas are no longer consistent with current practices. After reviewing various changes for several months, the Board has agreed on this updated version of these governing documents and recommends that they be approved by Society members. The goal of the changes is to make the documents more usable by Society and Board members, and to better reflect current practices and recent developments such as the use of electronic communications. An overview of the changes is included below for your reference. If you have questions or comments about the revisions, please contact me or another Board member.

Proposed changes to the Constitution:

Article III. Membership

The classes of membership are changed from four to three, as the Society no longer accepts Life memberships and has not done so for some time. All current Life members will maintain

that status for the duration of their lifetimes, but no new Life memberships will be accepted.

Article IV. Officers

The officers will be elected at a meeting of the Society held no later than May 31; the previous wording specified that the meeting was to be held in April. While this is the general practice, the proposed revision allows future flexibility in scheduling. Language has also been added to state that the term of office shall be two years beginning June 1.

Article V. Duties of Officers

The Secretary's duties have been stated as "keep the minutes of Board meetings and distribute them to the Board in a timely fashion."

Article VI. The Executive Board

The position of Hospitality Chairman has been added to describe the position responsible for planning the spring banquet and the winter party and for working with the Board in the months prior to these events. The members-at-large positions have been increased from three, to up to five, to expand opportunities for serving on the Board and provide a larger pool of candidates for officer positions; the member-at-large positions would no longer be limited to two consecutive two-year terms, but would be unlimited. A provision has also been added to enable the Executive Board to transact business by email or other means of electronic communication.

Article VIII. Meetings

The annual meeting of the Society will be held no later than May 31; this replaces existing language setting the annual meeting on the second Friday in April, which is no longer a viable date for this meeting.

Article IX. Quorum

References to "active" members at a "regularly" announced meeting have been removed.

Proposed Changes to the By-Laws:

2. Dues

The annual dues for each year shall be set by a majority vote of the Board. Dues shall be paid to the Treasurer by September 30 of each year. Members whose dues are more than three (changed from two) months in arrears shall be dropped from the roll. Honorary members are

exempt from paying dues. References to dues amounts for other categories of membership are deleted to provide greater flexibility in considering future dues changes.

The final sentence of the By-Laws is changed to state that at the beginning of each year, the Secretary (changed from President) shall provide all Board members with a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws.

A complete copy of the proposed Constitution and By-Laws can be found appended below in this newsletter (p. 15).



Group Activity/Walk Schedules

ORNITHOLOGY GROUP

David Becher, Chair—(314) 576-1146

Saturday Bird Walks

David Becher, Leader—(314) 576-1146

Saturday Trips meet at **8:00 a.m.**

April 3—Riverlands Environ. Area, Teal Pond

April 10—Des Peres Park

April 17—Tower Grove Park at Gaddy Garden

April 24—Busch Wildlife Area at HQ

May 1—Tower Grove Park at Gaddy Garden

May 8—Big Day/Migration Count

May 15—Castlewood State Park at HQ

May 22—Des Peres Park

May 29—Weldon Springs, Lost Valley Trail

Thursday Bird Walks

Jackie Chain, Leader—(314) 644-5998

Thursday trips meet at at the Des Peres Park parking lot (east side of Ballas Rd. just north of Manchester Rd) at **8:30 a.m.** (to avoid school and rush hour traffic). Depending on what birds are around, we may continue to other areas. Bring lunch as we usually have lunch in the field unless you plan to leave early. We will normally return by 3 or 3:30 p.m. If you have questions, please contact Jackie Chain at (314) 644-5998 or

chainjac@sbcglobal.net

BOTANY GROUP

George Van Brunt, Chair—(314) 993-2725

Botany Walks

Fr. James Sullivan, Leader

(now in his 44th year as Botany Walk Leader!)

Botany walks are every Monday. The WGNSS Botany Group visits many of the same locations as the Bird group: Busch Conservation Area, Shaw Nature Preserve, the Missouri Botanical Garden, Babler State Park and Cuivre River State Park. Learning plants will help you learn butterfly host plants. Sign up for WGNSS Botany Group emails from Jack Harris by contacting him at jahar@mac.com or (314) 368-0655 and receive an email no later than Sunday about the next Monday's trip.

ENTOMOLOGY GROUP

Rich Thoma, Chair—(314) 965-6744

Upcoming Meetings

Sunday, March 21, 7:00 p.m. Jane Walker, former board member and long time member of WGNSS, will be making a presentation on those delicate insects, the damselflies. Here is a chance to learn about and identify those odonates that can fold their wings. The location for this meeting will be at the Shaw Nature Reserve in Gray Summit. Directions for this event are as follows: Take I44 west (about 22 miles from the 270 interchange) to Gray Summit. The Gray Summit I-44 exit is # 253, just two exits west of Six Flags (Allenton/Eureka). After exiting I-44, turn left, crossing over I-44. Turn right at the intersection (at the Phillips 66) and go 50 yards to the large iron gates on the left side of the road. We will be gathering at the visitor's center prior to conveying a short distance to reserves conference center. For additional assistance with directions contact Richard Thoma at 314-541-4199.

Sunday, April 18, 7:00 p.m. On the 151st anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, join the WGNSS Entomology Group for an evening of discussion on "Charles Darwin, the Entomologist." Come to learn how Charles Darwin at an early age used insect collecting as a springboard to become established as a well renowned natural history scientist in the scientific community of Victorian England. Also come to the meeting to find out what the English entomological community thought of "On the

Origin of Species” and learn who came to Charles Darwin’s defense. For this evening’s event, Richard Thoma, chairman of the entomology group will lead the presentation. The location for this meeting will be at the home of Richard Thoma, 320 Frieda Ave., Kirkwood, MO. From the intersection of I-64/40 and I-270, take I-270 south to the Dougherty Ferry exit. Make a left and go east 0.25 miles. Make a right turn on Ballas Rd. At the bottom of the hill, the road splits. Stay to the right (this is still Ballas) and drive up the next hill and cross the bridge over railroad tracks. Make a left on Ann. Once again go down a hill and up the next. Make a left on Frieda. For additional assistance with directions contact Richard Thoma at 314-541-4199.

