

The  
Webster Groves  
Nature Study  
Society  
1920-1995

A Tribute  
to  
the 75th Anniversary  
of WGNSS

**Contents**

**Presidents of the Webster Groves  
Nature Study Society**

1920-21 A. F. Satterthwait	1957-58 Richard Wasson	<i>Presidents.....1</i>
1921-22 Jasper Blackburn	1958-59 David Jones	
1922-24 Mrs. Jasper Blackburn	1959-61 Dr. Harold Bulger	<i>First 50 Years of WGNSS: 1920 to 1970.....2</i>
1924-26 A. E. Mueller	1961-64 R. Ludlow Hill	<i>The Nature Groups: 1920 to 1970.....8</i>
1926-27 Dr. Julius H. Gross	1965 Richard Anderson	
1927-29 Sterling P. Jones	1965 Earl Biffle	
1929-30 A. F. Satterthwait	1966-67 Mrs. Helen Hill	<i>WGNSS in 1970..15</i>
1930-31 Pierre A. Vogel	1968-69 Paul Bauer	
1931-32 Dr. O. W. Brandhorst	1970 James F. Comfort	<i>The Webster Groves Nature Study Society: 1970 to 1995.....16</i>
1932-33 Dr. E. P. Meiners	1971-72 Margaret Feigley	
1933-34 Stuart L. O'Byrne	1972-73 Kyrle Boldt	
1934-35 Mrs. Phil Rau	1973-74 Floyd Hallett	
1935-36 Miss Olive Schregardus	1974-75 Rose Ann Bodman	<i>The Botany Group: 1970 to 1995.....17</i>
1936-37 Harold I. O'Byrne	1975-76 Walter Liddell	
1937-38 William Pickens	1976-77 Claudia Spener	
1938-40 A. D. DeVilbiss	1977-78 Tom Brooks	<i>The Entomology Group: 1970 to 1995.....20</i>
1940-41 Mrs. William Pickens	1978-80 Karen Haller	
1941-42 Miss Maude Lodewyks	1980-81 Blaine Ulmer	
1942-43 Arthur Christ	1981-83 John Molyneux	<i>The Ornithology Group: 1970 to 1995.....20</i>
1943-44 David Rau	1983-85 David Ulmer	
1944-45 Mrs. Edith Long	1985-87 Jim Curtis	
1945-47 Miss Frances Pickel	1987-89 Robert Gaddy	
1947-49 J. Marshall Magner	1989-90 Mary Frances Goodloe	<i>The Webster Groves Nature Study Society: The Future.....26</i>
1949-50 Miss Ellen Cone	1990-91 Cornelius Alwood	
1950-51 Mrs. Ernestine Magner	1991-93 Martha Gaddy	
1951-53 James F. Comfort	1993-94 Blaine Ulmer	
1953-55 Joel Massie	1994-95 Peggy Leonard	
1955-57 Rex Conyers		

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## **The First 50 Years of WGNSS: 1920 to 1970**

### **How WGNSS Began**

The following pages 3 through 15 are a condensed version of *A Short History of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society*, a booklet written by a committee of members to honor the Society's 50th anniversary in 1970.

The men, women and children who were early members of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society gathered together to study nature. They explored fields and woods, river banks, ponds and streams, vacant lots and even along railroad tracks. They looked, listened and tried to learn everything they could about creatures, plants, rocks and the heavenly bodies. They sought to identify what they observed. They tried to understand how living things related to their environment and to each other. They took notes, collected specimens, made use of books and called on experts.

Alfred F. Satterthwait, the son of a Pennsylvania farmer, organized the group. Born in Chester County, he attended the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, then worked the family farm for four years before joining the Department of Agriculture. He married Elizabeth Allen in 1911. Satterthwait came to Webster Groves in 1918 when he was in charge of the United States Entomological Station which had been moved to the St. Louis area from Charleston, Missouri.

The Satterthwaits loved nature, believing that close association and knowledge of nature were character building. Although they loved children, they had none of their own. Soon after moving to Webster Groves in that period right after World War I, they invited some members of a garden club and several prominent citizens of Webster Groves to form an association to study nature. In 1920, the year the Webster Groves Nature Study Society was formally organized, there were 85 adult members and some 30 children.

The only requirements for adult membership were one dollar per year and a sincere interest in nature. Junior members paid a quarter. By May 1921, there were 129 active adult members and 116 junior members.

The Society encouraged beautiful gardens and the elimination of billboards. An April 1921 clipping from the *Webster Groves News Times* reported that a WGNSS committee, including Dr. Irene M. Blanchard, A. F. Satterthwait and Sterling Jones were campaigning for the removal of rubbish heaps and empty tin cans that marred the beauty of otherwise clean streets and

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became breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes. They urged residents to eliminate standing water by punching holes in used cans and bury rubbish or have it hauled away to a community dumping place.

WGNSS held an annual meeting for the election of officers and for the annual reports of the several groups. They held general meetings and expeditions every month for the society as a whole. The Juniors met on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons. Everyone was welcome at all group meetings and members were encouraged to bring friends. From the beginning, WGNSS was a happy active organization.

The purposes of the Society were:

1. The stimulation of public interest in nature study,
2. Adult education in nature study,
3. Nature education for children
  - a. in Junior membership, and
  - b. in connection with other organizations
4. Encouragement of amateur research in natural sciences,
5. Conservation of wildlife.

The Laboratory of the U.S. Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine served as the meeting place for the Society from 1918 when the Satterthwaits came to Webster Groves until about 1936 when the Lab was transferred to Urbana, Illinois. The Lab gave WGNSS members the opportunity to use microscopes and other equipment as well as the extensive Satterthwait library and insect collection.

Alfred Satterthwait had an endless supply of ideas for making nature appealing to all, especially young people. He influenced the lives of many young people through employment in the Lab during the Great Depression. Many went into fields that related to entomology and nature.

The Laboratory served as a resource for anyone wishing to ask questions about birds, insects or other natural history subjects. Officially, the Lab ran experimental plots to test the effects of various insecticides.



*Alfred and Elizabeth Satterthwait in 1919, birding near Charleston, Missouri.*

## **The Laboratory**

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**Memories of a  
Charter  
Member,  
Victor Stones**

My association with WGNSS began with an item in the *Webster News* announcing a meeting to be held at the high school the following Friday for anyone interested in nature. My mother wanted someone to go with her and I, being 13 and the youngest in the family, was pressured into going.

We attended the meeting and Mr. Satterthwait, the president, announced that anyone joining that night would be a charter member, dues one dollar per year for adults and ten cents for juniors. Mother laid down the dollar and asked me to join. I agreed with the stipulation that she pay the ten cents since I was broke as usual. We both were charter members.

The early days of the society seemed to be principally as a bird watching group, although entomology must have been a close second. One flurry of excitement occurred when a Society member reported that her 12-year-old daughter knew all the birds at a glance. A special field trip was arranged to see the child prodigy. It took but a few minutes to discover that the girl knew some bird names and simply called out the first name that came to mind when she saw a bird. Poor Mr. Satterthwait took it hard since he was by training and by nature absolutely pedantic about any identification. To see names scattered about without any connections to the original object was a shattering experience for him.

One problem arose during the Society's formative years which could well have stopped everything if something hadn't been done. It was the custom to hold the meetings in members' homes, and each hostess felt it her duty to have refreshments afterwards. Each tried to outdo the others. Soon hostesses found themselves serving full-sized dinners with all the trimmings. I well remember one meeting at our home when I'm sure Mother blew the budget for some time to come.

Shortly afterwards, it became an unwritten law that there would be no refreshments served at meetings. This rule was stretched occasionally during the summer when lemonade was acceptable.

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Members of WGNSS were invited to take a field trip to the Entomological Society's cabin on the Ranken Estate on Antire Road in St. Louis County. These 2,000 acres of steep wooded hills, broad valleys, spring-fed streams, rocky outcroppings, small caves and river-bottom land were ideal for all phases of nature study.

In the spring of 1929, WGNSS had decided to build a cabin there to use as headquarters for the Society's nature study activities. In order to finance this undertaking, some WGNSS members pledged to contribute money for construction of the building, leasing of the land and maintenance of the building once completed. Those members who gave \$25 or more comprised the first Lodge Unit.

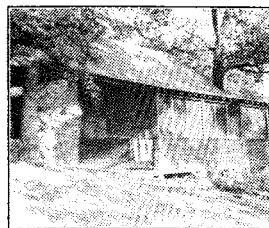
This group held the keys to the building and was responsible for regulating its use. There was to be no card playing, drinking, dancing or parties, according to the set of rules the Lodge Unit drew up. Any WGNSS member could get a key from a member of the Lodge Unit to use the cabin for nature study. Members were to sign the registry at the end of their stay.

Mr. C. S. Stones drew up the plans and constructed the cabin for \$1,457.87. Since there was not enough money in the funds, Dr. Brandhorst advanced enough to finish paying the cost. On May 25, 1930, the Lodge Unit invited the WGNSS membership to a housewarming at the new cabin. Activities began on the evening of the 24th for those interested in astronomy. The next day, field trips were led in search of birds, flowers, rocks, insects, butterflies and fishes.

For years many WGNSS activities centered around this lodge. A museum and library attested to the varied interests of the members. Each year there was a wood-chopping bee when the year's supply of wood was gathered by the men and the women gave the lodge a thorough housecleaning. This was a day of work and fellowship which everyone enjoyed.

In 1940, the Lodge Unit turned the building over to the general membership of the Society since the Society was now incorporated and the members felt that they could afford the \$50 per year lease. During World War II, many WGNSS members were in the military service

## **The Lodge at Ranken Estate**



*The Lodge at Ranken Estate in about 1930.*

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and those at home had an increased work load. Gasoline rationing cut back on the use of the lodge.

In 1947, soon after the war ended, part of the Ranken Estate was turned over to the Boy Scouts and became Beaumont Reservation. Tyson Park and a government ammunition storage dump took the rest of the tract of land.

The Society held an auction to sell the building contents and members vied with each other for the books, specimens and furnishings of the lodge. Then the building was formally turned over to the Boy Scouts and it became the home of the caretaker.

Although several field trips were held at Ranken after that, it wasn't the same happy place. Longtime WGNSS members held fond memories of this era.

## Nature Notes

On a bright October day in 1929, "Espy Jay" (*nom de plume* of Sterling P. Jones) and Stuart O'Byrne decided to produce a bulletin for the members of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society and include it with the monthly announcements. The first issue was sent with the announcements of November, 1929.

Members were asked to submit names and, as a result of this poll, the fourth issue of February 1930 was called *Nature Notes*. Since then, many editors have produced more than 450 monthly issues (as of 1970) and the contributors are legion.

The subjects of the articles have reflected the personal interests of the authors or of the group interests reported by individuals. Every editor from the first to the present one has had a problem in getting people to write about their observations and thoughts on nature for *Nature Notes*. Although some items have been voluntarily submitted, more often the editor has had to plead and even coerce likely authors to produce.

The Society is fortunate to have bound copies from 1929 through 1965. Bound copies also are owned by the St. Louis Public Library. The Smithsonian Institution, National Audubon Society and University of Missouri have files of *Nature Notes*.

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## Impact and Influence of WGNSS on People

"These observations should be published where they will be made known!" said Phil Rau to a younger member of the Society in the early 1930s. He and other knowledgeable naturalists and scientists voiced this same theme repeatedly over the years. Rau himself published over a hundred papers in entomological and ecological journals plus two books, *Wasp Studies Afield* with the assistance of his wife Nellie, and later *Jungle Bees and Wasps of Barro Colorado Island*. He shared his experience in publishing with budding writers and encouraged all to make their observations available through publication of papers.

Others actively encouraging the less experienced people to publish worthwhile studies included Alfred F. Satterthwait, founder of WGNSS, who was in charge of the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Entomology Field Laboratory in Webster Groves. He provided temporary employment during peak seasons to a number of Society members. He not only encouraged budding entomologists, but also ornithologists, botanists and herpetologists.

Over the years, other professionals in the natural sciences generated enthusiasm among WGNSS members. Among these valued friends were Dr. Edwin P. Meiners, Miss Edith Glatfelter, Dr. Edgar Anderson, Mrs. Edgar Anderson, Julian Steyermark, Lothar F. Pinkus, Max Schwarz and Herman Schwarz.

A considerable volume of published papers was inspired by these men and women. Some of these young people went on to become professional scientists while others took up their studies as an avocation. Among those who entered the professions, we should mention Dr. Ralph Swain in entomology, Dr. Julian Steyermark in botany, Marshall Magner in entomology, Harold O'Byrne in ecology and biology, and James Jackson in conservation and teaching.

Encouragement in the study of the natural sciences led to the publication of discoveries and observations. Noteworthy are the studies of Albert and Dorothy Heinze in botany and herpetology, Miss Magdalen Pfeffer in geology, Stuart O'Byrne in astronomy, and Leslie Hubricht in several biological subjects.



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**The Nature  
Groups:  
1920 to 1950**

**The Astronomy  
Group**

During the early years of WGNSS, one of the first groups to be formed was the Astronomy Group. The chief optical aids were the bird glasses of the members, often augmented by the three-inch refractor of A. E. Mueller, who sometimes was chairman of the group. An interest in the phases of the moon and its biological manifestations included the night-singing birds, insects and other creatures. Members paid particular attention to the aspects of constellations through the seasons. They affiliated with nation-wide efforts to observe and record meteors.

Outings often took place at the Lodge or on the hilltop at the Schnaedelbach cottage near Allenton. One noteworthy trip included the observation of an all-night aurora on May 29-30, 1932.

Characteristically, members would lie on their backs on blankets on the hilltop, all in a row. One or two would point out constellations, stars and other objects of interest. They might discuss astronomical concepts until it was almost too late for the star watchers to be enthusiastic about the bird walk scheduled for early the following morning.

**The Botany  
Group**

Elizabeth Satterthwait, Hattie Stones, Edgar and Dorothy Anderson, Mrs. L. Pinkus, Edith Glatfelter and John Kellogg were active members of the Botany Group in the 1920s. Kellogg, a member of the Missouri Botanical Garden staff, was a collector of wild plants from the 1880s until his death in 1940. Dr. Anderson, long associated with the Garden and Washington University, sparked members of the group to enroll in his Spring Flora course at the University. Dr. Julian Steyermark, who later wrote *Spring Flora of Missouri* and *Missouri Flora* as well as many scientific papers, and Dr. Robert Wood, curator of the Garden's Herbarium, also joined the Botany Group. The inspiration and friendship of these trained scientists was of inestimable value.

During the 1930s, Botany Group field trips frequently went to the forested hills and valleys, the fields and spring branch-watered meadows around the Lodge

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at the Ranken tract. To those who search with seeing eyes, no season is without its charm and bounty.

Other names are remembered from the 1930s and 1940s. Oscar Peterson, known to friends as the Vagabond Dreamer, painted delicate water colors of wildflowers. His lifetime of youthful zest led young people to an interest in wildflowers. Maude Lodewyks piloted many botany trips. Later, her husband David Rau made a photographic record of our native flora.

In addition to the Ranken tract, the Botany Group enjoyed field trips to Rockwoods Reservation where Harold O'Byrne was the naturalist. He and his wife Olive were genial hosts. Later, George and Polly Moors succeeded the O'Byrnes and also became favorites of WGNSS members. In the 1950s, WGNSS was able to use the Round House at Rockwoods. Julian Neill and Charlotte Vogt laid out nature trails in the area where they labeled native plants.

At Hill's preserve near Seckman, the Botany Group enjoyed the expert guidance of Lud Hill and Art Christ. Members' summer cottages offered botany and sociability in equal parts. The Schnaedelbachs were in Allenton, Sam Alfend and Art Christ on the Meramec River near Fern Glen and Lou Weber at Sherman. These were happy hunting grounds for students and professionals. The railroad near Sherman was a rich resource, often yielding plants not found elsewhere.

Each May, the big event was a trip to Pickle Spring to see native azaleas in bloom. Here in 1951, Art Christ and Mr. Peterson found the very rare large whorled pogonia (*Isotria verticillata*). This small stand of orchids, flourishing in the midst of exuberant spring growth, had been cited only one other time in the state, by Steyermark near Poplar Bluff.

Washington State Park, Cuivre River State Park and Busch Wildlife were familiar territory to the Botany Group. So was Sunny Ranch where Ruby and Burrell Pickering's hospitality offered another place for outings devoted to conservation and nature.

The valuable guidance of old timers and enthusiasm of new friends combined to rediscover plant species which had long been unreported in our area.

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## The Entomology Group

The Entomology Group, one of the first of the WGNSS groups, would have to have been uppermost in the mind of founder Alfred F. Satterthwait, entomologist and a founder of WGNSS. In 1926, R. C. Lange, an entomologist working with Satterthwait at the Laboratory, served as chairman, and Mrs. J. H. Gross as secretary of the Entomology Group. A 1926 schedule showed ten meetings and two field trips per month.

Junior members were first mentioned in 1927. Mrs. Mae Pickens, a valued member with a warm personality and willingness to work on any necessary tasks, devoted tireless effort to teaching the wonders of nature to children. Her husband Will also served WGNSS for many years and was one of the mainstays of the Lodge Unit.

On November 4, 1927, the first prize for the 2nd Annual Insect Collection Contest went to Helen Holly whose collection included 515 specimens, 319 species representing 15 insect orders. The contest, a brainchild of Satterthwait, interested many young St. Louisans. His meticulous plans, more complete than today's Science Fairs, included instructions for both contestants and judges plus a list of 92 subjects from which a contestant could choose.

Through the years, the "Ent" meetings included speakers and visitors from such diverse places as Hawaii and Russia. Others came from the U. S. Department of Agriculture and Missouri Department of Agriculture. In June 1931, Dr. Parfentjer, a Russian entomologist, discussed arsenic insecticides and said that several million tons had been used over the past 75 years. Alfred Kinsey, then of entomological fame, discussed his extensive study of Cynipid gall wasps at a 1932 meeting.

The records of the Entomology Group are impressive for the members' broad coverage of insect orders, individual life histories and entomology's relationship to other sciences, including crop production, public health, stored products, insects, parasitism and insect sounds.

In June 1936, the last meeting was held at the Entomology Laboratory prior to its moving to Urbana,

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Illinois, where Ralph A. Blanchard, a charter WGNSS member as a youth, would be in charge. After this, meetings were held at members' homes. Beginning in 1942, meetings were regularly held with the Entomology Section of the St. Louis Academy of Science. In 1946 after World War II, Dr. E. P. Meiners called together interested people at his home to revive the WGNSS Entomology Group. Following Dr. Meiners' death, this group was named the E. P. Meiners Entomology Club.

Although there is no geology section now, during the 1930s and 1940s, there were enthusiastic members in the Geology Group. Dr. Julian Steyermark was chairman from 1933 to 1935 and Stuart O'Byrne was a lively leader 1936 to 1937. Magdalen Pfeffer and Adolph Dreyer contributed remarkable knowledge and devotion.

## The Geology Group

Favorite field trip sites were the Ranken tract where the Lodge was available, Meramec River Quarry, Fern Glen, Highway 66 and Marshall Road where cuts had exposed the strata. Members regularly made presentations at the monthly meetings and wrote lively articles for *Nature Notes*.

At the January 1934 meeting, Dr. Steyermark said, "Everything depends upon geology. It gives us some idea of the wonderment of the universe; it teaches us the fundamentals of evolution; it interprets the past for us." In 1935 they enjoyed a field trip to Sulphur Springs where mastodon bones were unearthed. In 1940, the group made a geological survey of the Ranken tract. Often the notices of geology field trips read, "Bring hammers, chisels, baskets (for specimens) and lunch."

During 1940 and 1941, Mr. Robert McAdams of the St. Louis Academy of Science, who worked on archeological digs at WPA projects, conducted field trips to nearby excavation sites. One of his talks, according to *Nature Notes*, was "Restoration of Prehistoric Indian Culture in Jefferson County with an Analysis of the Earliest People Found in the Area and a Description of the Kimmswick Bone Bed."

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In June 1942, *Nature Notes* reported that Magdalen Pfeffer discovered a hitherto unknown fossil, a new species of cephalopod, in the Fern Glen formation of Dennis Hollow near Valmeyer, Illinois. In honor of its discoverer it was named *Imitocera pfefferae*. In August 1943, the group visited glacial deposits west of Chain of Rocks Waterworks, and *Nature Notes* reported that the 50-foot Pleistocene deposit was a terminal moraine and "without a doubt the most striking outcrop of the region."

After 1942, activities of this group waned, perhaps because of World War II when so many were busy with the war effort.

### The Herpetology Group

The Herpetology Group first appears in the November 1931 *Nature Notes*. Albert Heinze and his wife, Dorothy Boyer Heinze, who were the mainstays of the group, published articles in COPEIA, exhibited their collections of reptiles and amphibians at the 1932 Flower Show and contributed fascinating articles to *Nature Notes*. The late Marlin Perkins, then a curator at the St. Louis Zoo, was a speaker at meetings and led field trips in 1932.

Following an inactive 1933, ten WGNSS members reorganized the group in May 1934 with Dorothy Heinze as chairman. The objectives were an elementary study of herpetology and the collection of local specimens. Albert Heinze served as curator of herpetology at the Lodge Nature Museum. Regular meetings were discontinued in the fall of 1936.

### The Ichthyology Group

Pierre Vogel and R. C. Lange founded the Ichthyology Group and held the first meeting on April 30, 1926 at the U. S. Entomological Laboratory. Twenty-seven people attended. These men presided over most meetings and presented studies, reports, movies and slides on all forms of aquatic life. Many meetings were held at the Lange home where he had an aquarium.

Field trips included treks to the creeks on the Ranken Estate, seining expeditions to Horseshoe Lake, tours of the Beldt Fish Farm in northwest St. Louis

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County, a joint meeting with the Academy of Science at Washington University in 1930 and a fish fry at the Lodge in spring of 1933. The group averaged 20 members for several years. Group activities discontinued in 1934.

A. E. Mueller was the organizer and first chairman of the Microscopy Group which began in the late 1920s and continued through the summer of 1932. Mueller prepared slides for viewing and for study. He often exhibited his photomicrographs of spirogyra and other algae.

Dr. Meiners and Mr. Pinkus led the majority of the meetings which were held at the Entomological Station in Webster Groves. Microscopic studies of various subjects were presented at the meetings, including cross sections of pig hoof and the base of a fingernail, section of abdominal skin, human hair with the larval case of a nit attached, hair of humans and various animals, fish scales and butterfly wing scales.

This group comprised WGNSS members with an earnest desire to discern and describe the sounds of nature, including the songs and calls of birds, trills and croaks of frogs and toads, hisses and rattles of snakes and the clacking, sawing, buzzing and grating noises of insects. The voices of the sea, wind, rain, snow and ice also were discussed and interpreted. A listing of nature sounds, *Nature Melody Terminology*, was compiled in 1930.

The Music Group, formed in 1939, was considered a misfit in WGNSS and looked down upon by the other more scientific groups. This group had no pretensions and no particular aim. It was simply a nucleus of classical record owners plus a surrounding group of listeners who gathered monthly to share the best in classical music. The group was scandalously lax in format, kept no minutes, had no reports. However, this group lured several valuable members into WGNSS.

### **The Microscopy Group**

### **The Nature Melody Group**

### **The Music Group**

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## The Ornithology Group

Since the beginning, WGNSS has had an energetic group of birders with lively meetings and field trips that attract those interested in birds from throughout the St. Louis area. The early trips were unsophisticated. Ten to 15 hardy enthusiasts would gather before daylight and, with two or three pairs of low-power opera glasses and a Reed or Chapman handbook, spend a morning in the wooded area along Elm Avenue or Berry Road. Lists were short and high-flying warblers escaped identification, but they offered their thrills then as now.

In 1930, WGNSS became an early participant in the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas census. The first census covered the Ranken tract and 26 species were recorded by Marshall Magner. In 1951, the first Christmas census of Busch Wildlife Refuge took place. This remains a featured activity of the group. WGNSS also takes part in an annual Big Day which is held in early May each year.

The Busch Wildlife Refuge at Weldon Springs has logged the most birding hours for many years. Countless field trips have been held there in addition to thousands of hours spent by individuals and informal groups. When the refuge was first opened, WGNSS was asked to cooperate with the Conservation Commission in making a monthly bird count in the area. Routes were laid out and the faithful dutifully walked the four to seven miles designated, turning in careful reports of their findings. They also placed bluebird houses and kept records of nesting and young birds.

The Ornithology Group history would not be complete without mentioning happy years at Ranken. From the early 1930s until 1947, Stuart O'Byrne coordinated monthly field trips which resulted in a wealth of data. Birders also located good birding sites at Hill's Hill and Rockwoods, in the river valley and marshes of St. Charles County and along the reaches of Horseshoe Lake, Alton Lake, Pere Marquette Park, and the Calhoun unit of the Mark Twain Refuge, the latter under the generous auspices of Dick and Sally Vasse.

Later the long-neglected levee region on the east side between Jefferson Barracks and Fort Chartres was rediscovered by Wally George and received particular

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attention during the summer and early fall when wanderers from the South were found.

All these and other areas have been described in *A Guide to Finding Birds in the St. Louis Area*, a combination guide and annotated check list compiled by Dick Anderson and Paul Bauer. This was the latest of a series of annotated check lists beginning with Sterling P. Jones and continued by Gene Wilhelm.

Members have given unselfishly of their time and transportation facilities to encourage newcomers. J. Earl Comfort is responsible for many of our later-day experts since it was under his patient guidance that they perfected the art of identification. Hospitality and both "know-how" and "where" have been graciously extended to visiting birders who wished to list our specialties. Again, J. Earl must be cited for his continued efforts to collect and collate data and make it accessible by writing monthly articles for *Nature Notes* and contributing to other publications.

The Ornithology Group has been conscientious in tabulating records of nesting species, migrants and rarities, thereby preserving an accurate ornithological picture of this region. Today, with the Webster Groves Nature Study Society bending much of its efforts to the field of conservation, it is hoped that the "miracle of the returning bird" will be preserved for another generation of bird watchers.

For 50 years, thousands of people have enjoyed and contributed to this nature organization. Some have been members for a long time. Others drop out but more come in. Today, our membership is 430. Area members number 229, others 71, with one honorary, 21 complimentary and eight life members. WGNSS has members in 15 states, Washington, D.C. and England.

We look forward to opportunities for WGNSS in management of resources to conserve and perpetuate plants, wildlife, soil, clean air and unpolluted water. With the instability of life today, we can find solace in knowledge of the world around us and strength in a close association with the riches of nature.



*Marshall Magner shows a saw-whet owl to children in Jefferson County, Missouri (about 1947).*

## **WGNSS in 1970**



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## The Webster Groves Nature Study Society: 1970 to 1995

James P. Jackson



*Burrell Pickering enjoyed any visitors who appreciated the natural beauty of Pickering Ranch (photos taken by Jim Jackson in the 1970s).*



The harbinger for the past 25 years was something that evolved in the 1960s. Burrell Pickering, with help and devotion from his wife Ruby, had established a 500-acre nature preserve in Warren County. Then, upon having joined WGNSS, the Pickerings generously invited all members to use their spread, known as Sunny Ranch, as a sort of home base. The Pickerings converted an old barn into an attractive museum for member collections of nature objects. Burrell established a series of nature trails and posted informative signs to mark them. Finally he built and set out numbered bluebird boxes and recruited WGNSS families and friends to keep records on them. This was a project for growth at its best. Case in point: In 1968, with 20 nesting boxes scattered about Sunny Ranch, a total of 62 bluebirds were fledged; by 1972, with a total of 60 nest boxes, bluebird production jumped to 299.

The Pickerings were conservationists whose devotion to wild nature had positive influences on all WGNSS visitors. Yet, as is typical of too many good things, the relationship ended when Burrell died in 1981 and Sunny Ranch was passed on to heirs. After that the membership responded to a fact already well known: With many other habitats on which to pursue nature interests, particularly on public lands, the loss of a temporary home base would be easily overcome.

In fact, members had been doing studies on the August A. Busch Memorial Wildlife Area since 1951. That was the year when the first Christmas bird census was conducted there, a tradition that has been continued yearly ever since. No mention of that particular wildlife area can be justified without fondly remembering James F. Comfort. Among his other nature devotions, Jim kept monthly records on the birds of the Busch Area until he died in a freakish auto accident there in 1975. The next year, WGNSS members were aided by the Missouri Department of Conservation in setting aside a special sanctuary in Jim's memory. There, for all to see, is a sign proclaiming the *James F. Comfort Memorial Nature Study Area*.

Way back in the 1930s, WGNSS organized itself into 10 different interest groups, too many to keep

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viable for 75 years. Lately there have been only three groups--botany, entomology and ornithology--but this has not resulted in a shrinking of the membership. It has, in fact, lately increased it. Back in 1970, WGNSS boasted slightly more than 300 members, including 15 from outside of Missouri and, amazingly, two from England. Today the roster lists 450 members from Missouri plus 49 more from out of state. It seems that 500 should be a good starting number for the next 25 years.

October 25, 1968 was a momentous day, to say the least. It was the first day Art Christ and I went on a weekday botany hike. Little did we know what we had started! We continued to botanize on my day off for the next 22 years.

Our weekly forays gradually grew in numbers, as other WGNSS members began to take part. Everyone was welcome, but folks did need to learn that we achieved our objectives at all costs. We were targeting sites that looked good on maps, but they were not always easy to reach. We often hiked without trails, negotiating steep slopes, fields of poison ivy, stinging nettles and smilax. We sometimes didn't stop for lunch until three in the afternoon! At times, I feel like I am leading a funeral procession when we all step out of our cars at the scene of our Thursday expedition.

Edgar Denison took us by surprise when he announced that the botany group was being reactivated in WGNSS. We had been too busy with field trips to plan regular indoor meetings. Edgar's move proved a good one. We have been enjoying beautiful and rewarding indoor presentations ever since, and weekend walks have been scheduled with greater regularity.

During the past 25 years, the natural areas movement was born in our state. Art and I met several times with state agents to share maps and plant lists for our special places. We also gave extensive reports on plants being considered for the new rare and endangered lists.

Our botany group invented names for places we visited. Bluffs southeast of Pacific were "Pacific Palisades," and a small canyon in LaMotte sandstone

## **The Botany Group: 1970 to 1995**

The Rev. James M.  
Sullivan

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became our own "Orchid Valley." The former has given its name to an adjacent wildlife area, and the latter is now a Hawn State Park Natural Area by the same name.

Over this period of years, we discovered two new sites for the rare *Isotria verticillata* orchid. Art found two native species new to the state list: *Carex bromoides*, a sedge, and *Vulpia bromoides*, a grass. The identical species names are, of course, a coincidence. The only thing these two plants have in common is being "nondescript" to anyone but Art! Art became a significant resource for the Missouri Botanical garden in the collection and identification of the sedges.

Karen Haller, John Molyneaux and Art Christ were visiting a fen site in the Ozarks when they found *Anemone quinquefolia*, another Missouri species hitherto unnoticed. On a walk at Sam A. Baker State Park, a tree at the edge of the road caught our attention. Its leaves were vaguely familiar--it was the first discovery of a native yellowwood tree in southeastern Missouri. On another expedition, we had been invited to explore the valley of Turkey Creek south of Branson. I remember giving this timely reminder: "If you see a tree with leaves like a pawpaw, check the terminal bud. If it is egg-shaped and hairy, you've got it." It seemed only seconds later when Betty Nellums spoke up. "Is this it?" It was--the rediscovery of *Magnolia acuminata* in the southwestern corner of the state. All previously discovered southwestern sites were by then under lake water.

On one of our trips to Ste. Genevieve County, Art and I found a club moss we had never seen. When we got back to the book, we found the species (*Lycopodium dendroideum*) and we also found Steyermark describing the very place we had been that day! One of our highlights of more recent years was getting to meet Steyermark when he returned from Venezuela. He was the "great enabler" who even in his absence served as our constant guide to Missouri plants.

Mary Wiese coined the term "rich ditch" for a linear wetland along a highway of southeastern Missouri. It was truly rich in native lowland plants. More recently, we have found endless "dead ditches." We are told that herbicide runoff is a real problem.

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Though we are an amateur group, we can be justifiably proud of the advancement and experience of so many of our members. A few of us have even ventured into book authorship: Edgar Denison with his *Missouri Wildflowers* (1972), Bill Summers with his *Missouri Orchids* (1981), Joanna Turner who collaborated with George Yatskievych on the *Catalogue of the Flora of Missouri* (1990), and now Karen Haller with *Walking With Wildflowers* (1994).

Lately we have all enjoyed collaborating with George Yatskievych and Bill Summers on our longer botanical excursions. George is working toward the publication of an updated *Flora of Missouri* and it is exciting to be part of his research in the field.

Carl Darigo has become our able chronicler, recording in *Nature Notes* the stories of our botanical escapades. And Carl tells all! From lost mufflers to lost botanists, it's all there in print! Who needs the tabloids?

We suffered the loss of a very dear leader in February of 1991 when Art Christ died of a stroke at the age of 84. Art enjoyed our regular botany trip the Thursday before his death. What he has meant to our botany group these past 25 years cannot be overstated. Art leaves us a legacy of enthusiasm and a lighthearted spirit in the pursuit of our Missouri plants.

August of 1993 brought another loss: Edgar Denison passed away at 88. The master gardener and guru of Missouri wildflowers remains a legend throughout Missouri.

Our enjoyment of wild plants continues. Once a week, after assessing the weather and other factors, we decide where our trip will proceed. Everyone used to call Art for the details. Now Catherine Filla has become our center for information. With her help we come together for each new adventure in our floral heritage.

It is always a special treat to gather with folks who appreciate the natural world. Everyone is welcome! You don't have to be an expert. Everyone contributes. We constantly rediscover the plants through each other's eyes.

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## **The Entomology Group: 1970 to 1995**

J. M. Magner

After World War II, through the efforts of Dr. E. P. Meiners, a prominent lepidopterist, interest in entomology was revived at organizational meetings at his home in October and December, 1960. Thereafter, regular meetings were held at Washington University through the efforts of L. F. Pinkus. This independent group continued until the final picnic meeting at the Pinkus home in Glendale, Missouri, on 14 June, 1968.

It was not until 30 September 1984 after urging by David Tylka, that Marshall Magner presented a formal request to the WGNSS board to reconstitute an Entomology Section as set out by the Constitution and By-laws. The first meeting was held 14 November 1984. Meetings have continued with an average of eight meetings and three field trips each year. In addition, the group has participated in the Missouri Butterfly Counts for 1993 and 1994.

There have been many meetings where insect topics and experiences of interest to our special group have served as lessons about the importance of insects in our daily lives. Probably our most popular meetings have been "Kids' Nights" which appeal to all ages. A large trash bag of insects is emptied on the table, and the children select and assemble a collection as they learn to pin, label and classify.

## **The Ornithology Group: 1970 to 1995**

Kevin Renick

Birding has always been a popular activity in WGNSS, and the past 25 years have seen a growth in this pastime that is reflective of a greater interest in birding worldwide. The St. Louis area has become an excellent birding region, and WGNSS members have made important contributions on several fronts. There were a number of legendary WGNSS birders in the 1960s whose knowledge of birding and patience in teaching their skills to others would prove enormously influential. Earl Comfort, Kathryn Arhos and Bertha Massie led trips and shared their wisdom with at least two generations of birders. Bertha Massie's global life list of over 3,000 species by 1970 was considered an incredible number. Phoebe Snetsinger, who acknowledges a debt to those early birders and is now the most legendary WGNSS birder of all, currently numbers over

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7,800 species on her life list. She is working toward the number 8,000, which she says is the last big number she can reach. Her remarkable achievements are indicative of the caliber of birding expertise that evolved from WGNSS greats like Comfort, Arhos and Massie, an opinion shared by another veteran birder, former WGNSS president Dick Anderson.

"We have had a core of birders that I would put up against anyone in the country," Anderson commented. "They were absolutely top notch. People like Bill Rudden, Skip Russell, Carmen Patterson, Eugenia Larsen, Phoebe Snetsinger and Richard Coles. We used to have meetings at Carmen Patterson's house where we would go over things like the little points of separating the Carolina from the Black-capped Chickadee."

Anderson talked about other listing records held by WGNSS members. Tim Barksdale set a new state record by logging 312 species in Missouri in 1991. Anderson himself probably has the largest St. Louis area life list, an amazing 338 species. His record tally of 267 species seen in one year in the St. Louis area was first broken by Joe Eades, then by Phoebe, who tallied 275 birds in 1978. Ron Goetz set a new record in 1986 by logging 276 species, a record that still stands.

Many St. Louis birders now routinely see over 200 species per year. "It didn't used to be that way," Anderson said. "When I started, only one birder got over 200 species. So that's a big change."

The increased seriousness of birding in the past quarter century is largely due to what Phoebe Snetsinger called "an explosion of knowledge" in the field. She mentioned the advent of tape recorders and the impact of highly specialized birding guides such as a 1986 shorebird guide by Haymann and Prater.

"So much more is known about identification now, said Phoebe. "The Haymann book has incredibly detailed information. If Earl Comfort had had that book, he would have been in seventh heaven."

Many accomplished WGNSS birders have led trips and educated others over the past 25 years. Thursday birding trips were led by Kathryn Arhos in the late 1960s and by Kyrle Boldt throughout the 1970s and

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1980s. Saturday trips have been led by Jim and Marge Ruschill, George Barker, Kay and Ernie Mueller, Claudia Spener, Floyd and Vi Hallett, Rose Ann Bodman and Bill "Mr. Gull" Rudden. For roughly the past decade, David Becher has been ornithology chairman and has shown great dedication to the task of leading weekly trips to "wherever the birds are." Paul Bauer has led birding trips for beginners to Forest Park, Busch Wildlife Area and Riverlands. Richard Coles, who heads Washington University's Tyson Research Center, has taught bird-related classes to college students, led trips and allowed WGNSS members to bird the riparian woodlands of Tyson. Veteran birder Bill Rowe and the late Mary Wiese taught classes in birding at schools and at the Missouri Botanical Garden, giving emphasis to the importance of bird songs as identification tools.

Dick Anderson and Paul Bauer made vital contributions to St. Louis birding with the 1968 publication of their book *A Guide to Finding Birds in the St. Louis Area*. This was the first attempt at a local bird-finding guide and proved very useful, putting forth the notion that St. Louis was an area of distinguished birding possibilities, not just the home of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow. Thirty years later, when talk began about updating the book, tremendous changes had taken place in local birding (many more species, new birding sites and more birders with updated knowledge about migration patterns). What began as an effort to update the guide soon turned into an ambitious new book called *Birds of the St. Louis Area: When and Where to Find Them*. Scheduled for publication in spring 1995, it is co-authored by Dick Anderson, Paul Bauer, Randy Korotev, Jack VanBenthuyzen and Connie Alwood. The book will put St. Louis and WGNSS on the map in the world of birding literature. It is also worth mentioning the official St. Louis area Checklist of birds which Anderson and Bauer produced in 1978. Widely used by WGNSS members, the list was substantially revised by Anderson in 1990 to include many new species reported in our area during the previous decade. Dick could be forgiven some mixed feelings when his new

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list was rendered out of date only a year later by the unprecedented appearance of a Ross' Gull at Riverlands!

The high number of rarities and unusual species that have occurred shows why this region is an excellent if unpredictable birding area. Local records include amazing sightings prior to 1970. Dick Anderson stated that the Band-rumped Storm Petrel found near Defiance in 1950 may have been the "rarest bird seen here in the last half century." Earl Comfort compiled a personal list of local rarities before he died, with a Varied Thrush found in Calhoun County in 1976 by Joe Eades being his last life bird. Other amazing birds found in the past 25 years include: Rock Wren, McCown's Longspur, Pomarine Jaeger, Lark Bunting, Purple Gallinule, Pacific Loon, Parasitic Jaeger, Mew Gull, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga and Garganey.

But it was two rare gulls that brought St. Louis the most attention from the international birding community and the media. The appearance of the Slaty-backed Gull, a Russian species, in late December, 1983, created a huge stir. This was its first appearance in the continental U.S. and birders came from all over the country. Bill Rudden, who has an uncanny ability to find rare gulls, first saw the bird near the old water treatment plant off East Grand; it later settled in for a spell at Alton Dam where hundreds were able to view it. Much effort from Phoebe Snetsinger and Ron Goetz was needed to finally ID this bird. Phoebe called the Slaty-backed saga "one of the greatest birding experiences of my life."

Then on December 31, 1991, an incredulous Tim Barksdale found a Ross' Gull at Riverlands, just in time for his record-setting Missouri year list. The Ross' repeated the excitement of the Slaty-backed, but came closer to shore, allowing great photo opportunities. Many rare gulls have been observed in St. Louis over the past 25 years. Before 1960, only four species had occurred here, according to Dick Anderson. We have now recorded 17 gull species.

Finding a rarity is an exciting event for a birder, but in the past only a few lucky birders were in the right



*Some familiar faces on a WGNSS Forest Park bird walk in 1974 (photo by Kevin Renick).*



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place at the right time. Prior to 1970, if a rare bird appeared, Kathryn Arhos would phone individual WGNSS members to inform them. In 1970, an official hotline was set up by George Barker so that active field birders could notify one another if a rarity was seen. Thus, more serious birders could quickly get news of exciting new birds. Timing can be everything.

Paul Bauer relates the story of getting a hotline for the very rare Yellow Rail. "I excused myself quickly from work," he said. "And I rushed for 20 minutes through heavy traffic, ran across a muddy field and over a levee only to see a tiny black dot flying away while others were telling me what great views they had seen. Years later, I still don't have a Yellow Rail for this area."

The hotline, which currently numbers 50 to 60 birders, is still run by George and Terry Barker who assume many of the Ma Bell-related expenses to keep it functioning. As a result, more birders can see rare species than in past years.

The reporting of area birds in our monthly journal *Nature Notes* is also more thorough now. For many years, Earl Comfort wrote the column, summarizing birds that members had seen each month. Rose Ann Bodman took over in the late 1970s and has done a sterling job writing this informative column. Rose Ann thinks that the greater number of birders in the field and the increased reports have made coverage of St. Louis birding more complete.

The areas that birders cover have changed substantially in the past 25 years. Busch Wildlife Area, Shaw Arboretum at Gray Summit, Mark Twain Wildlife Refuge, most of St. Charles County, and Tower Grove and Forest Parks continue to be popular birding destinations, but the Mississippi levee area of Illinois, formerly a monthly destination, has been repeatedly ravaged by floods and is seldom visited today. Marais Temps Clair Refuge in St. Charles county was off limits to birders until the end of the 1970s, but it became a prime birding spot in the early 1980s. Floods and management policies have made it an area of constant change. Horseshoe Lake in Illinois, inaccessible in the 1960s, has become one of our most visited birding sites.

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It is reliable for waterfowl, herons and other birds. Alton Dam was a staple for many years. The new dam built in the late 1980s resulted in Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area. This is an excellent spot, especially for gulls and shorebirds. Creve Coeur Park and Frank Holten State Park, once popular birding sites, have suffered commercialization and overcrowding and are birded only sporadically today.

New birding areas include Carlyle Lake in Illinois (famous for rarities like Pacific Loon, Mew Gull and Rock Wren); Baldwin Lake (home of the rare Ross' Goose); Castlewood State Park (a recent addition to the Missouri Parks roster and a good spot for migrants and nesting songbirds); and Tyson Research Center, a tract acquired by Washington University in 1965. Tyson became accessible for birding trips, courtesy of its director, ornithologist Dick Coles, in the early 1980s. Unquestionably, the addition of areas like Carlyle Lake has lengthened our local bird roster substantially. Also, the ranges of birds such as the Fish Crow and Mississippi Kite seem to be expanding (both are seen every year now and the Kite has even bred in Webster Groves). Rare gulls are occurring with greater frequency. The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher bred here for the first time in 1991, but has not been a regular visitor. The Western Kingbird does seem to be breeding here every year now. The Great-tailed Grackle has been reported several times in recent years, after being absent since 1958. As for the House Finch, who could have predicted that a bird listed as an accidental at the end of the 1960s would become an abundant backyard bird? Change is a constant in birding.

Sadly, change also has come to our membership over the past 25 years as veteran birders passed away. On this 75th anniversary, we should remember those who taught us and walked with us. Departed WGNSS birders include Kathryn Arhos, Kyrle Boldt, Andy Bromet, Earl Comfort, Mary Frances Goodloe, Floyd and Vi Hallett, Earl Hath, Lanier Kriger, Ralph "Doc" Laffey, Joel Massie, Burrell Pickering, Fred Ruegsegger, Mildred Schaefer, Mickey Scudder, Gus Ulbricht and Mary Wiese. Perhaps they're all birding on some

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mudflat in heaven...

The ornithology "wing" of WGNSS continues to offer many options for the casual or serious birder. The regular Thursday and Saturday field trips continue, the annual Big Day marathon, in which birders try to list 100 or more species, is still held, and trips for beginners are led each spring and fall. WGNSS still sponsors the Orchard Farm and Weldon Spring Christmas counts each year, which are decades-old traditions. There are several breeding bird surveys for interested birders. And, of course, there is our monthly journal to contribute sighting reports and articles to. Any birder can tailor his level of interest to what is offered. Who knows what records may yet be broken or which rare species may be discovered by future birders? WGNSS has a rich, fascinating history, filled with colorful people and even more colorful birds.

May we continue to soar into the next century.

**The  
Webster  
Groves  
Nature Study  
Society:  
The Future**

Peggy C. Leonard,  
President of  
WGNSS,  
1994-1996

Several thousand people have enjoyed and contributed to the Webster Groves Nature Study Society throughout its 75-year history. Creativity and a pioneering spirit have characterized the organization since its inception. It is fortunate that WGNSS has continued to attract people with varied interests and diverse backgrounds. Wide ranges of interest and skills have contributed to the success and respect that the organization enjoys in the St. Louis community. When one needs the advice of an expert in birding, botany or entomology, it is no surprise that WGNSS is the organization to contact.

One dollar and a sincere interest were the only requirements for adult membership when the Webster Groves Nature Study Society began, and the original purpose reads much like ours today. Although the numbers have increased, our enrollment has remained at approximately 500 members for several years, depending on word of mouth to solicit new members. Our field trips in birding, botany and entomology are the organization's most effective external publicity. We now have several levels of membership, including life

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membership, but cost is rarely a deterrent to membership since regular annual dues are only \$10.

Members receive monthly issues of *Nature Notes*, thanks to the hard work and dedication of our editors and contributors. We have monthly meetings of general interest September through May. The expertise of WGNSS members is not overlooked in planning speakers. The 15-member WGNSS Board meets monthly to plan activities and to represent the organization in community issues regarding conservation. WGNSS interacts with several groups and participates in the census of birds, plants and butterflies. We administer the yearly Scudder Scholarship Fund for a university student and sponsor an adult for Audubon Camp each year.

In planning the years ahead, we must put greater effort into recruitment of new members, especially young people, so that they can learn to appreciate, understand and enjoy wildlife and natural beauty. Members today are proud of their rich history and the influences it has had on conservation and enjoyment of nature. That same creativity and pioneering spirit that energized the WGNSS founders is still evident today! We look forward to continuing in the great tradition that has been established by those who fought environmental destruction, patiently taught newcomers and shared their expertise with all who love natural beauty and have an interest in nature.

*WGNSS Anniversary Booklet Committee*

*Barbara Perry Lawton, Chairman  
James P. Jackson  
Kevin Renick  
Peggy Leonard, Ex Officio*

*Research by Marjorie Richardson*

*Type and Design by Barbara P. Lawton*



This booklet has been printed on recycled paper.

*The objectives of the society are to stimulate interest in nature study on the part of adults and children, to cooperate with other organizations in nature study, to encourage amateur research in the natural sciences and to promote conservation of wildlife and natural beauty. The society is open to all with an interest in nature.*

THE WEBSTER  
GROVES NATURE  
STUDY SOCIETY

75TH ANNIVERSARY  
DINNER

May 4, 1995

Hawken House  
Webster Groves, Missouri



Welcome Peggy Leonard,  
WGNS President

Dinner buffet Best Catering  
(Coordinated by  
Second Vice President Margot Holsen)

Mystery Members

Readings from 1970, the 50th Anniversary Year  
Rose Ann Bodman  
Martha Gaddy  
Blaine Ulmer  
Karen Haller  
John Molyneaux  
Robert Gaddy  
Walter Liddell

Slide Presentation "Scenes from the Past"  
Paul Bauer  
(Slides also provided by Alberta Bolinger, William  
Brandhorst, Jim Jackson, Randy Korotev, Peggy Leonard,  
Marshall Magner, and John Molyneaux)

Recognition of Phoebe Snetsinger Claudia Spener

"A Tribute to WGNS" Phoebe Snetsinger



Other Recognitions

“A Tribute to the 75th Anniversary of WGNSS

Barbara Perry Lawton  
Jim Jackson  
Kevin Renick  
Father Sullivan  
Marshall Magner  
Marjorie Richardson

The WGNSS Board

*Birds of the St. Louis Area: When and Where to Find Them*

Connie Alwood  
Dick Anderson  
Paul Bauer  
Randy Korotev  
Jack Van Benthuisen

*We wish to thank WGNSS Historian Betty Nellums and the following persons for providing historical items for the 75th Anniversary: Bill Brandhorst, Dorothy Heinze, Marshall Magner, and John Molyneaux.*

*We also appreciate Randy Korotev's coordination of the Social Hour.*

*The 75th Anniversary Cake is compliments of Francis McMillian, a friend of Peggy Leonard. We also wish to thank OK Hatchery for helping provide flowers for this evening's celebration.*

*We also wish to thank Paul Bauer, Bill Brandhorst, and Peggy Leonard for preserving memories of this 75th Anniversary Celebration through photography.*

*The Board  
of the  
Webster Groves Nature Study Society*

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