For general information about WGNSS, contact Membership Chairman Paul Brockland at pbrockland@sbcglobal.net or (314) 961-4661.



Editor's Corner

By Ted C. MacRae

NATURE NOTES BY EMAIL

Nature Notes is available not only by regular post, but also by email. Not only does this save paper and reduce mailing costs, it allows viewing of the newsletter and the included photos **in full color**. Embedded hyperlinks also allow instant navigation to email addresses and websites. Of course, you can always print your electronic copy of *Nature Notes* if you wish (if you do, please be sure to use

both sides of the paper ☺). The electronic newsletter is sent as a PDF, which can be opened using Adobe Reader (free download available at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>). Send your name and email address to the Assistant Treasurer at whittex@aol.com to receive *Nature Notes* by email.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We welcome all announcements of WGNSS or other nature related events in the St. Louis area, notices of published articles—especially those authored by members, and original nature oriented articles. Suggested topics include accounts of field trips you have taken, information about local natural areas, interesting nature sightings, or reviews of nature related books. Reprinting of articles from other sources requires permission from the copyright holder. Previous *Nature Notes* issues are a good source of ideas—copies of recent issues can be provided upon request.

Please direct all submissions by email to the Editor at ted.c.macrae@monsanto.com. Limit text formatting to bold for emphasis and italics for scientific names. Additional formatting (e.g., use of tabs and extra spaces, multiple hard returns, underlining, etc.) should be avoided, since it must be removed by the Editor during final formatting. Photographs are encouraged and will be published on a space-available basis. Contributions are welcome from all but especially encouraged from members—remember; this is your newsletter!





Constitution and By-Laws of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society (Proposed)

Article I. Name

This Association shall be known as the Webster Groves Nature Study Society (WGNSS, hereinafter referred to as the Society).

Article II. Purposes

The purposes for which the Society is organized are:

1. The stimulation of public interest in nature study
2. Adult education in nature study
3. Nature education for children
4. Encouragement of amateur research in natural sciences
5. Conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats

Article III. Membership

There shall be three classes of membership: Regular, Student, and Honorary. Honorary Membership may be conferred upon any individual by the Society in recognition of special service to the Society or outstanding accomplishment in some line of nature study. The name shall be proposed by three members of the Society and approved by the Executive Board. All current Life members maintain that status for the duration of their lifetimes, but no new Life memberships will be accepted.

Article IV. Officers

The officers of the Society shall consist of: President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The election shall occur at a meeting of the Society no later than May 31 each year. The term of office shall be two years beginning June 1 and no officer shall be eligible for the same office for more than two consecutive terms, with the exception of Treasurer, which shall have no limit on the number of two-year terms. In one given year, the President, First Vice President, and Second Vice President shall be elected; the following year, the Secretary and Treasurer shall be elected. Nominations shall be made by a Nominating Committee appointed by the Executive Board. This committee shall consist of at least three members. Other nominations may be made from the floor.

Article V. Duties of Officers

The President shall perform the usual duties of presiding officer, shall be chairman of the Executive Board, and shall appoint all special committees of which he/she may be an ex-officio member. The First Vice President shall assume the duties of the President in the absence of the President and shall act as Program Chairman. The Second Vice President shall assume the duties of the President in the absence of the President and the First Vice President, and shall act as Publicity Chairman. The Secretary shall keep the minutes of Board meetings and distribute them to the Board in a timely fashion. The Treasurer shall receive membership dues and keep the roll of the Society, keep all accounts, pay all bills and make financial reports at the request of the Executive Board.

Article VI. The Executive Board

The Executive Board shall consist of all the officers of the Society, the Editor, the Membership Chairman, the Hospitality Chairman, and up to five members-at-large. The Editor, the Membership Chairman, and the Hospitality Chairman shall be appointed by the Executive Board, and the five members-at-large shall be appointed by the Executive Board. The Executive Board shall authorize the expenditure of funds, and promote and conserve the welfare of the Society. One-third of the members of the Executive Board shall constitute a quorum. The Executive Board may transact business by email or other means of electronic communication.

Article VII. Groups

Special interest groups in nature study may be organized at any time by members sharing similar interests. The Chairmen of such groups are expected to participate as Executive Board members as voting members.

Article VIII. Meetings

There shall be an annual meeting of the Society no later than May 31. Field trips and other meetings of whatever nature may be arranged at the discretion of the Executive Board and/or group chairmen.

Article IX. Quorum

Twenty-five members at an announced meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Article X. Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution and By-Laws, recommended to the Executive Board and announced to the membership 30 days in advance, may be adopted at any regular or specially called meeting of the Society by a majority vote providing that a quorum is present.

1. Officers

Officers elected for a two-year term in April shall be installed at the annual banquet meeting in May.

2. Dues

Regular and Student Members: The annual dues for each year shall be set by a majority vote of the Board. Dues shall be paid to the Treasurer by September 30 of each year. Members whose dues are more than three months in arrears shall be dropped from the roll. Honorary Members are exempt from paying dues.

3. New Members

The name of any prospective new member shall be submitted to the Membership Chairman who will then send him/her one copy of *Nature Notes* together with an application for membership.

At the beginning of each year the Secretary shall provide all Board members with a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws.