



# Nature Notes

## Journal of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society December 2009, Vol. 81, No. 9

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### President's Corner

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#### *Ann Earley*

The spotlight was on our members at our November 4 general program meeting, which featured our members' "show and tell" evening. Again this year, WGNSS members shared their nature-related adventures, talents, and experiences. Many thanks to Rich Thoma, Jack Harris, and Anne McCormack for their informative and entertaining presentations!

There will be no program meeting in December. Instead, as in years past, WGNSS will be **celebrating the holidays** with the St. Louis Audubon Society. This year's event will be held on **Sunday afternoon, December 6** from 1:30-4 P.M. at The Green Center in University City. Mark your calendars, and don't miss this festive annual event!

**We continue to seek a volunteer to serve as First Vice President and Program Chair, as well as a volunteer to assume Membership Chair duties.** If you are interested in these opportunities, know someone who might be interested, or would like more information about what is involved, please let me or another Board member know.

On October 28, the LaBarque Creek Watershed Conservation Plan was finalized and signed by representatives of the organizations involved in the planning process during the last few years.

WGNSS was represented at the planning meetings and the signing ceremony by Jack Harris. Other groups involved in this effort include Friends of LaBarque Creek Watershed, Stream Team #2991, Missouri Native Plant Society, Ozark Regional Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, The Open Space Council, and representatives of Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson County, and East-West Gateway Council of Governments. The purpose of the plan is "to maintain and enhance the ecological, educational, and recreational values of and the quality of life in the LaBarque Creek Watershed." As the planning moves into the implementation phase, WGNSS will continue to support efforts to appreciate and learn more about the diverse natural features of this unique area.

As the end of this year draws nearer, on behalf of the other officers and Board members, I wish all WGNSS members a holiday season filled with all the special things you enjoy!



### December Holiday Celebration

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**Celebrate the Holidays with WGNSS at The Green Center, Sunday, December 6, 2009 from 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

The Webster Groves Nature Study Society will once again be gathering with the St. Louis

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Audubon Society to celebrate the holidays at The Green Center in University City. This special event will be held on Sunday, December 6 from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. Parking is available in the Kaufman Park lot next to The Green Center.

Please bring a ready-to-serve appetizer or dessert to share. Beverages will be provided.

Drawings will be held during the afternoon for attendance prizes, so remember to register for the drawings when you arrive.

Directions to The Green Center at 8025 Blackberry Avenue:

From Hanley Road: Traveling north on Hanley Road, cross Delmar Blvd. Continue on Hanley Road to Blackberry Avenue, the fourth street north of Delmar. Turn left (west) on Blackberry Avenue.

From Interstate 170: Take the Delmar Blvd. Exit from I-170. Go east on Delmar three stoplights to North and South Road. Turn left

(north) and proceed to Blackberry Avenue. Turn left (west) on Blackberry Avenue.

We hope to see you there!

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## September Bird Report

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*Jim Ziebol*

I'm no longer receiving materials from Mobirds, so please mail your reports to J. Ziebol, 3900 Berger, St. Louis, 63109, or call me at (314) 781-7372.

Due to the volume of reports, I can't use everything in the WGNSS Bird Report.

**Sightings:** A beautiful Am. Golden Plover was seen on Bruns Rd. along with a Lesser Yellowlegs and a Pect-JZ, FH. Joe Pinnell reported an Avocet at RMBS on 9/11. On 9/2, 2 Buffies-jE, and a Baird's Sandpiper-BR, were seen at RMBS. Joe also found a Red-necked Phalarope there on 9/3. Connie Alwood added 15 Stilt Sandpipers and 28 Dowitchers at RMBS on 9/2. The WGNSS Thursday Group found Least Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plover at RMBS on 9/4. A Sora, Virginia Rail and a HY King Rail were good finds at Riverlands on 9/20-CM. On 9/8, a Sabine's Gull appeared at CL-DK. 20+ Com. Terns, all sporting black primaries and dark carpal bars, a Forster's Tern and an Osprey were seen from the north shore HL-JZ. On 9/12, 2 Forster's and 5 unidentified Terns were present at HL-FH. Dan Kassebaum had a possible Arctic Tern at CL on 9/20.

Ospreys were reported at HL on 9/12-FH, (3) at HL on 9/23-JZ, FH, one at RMBS on 9/2-CA, (2-3) at RMBS on 9/4-JC and one at BCA on 9/30-JZ. Paul Bauer had 2 Bald Eagles, one AD + one HY, plus a White-fronted Goose along the Levee Rd. on 9/4. 50+ Nighthawks were seen in TGP on 9/7-P. Mahoney. 130 Nighthawks were encountered over Granite City on 9/5-FH. On 9/3, (7) Chimney Swifts were counted at Bristol School, entering a chimney-AMcC, and she had 337 there on 9/11. Hundreds of Chimney Swifts were feeding low over the water on 9/13 and 9/20. About a 1000 were seen in TGP on 9/23, after the passage of a cold front. Only 19 Broad-winged Hawks were seen migrating that day-JZ. Dave Faintich found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in

TGP on 9/1. We're sorry to hear that Dave passed on recently. He will be missed. Bill Rudden posted a beautiful photo of a pale adult; they don't have a contour molt until they reach their wintering grounds, also in TGP. Al Smith found Sedge Wren, 3 female Bobolinks and a Lincoln's Sparrow at RMBS on 9/21.

On 9/11, a Black-throated Green and a Blackburnian W. were seen along with 10 T Titmouse at HL-FH. A fall Mourning W. is always a good find: seen in TGP on 9/10-C. Kirmaier. Jackie Chain reported a Canada W., 2 Great-horned Owls, and a Collared Dove in TGP on 9/9. The Collared Dove is probably a park record. Two Savannah Sparrows were seen at RMBS on 9/19-BR. A Swamp Sp. Returned to FP on 9/22-SMcC. The first fall White-crowned, a HY bird, was seen at Rte. 66 SP on 9/26-JZ. Fifteen Catbirds, a Thrasher, a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 2 Tennessee, a Nashville, 3 Black-throated Greens, one Redstart, a Magnolia W., a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and 3 Carolina Chickadees were seen in the dredge area, HL on 9/23-JZ.

A typical day at HL on 9/27 included one Cormorant, 2 Green Herons, 20 Great Blue Herons, 2 Snowy E., 25+ Great Egrets, 5 Blue-winged Teals, a Pintail, 6 Coots, 50+ Killdeer, an Am. Golden Plover, one Lesser Yellowlegs, one Pectoral, 3 Osprey, 5 Kestrel, a HY male Ruby-throated Hummer, Six Woodpecker species, a Phoebe, 2 Least Fly., 100+ Horned Larks, Swainson's T., a Catbird, Brown Thrasher, one Tennessee, a Chestnut-sided W., female Rose-breasted Gros., and 12 Indigo Buntings-FH, JZ.

**Backyard Birds:** Linda Virga reported a Canada W. on 9/18 and a Cardinal with a deformed beak. A late Hummingbird was seen on 9/26 along with a resident Cardinal family-SMcC. One of the very best backyard birds I've ever heard of was a Marsh Wren seen on 9/19 in Sherry's yard. Careful planting and a water source has turned her yard into a paradise for insects, birds, native plants and numerous other creatures. A few years ago, Sherry had a Dickcissel in her yard: another really outstanding yard bird.

**Contributors:** C. Alwood (CA), J. Chain (JC), J. Eads (JE), F. Holmes (FH), D. Kassebaum (DK), A. McCormack (AMcC), S. McCowan (SMcC), C. Malone (CM), B. Prather (BP), J. Ziebol (JZ).

**Abbreviations:** BCA, Busch Conservation Area; CL, Carlyle Lake; FP, Forest Park; HL, Horseshoe Lake; HY, Hatch Year; RMBS, Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary; Rte. 66 SP, Route 66 State Park; TGP, Tower Grove Park.



## October Bird Report

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### *Jim Ziebol*

The fall migration was fairly normal except for the absence of Loons. Many good Warbler sightings did occur late in October.

**Sightings:** A Common Loon was observed at HL on 10/25-CA, CK. Joe Eads spotted an Eared Grebe at HL on 10/23 and two were seen there the following day-CA. A Western Grebe was found at CL on 10/25-DK. Frank Holmes saw a Black-crowned Night Heron at HL on 10/16. A Northern Pintail was a very good bird in FP on 10/16-SMcC. By 10/25, large numbers of Gadwall and Ruddy Ducks, as well as a few Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead, were present at HL-mob. Avocets occurred at HL on 10/12 (2)-FH, and (2) on 10/22-BRu. A Golden Plover is a good fall bird, and one was found at HL on 10/12-FH. On 10/18, 7 Least S. and 2 Dunlin were seen on the causeway at HL-FH, JZ, and on 10/19 8 Dunlin and 34 Least Sandpipers were seen around the HL area-FH. Five Lesser Yellowlegs, 2 Long-billed Dowitchers and several Pects were seen at the junction of Bischoff and Bruns Roads on 10/11-FH, JZ. By 10/25, many Herring, Franklin's and a few Bonaparte's were present in the ST. Louis area-mob. Frank Holmes reported two Franklin's Gulls at the BP on 10/14. Franklin's were also seen on 10/18 and 10/19 (8) at HL-FH. A dark 1<sup>st</sup> Winter California Gull was photographed at the BP on 10/15-BRu and this bird was refound at RMBS on 10/25-JE. A 1<sup>st</sup> W. Laughing Gull was present at the BP on 10/24-25-BRu, FH, JZ. Two Forster's Terns were observed at HL on 10/1-FH and on 10/26 a Com. Tern and 5-6 Forster's were seen at RMBS-BRu.

On 10/26, a Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen at Layton Road-JZ. Cooper's Hawks were seen on the Hwy 111 and Hwy 203 sides of HL-FH. A HY N. Harrier flew over Bruns Road on 10/26-



JZ. Dan Kassebaum had a Golden Eagle at CL on 10/17. A single Nighthawk was seen over Granite City on 10/1-FH. On 10/26, a Phoebe and 2 B. Creepers were seen at HL-JZ. Sherry McCowan had 5 Marsh Wrens and 2 Lincoln's Sparrows in FP on 10/5 and by 10/6 Swamp Sparrows appeared there. On 10/26, 2 Sedge Wrens and 20+ Swamp S. occurred there-SMcC. A Catbird and a Lincoln's were seen in FP on 10/7-SMcC and 10/7 she recorded Wood and Hermit Thrush and a Summer Tanager in TGP on 10/11. On 10/5, LeConte's, White-crowned, and White-throated Sparrow were seen on Walker Island, HL-FH. Fair numbers of Chipping Sparrows were reported: 10+ at HL on 10/25 and 30 in FP on 10/27, along with 7 other species of Sparrows-SMcC. Frank Holmes recorded Little Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, 2 House Wrens, Hermit Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Indigo Bunting and N. Waterthrush. A Brewer's Blackbird was found on Bischoff Rd. on 10/25-JZ, FH. 12 Great-tailed Grackles returned to Briar Stables on 10/21-CA.

**Backyard Birds:** Sherry McCowan reported the following yard birds: A House Wren and Com. Yellow-throat on 10/5, an Indigo B., Cooper's Hawk and 10 Cardinals on 10/8, a House Wren on 10/11, Yellow-rumped and Orange Crowned W., Swamp, White-cr., and White-thr. and Song Sparrows on 10/18, a Nashville W. on 10/26, Field, White-cr., and 7 White-thr. Sparrows and a flyover Red-tailed H. on 10/27. Pine Siskins were reported at Joe Pinell's and Connie Alwood's (one individual on 10/26-27). A female or HY Black-throated Blue W. was seen in Wally George's Cedar Hill yard on 10/19.

**Contributors:** C. Alwood (CA), J. Eades (JE), W. George, F. Holmes (FH), D. Kassebaum (DK), A. Kirkpatrick, C. Kirmaier (CK), S. McCowan (SMcC), J. Pinell, B. Rudden (BRu), J. Ziebol (JZ).

**Abbreviations:** BP, Borrow Pit; CL, Carlyle Lake; FP, Forest Park; HL, Horseshoe Lake; HY, Hatch Year; mob, many observers; RMBS, Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary; TGP, Tower Grove Park.

## September Botany Report

*Compiled by George Van Brunt*

**September 7, 2009—Fishtrap Hollow**, Crawford County, MO (contributed by Jack Harris).

Six of the regular WGNSs trippers (Fr. Sullivan, Wayne Clark, Nancy Clark, Nels Holmberg, Jack Harris, and Paul Corley) gathered at the assembly site. They were joined by 6 members of the OZARK REGIONAL LAND TRUST (Ted Heisel, Lynda Richards, Justin Thomas, Rosemary Wakeham, Jerry Breadstone & Lynn Breakstone. All met on a mostly cloudy and cool (65 - 75°F.) morning, excellent conditions for exploring the area for wildflowers and other botanical curiosities. This was the second visit to the area ORLT property by the WGNSS-Botany Group and is part of a planned series of seasonal visits to assist the ORLT in compiling a plant survey for the property.

This day's route led the group along the north boundary of the property, on down into the valley and to Huzzah Creek itself, and then return to the parking area. A sampling from the plant list follows: *Adiantum pedatum* var. *pedatum* (northern maidenhair fern), *Ageratina altissima* var. *altissima* (white snakeroot), *Ambrosia bidentata* (lanceleaf ragweed), *Aristolochia serpentaria* (Virginia snakeroot), *Bouteloua curtipendula* var. *curtipendula* (sideoats grama), *Bromus pubescens* (Canada brome), *Carex eburnea* (bristle-leaved sedge), *Circea canadensis* ssp. *canadensis* (enchanter's nightshade), *Conoclinium coelestinum* (mist flower), *Corallorhiza odontorhiza* (late coral root orchid), *Cunila origanoides* (dittany), *Desmodium nudiflorum* (naked-stemmed tick clover), *Liatris aspera* (rough gayfeather), *Panicum dichotomiflorum* (zig zag grass), *Spiranthes lacera* (slender ladies' tresses orchid), and *Scutellaria ovata* (heart-leaved skullcap). Nels Holmberg and Justin Thomas continued exploring into the central area of the ORLT property (after the rest of the party departed) and contributed the larger part of the plant list for the day, including *Rudbeckia fulgida* (orange coneflower), and the bright white flowers of *Parnassia grandifolia* (grass-of-parnassus) found in a small fen area of Fishtrap Hollow. The genus and various species, known as "bog-stars" in some

quarters, also occur in arctic and alpine habitats across the northern hemisphere.

**September 14, 2009—Lower Meramec County Park**, St. Louis County, MO (contributed by John Oliver).

Monday dawned clear and sunny, encouraging eight botanists to attend the botany walk at Lower Meramec County Park and some adjacent floodplain areas along the Meramec River in St. Louis County. The group walked along the Meramec Greenway and Tall Timbers trails through wet-mesic forest and flood plain habitats.

Along the way, we observed many of the "usual suspects" for bottomland forest and floodplains, as well as a few surprises. We spotted a variety of smartweeds: *Persicaria longisetata* (bristly lady's-thumb), *P. pennsylvanica* (Pennsylvania smartweed), *P. punctata* (dotted smartweed), *P. amphibia* (water smartweed), and *P. lapathifolia* (pale smartweed). Other species noted included *Eclipta prostrata* (yerba de tajo), *Conoclinium coelestinum* (mistflower), *Chasmanthium latifolium* (river oats), *Rudbeckia triloba* (brown-eyed Susan), *Laportea canadensis* (wood nettle), *Boehmeria cylindrica* (false nettle), *Eupatorium altissimum* (tall thoroughwort), *Eupatorium serotinum* (late boneset), *Hedyotis nigricans* (narrow-leaf bluets), *Iresine rhizomatosa* (bloodleaf), *Erigeron annuus* (daisy fleabane), *Ageratina altissima* (white snakeroot), *Hackelia virginiana* (stickseed), *Arnoglossum atriplicifolium* (pale Indian plantain), *Lobelia inflata* (Indian tobacco), *Dianthus armeria* (Deptford pink), *Verbena stricta* (hoary vervain), *Heterotheca subaxillaris* (camphorweed), *Pilea pumila* (clearweed), *Prunella vulgaris* (self-heal), *Phyla lanceolata* (fogfruit), *Agalinis tenuifolia* (slender false foxglove), *Desmodium paniculatum* (panicked tick-trefoil), *Symphyotrichum anomalum* (many-rayed aster), *Symphyotrichum pilosum* (hairy white oldfield aster), *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* (green ash), *Ellisia nyctelea* (aunt Lucy; in seed), *Mazus pumilus* (Japanese mazus), *Samolus parviflorus* (water pimpernel), *Bidens aristosa* (tickseed sunflower), *Ipomoea lacunosa* (small white morning glory), *Lespedeza cuneata* (sericea lespedeza), *Rubus trivialis* (southern dewberry), *Plantago major* (common plantain), *Solanum ptycanthum* (eastern black nightshade), *Solidago altissimum* (tall goldenrod), *Chamaecrista fasciculata* (partridge-pea), *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* (common ragweed), *Ambrosia trifida* (giant ragweed), *Verbena urticifolia* (white vervain), and *Comelina diffusa* (a

dayflower), which is often found in disturbed, alluvial areas and openings in bottomland forests. Its ecological characteristics match many introduced weeds, but it appears in records from the early 1800s, and therefore may be a disturbance-adapted native.

We saw several female specimens of *Ilex decidua* (possum haw), with fruits just turning pink. These fruits are produced heavily on female trees, and provide food for small mammals including opossums and at least 9 species of birds. The fruits persist until late winter when they may ferment in situ, causing robins and mockingbirds that eat them to behave as if intoxicated.

The fertile bottomland is a home to many vines, and we noted *Fallopia scandens* (climbing false buckwheat), *Clematis virginiana* (virgin's bower), *Campsis radicans* (trumpet creeper), and the dark green, shiny bipinnately compound leaves of *Ampelopsis arborea* (pepper vine), which is found in alluvial soils in floodplain forests along the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Meramec, and, as we discovered, some distance along the lower Meramec as well. In one small area, we observed several high-climbing vines of what may have been the native *Wisteria frutescens* (wisteria), a twining, woody vine which can reach a length of 40 feet or more. There are at least two Asian wisterias which have escaped from cultivation, and further study is required to rule out *W. sinensis* (Chinese wisteria) and *W. floribunda* (Japanese wisteria). Given the timing of our visit, it was not possible to use the flower clusters as a means of conclusive identification, nor were there any seedpods in evidence, but the native wisteria is known to occur in low wet or swampy woods and along the borders of swamps, sloughs, and slow streams.

And finally, a brush with *Quercus lyrata* (overcup oak), which occurs in wet bottomland forests bordering swamps and in valleys with floodplain forests bordering the Mississippi and Meramec Rivers. It is native to these flooded sites although its habitat in southeastern Missouri has been greatly reduced by forest clearing and ditching of floodplains and swamps. The tree depends on seasonal overflow or floodwaters to float the acorns to new sites for establishment—conditions which changes in hydrology have made much less frequent. They occur northward along the

Mississippi River, and are recorded from the floodplain of the lower Meramec River in adjacent St. Louis and Jefferson counties. Of course, human alteration of the floodplain has reduced its habitat in this area as well. One small remnant of swamp natural community is preserved in Lower Meramec County Park, where the Tall Timbers trail loops north of Meramec Bottom Road, and it was here that Fr. Sullivan spotted some leaves on some small trees which he felt might be the overcup oak or perhaps a hybrid. Several of us walked off the trail into the low area looking for larger specimens and acorns, but were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, this area is a likely location for *Quercus lyrata*, and deserves further exploration.

**September 21, 2009—Shaw Nature Reserve,** Franklin County, MO (contributed by Nels Holmberg).

James Trager, Shaw's Restoration Biologist, joined a group of 13 at Shaw Nature Reserve for a viewing of fall flowers, especially asters and goldenrods. First we hiked through savanna-like woods to the Crescent Knoll Overlook. Here we saw a good number of the asters and goldenrods. It gave us yet another chance to complain about the new collection of aster names now in genera *Symphotrichum*, *Eurybia*, *Doellingeria* and *Ionactis*, with *Aster* reserved for Old World species. In the old days, we told each other that we must learn the Latin names because the common names were many, regionally variable and changeable, while Latin names were stable. Now it seems it is the Latin names that are in more flux than common names. This morning, we noted many many rayed asters (*Symphotrichum anomalum*), drummond aster (*S. drummondii*), calico aster (*S. lateriflorum*), spreading aster (*S. patens*), prairie aster (*S. turbinellum*), arrow-leaved aster (*S. urophyllum*), downy ragged goldenrod (*Solidago petiolaris*), showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*), and elm-leaved goldenrod (*Solidago ulmifolia*).

Next we hiked the Wetland Trail and again saw more asters and goldenrods: New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*), willow aster (*Symphotrichum praealtum*), tall goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*), rough goldenrod (*Solidago radula*), stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*), and gray goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*). Here James complained vigorously about a legume vine which was

covering a large area of trailside vegetation. It had been spreading for several years, perhaps a contaminant in the original seeding mix. It looks a little like a robust and hairy hog peanut (*Amphicarpaea bracteata*), but James thinks it may be a vining relative of the soybean (*Glycine max*) which is not included in the Flora of Missouri. Other showy flowers along the trail were white gentian (*Gentiana alba*), beggar-ticks (*Bidens aristosa*), downy gentian (*Gentiana puberulentia*), rose turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*), field thistle (*Cirsium discolor*), carpet weed (*Mollugo verticillata*), and swamp lousewort (*Pedicularis lanceolata*). We left on a confusing note, trying to sort out the difference between Maximilian sunflower (*Helianthus maximilianii*), sawtooth sunflower (*Helianthus grosseserratus*), and their possible hybrids.

**September 28, 2009—Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area,** St. Charles County, MO (contributed by George Van Brunt).

Six botanists (Fr. Sullivan, Jack Harris, Wayne Clark, Nancy Clark, Jean Clauson, and George Van Brunt) met on a mostly sunny, mild, very windy day at the Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area in St. Charles County. From there, we drove to the Edward "Ted" and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park. Next to the Confluence SP parking lot, we found a large stand of *Ambrosia trifida* (giant ragweed) in fruit. Mixed in with and around the periphery of the ragweed were *Symphotrichum pilosum* (white heath aster) and *Eupatorium serotinum* (late boneset) in bloom, and *Xanthium strumarium* (common cocklebur) and *Desmanthus illinoensis* (bundle flower) in fruit.

On the walk to the confluence point, we observed large numbers of *Humulus japonicus* (Japanese hops) plants, heavily laden with fruit and covering a large area of this bottomland habitat. This invasive species is an annual that thrives in moist bottomland and spreads its seeds by wind and water. Another fruiting species we identified was *Artemisia annua* (sweet wormwood). Sweet wormwood is a native of temperate Asia that has been naturalized throughout the world. The plants have fern-like leaves and when crushed, emit a camphor-like odor. *Artemisia annua* has been used in Chinese medicine since ancient times and its anti-malarial activity has been confirmed in modern times. Other fruiting species included *Penthorum sedoides* (ditch stonewort), *Mollugo*

*verticillata* (carpetweed), *Oenothera biennis* (common evening primrose), and *Abutilon theophrasti* (velvetleaf). Blooming species included *Persicaria lapathifolia* (pale smartweed), *Persicaria pennsylvanica* (pink smartweed), *Bidens tripartita* (swamp beggarticks), *Erigeron annuus* (daisy fleabane), *Eclipta prostrata* (yerba de tajo), *Chamaesyce humistrata* (spreading sandmat), and *Symphotrichum lanceolatum* (tall white aster).

A short walk on Ellis Island revealed a large number of blooming *Heterotheca subaxillaris* (camphorweed or golden aster) as well as *Solidago altissima* (tall goldenrod) in bloom. Several large *Populus deltoides* (eastern cottonwood) had been felled by beavers. Wayne measured the trunk diameter of one of the larger trees and found it to be about 18 inches.

**Editor's Note:** Labeled and annotated pictures of WGNSS botany field trips may be found at

<http://community.webshots.com/user/oliverjcom>

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## October Entomology Meeting

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*Rich Thoma*

### October Entomology Meeting Review

For the October meeting, the WGNSS Entomology Group met at the St. Louis Zoo to learn about the endangered American Burying Beetle (ABB), *Nicrophorus americanus*. Bob Merz, Zoological Manager of Invertebrates, talked about the natural history of the beetle and the work being done at the zoo to preserve this species. Unlike other members of the family Silphidae, ABB is the only truly nocturnal species. Though often thought of as gruesome because they feed on carrion, these beetles play a vital role as decomposers in the natural community. When an animal dies, these beetles show up very quickly. ABB is known to prefer animals the size of a small chicken. The beetle quickly finds a mate, and the two bury the carcass, typically in less than twelve hours. The beetles use the carcass for a home and to raise a brood, being one of the few beetle species that exhibit parental care of their offspring.

ABB was once a widespread species throughout the central and eastern United States. Today there are a few remnant populations located in Rhode Island, central Nebraska, eastern Kansas, eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas. No one has a clear understanding of why there are so few beetles remaining. Some interesting possibilities include: fragmentation of habitat favorable to other scavengers; appropriate size carcasses used for food (prairie chickens, bobwhite and passenger pigeons) are extinct or no longer plentiful; and light pollution. There appears to be a correlation between the location of remaining ABB populations and where people are not. It is thought that outdoor lighting may disorient the beetle so that it cannot behave naturally.



**American Burying Beetle, *Nicrophorus americanus*.**

The St. Louis Zoo is a Center for ABB Conservation. The zoo has been rearing these beetles since 2004 and has successfully reared over 4,800 individuals. Because they are on the Federal Endangered Species List, genealogical records of each individual are and formulation of a species recovery plan are required. All beetles must be maintained in a specially enclosed room at the zoo to protect the beetles and prevent escape, and each beetle must be preserved when it dies. Recently, 1,500 of the zoo's ABB were part of a reintroduction effort in Ohio. Unfortunately, no beetles were found at the site a year later. Plans are being formulated to attempt a reintroduction in Missouri. Bob and the zoo have high hopes this future reintroduction attempt will be successful.



## North America's Most Beautiful Longhorned Beetle<sup>1</sup>

*Ted C. MacRae*

I've written a few posts in recent weeks highlighting some of the more interesting finds encountered during two visits this past July to the White River Hills region of extreme southwestern Missouri. It's a land of extremes, with deeply dissected layers of limestone/dolomite bedrock supporting xeric glades, dry woodlands and riparian watercourses. The hilltop glades ("balds"), in particular, feature prominently in the region's natural and cultural history and are the most extensive system of such habitat in Missouri. They support a number of plants and animals more characteristic of the grasslands of the south-central U.S., such as the recently featured [Megaphasma denticrus](#) and [Microstylus morosum](#), North America's longest insect and largest robber fly, respectively. Sadly, the glades in this region are much reduced in size and quality compared to their pre-settlement occurrence, primarily due to overgrazing and suppression of fire. These anthropogenic forces have combined to reduce overall vegetational diversity and accelerate encroachment by woody species (chiefly eastern red-cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*). Nevertheless, there still remain several high quality glade remnants in the area, and the public agencies charged with their conservation are increasingly utilizing mechanical removal of woody growth, controlled burns, and managed grazing in an effort to simulate the natural forces that mediated this landscape for thousands of years.

My reason for returning to the White River Hills this year was simple—find and photograph the magnificent longhorned beetle, *Plinthocoelium suaveolens* (family Cerambycidae). This species, occurring across the southern U.S. from Florida and Georgia west to New Mexico and Arizona, is truly one of North America's most beautiful longhorned beetles due to its large size, brilliant iridescent green coloration, and super-elongate



Chute Ridge Glade, Roaring River State Park, Barry Co., Missouri.

wildly contrasting orange and black legs. Until recently, this species was known in Missouri only from sporadic records across the southern part of the state (MacRae 1994). I knew of its association with gum bumelia [[Sideroxylon lanuginosum](#)] (= *Bumelia lanuginosa*), also called gum bully and woolly buckthorn), which was first noted by Missouri's first State Entomologist, C. V. Riley (1880) and later discussed in detail by Linsley and Hurd (1959) and Turnbow and Hovore (1979); however, my repeated searches over the years whenever I encountered this plant came up empty. A few years ago, Chris Brown and I were conducting a survey of tiger beetles in the White River Hills and noted the relatively common occurrence of bumelia on these glades. Bumelia, like *P. suaveolens*, is one of only a few North American representatives of a largely tropical group, and it is one of the few woody species naturally adapted to the xeric conditions found on these glades. Recalling the association of *P. suaveolens* with this plant, and also recalling that adults could be attracted to fermenting baits of the type described by Champlain and Knull (1932), we placed fermenting bait traps on several glades in the area and succeeded in trapping a number of individuals during the month of July. When I began searching the bumelia trees at these glades, I found adults perching on the lower trunks of several trees. It was the first time I'd seen live individuals of this species in Missouri. At the time I was not a photographer, and that experience became one of the many moments that I would later look back upon and think, "If only I'd taken a picture of that!" Thus, at the end of June this year, having successfully found [Cylindera celeripes](#) in

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from an article posted September 28, 2009 at the author's website: <http://beetlesinthebush.wordpress.com>  
All photos are by the author.



[Missouri](#) on the first day of a planned 3-week search, my attention immediately turned to the new goal of finding *P. suaveolens* and photographing it on its host plant.



*Sideroxylon lanuginosum* (gum bumelia) at Blackjack Knob, Taney Co., Missouri.

I knew this wouldn't be easy—the beetles were not abundant when I had last observed them, and those that I did find were quite wary to my approach. Getting within striking distance with a net was one thing; doing so with a camera and macro lens would be another thing entirely. In my first trip to the area (early July), I went to Chute Ridge Glade, a magnificently restored glade in [Roaring River State Park](#) where I had seen the greatest number of individuals before. I was full of optimism on that first day as I zigzagged across the rough terrain from one bumelia tree to the next, but my optimism began to wane as I cautiously approached each tree and saw nothing. Within an hour, I'd looked at every bumelia tree I could find on the glade and not even seen a beetle, much less attempted a photograph. It would take a 2-hour drive along twisting back roads to reach the other sizeable glade complex where I had seen beetles before ([Blackjack Knob](#) in Taney County), and another hour of searching on several dozen trees would again yield nothing. By now I was feeling rather frustrated—the day's oppressive heat and humidity had taken its toll, and my 4.5-hour drive from St. Louis was looking like it would be for naught. I had noted that the bumelia flowers were almost but not quite open yet—perhaps it was too early in the season still?

The remnant glades at Blackjack Knob are more extensive than those at Chute Ridge, so many more trees still awaited examination—if I could



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* larval frass pile at trunk base of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

only muster the energy! I trudged back to the truck, guzzled a nice, cold Powerade, and started off in another direction. I looked at a number of trees and still had seen no sign of the beetle, but on one particular tree I noticed an enormous pile of sawdust on the ground at the base of the tree. I looked at it more closely and saw that it had the rough, granular texture so characteristic of longhorned beetle larvae that like to keep their galleries clean, and its bright, moist color suggested that it was being ejected by a larva tunneling through living wood. I looked up into the tree above the pile to find where it was coming from but could find no ejection hole. I checked the base of the trunk itself and still couldn't find anything. Then I started poking into the pile and felt a root. Further poking revealed a soft spot on the root, and I immediately knew that I had found a *P. suaveolens* larval gallery—no other cerambycid species is known to bore in roots of living



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* larva in root of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

*Sideroxylon*, especially one as large as this based on the size of the frass pile. I hurried back to the truck and grabbed my hatchet, returned to the tree, and scraped away the soil above the root to find an obvious ejection hole a few inches away from the base of the trunk. I started chipped into the root at the ejection hole and found a large, clean gallery extending down the center of the root away from the trunk. About 18" away from the trunk I found it—a large, creamy-white cerambycid larva.



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* larva in root of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

Finding a *P. suaveolens* larva was gratifying, but it wasn't what I had come here to do, which was photograph the adult. After placing the larva live in a vial for preservation later on (dropping into scalding water to "fix" the proteins and prevent discoloration when stored in 70% ethanol), I continued searching the trees for adults. I found one tree on which the flowers were just barely beginning to open and collected a few of the pedestrian species of scarabs that are attracted to bumelia flowers in droves when fully open (e.g. *Cotinis nitida* and *Trigonopeltastes delta*)—for the record. There was still no sign of adult *Plinthocoelium*, and I was on the verge of calling it a day when I approached another tree and saw it! I froze, then slowly geared up with the camera and started stalking slowly towards it. It was not in a very convenient location, down low on the trunk and partially screened by foreground vegetation. I got close enough to start attempting some shots—not ideally composed, but just to ensure that I had something before I tried to get any closer. After the third shot, however, it became alarmed and started to flee, and I had no choice but to capture it for a "studio backup." That taste of success

gave me the motivation to resume my search, but no additional beetles were seen before a dropping sun put an end to the day.



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* on lower trunk of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

Not entirely satisfied with the shots that I'd gotten, I returned to Blackjack Knob the following day and also searched some of the extensive habitat at nearby [Hercules Glades Wilderness](#). I wouldn't see another beetle the entire day, although encountering a nice series of *Cicindela rufiventris* (red-bellied tiger beetle) was some consolation for suffering the day's oppressive heat and humidity. I still had the live beetle, so I placed my hopes on getting better photographs of the beetle in confinement after returning home. That would not come to pass—the beetle refused to sit obligingly on the stick I placed in the large screen cage, and instead clung to the cage itself. For days I watched it, giving it honey-water for sustenance and waiting for an opportunity to photograph it on the stick on which it refused to sit. It became clear to me that studio photographs, at least in the manner I was attempting, would not be possible. Not entirely satisfied with having seen only a single beetle on my trip, and thinking that I may have been too early based on the flowering phenology of the bumelia host trees, I did what any dedicated entomologist would do—I made a second trip to the area two weeks later!

I didn't mess with Chute Ridge Glade this time, instead making a beeline for Blackjack Knob right away. Unfortunately, the weather was uncooperatively drizzly (I would have preferred hot and humid to rain!). Nevertheless, daughter Madison and I made our way to the glades and began inspecting the trees that I had just examined

two weeks earlier. I noted immediately that the bumelias were now in full flower, and it wasn't long before I saw the first adult flying into these flowers. Exciting for sure, and this was a good sign to see an active adult despite the drizzly weather, but the situation of the beetle on a high branch left no possibility for photographs (and only with a rather acrobatic swing of my [fully extended net handle](#) amidst a jumble of dead branches was I able to capture it). This same scenario would replay several times over the next two hours before rain finally drove us back to the car. In total, we saw half a dozen active adults, but in each case they were seen flying to flowers on high branches and could not be photographed. Despite that disappointment, I'll never forget the spectacularity of seeing these beetles in flight—shimmering green and bold orange, with legs and antennae spread wide in all directions. I was also fortunate to find another tree with a fresh frass pile at its base indicating an active larva. This time, I cut the tree some inches above the ground and extracted the trunk base and root intact for transplanting into a large soil box upon my return home. The appearance of new frass on the soil surface afterwards confirmed that I had gotten the root containing the larva and that it had survived the extraction and transplanting. Hopefully I will be able to successfully rear this individual to adulthood.

Despite the rain, we then went back to Hercules Glades Wilderness to see if luck would follow suite there as it had at Blackjack Knob. It didn't, as rain continued to doggedly pursue us, but the day was not a total loss as daughter and I got in a nice 7-mile hike through some of Missouri's most ruggedly scenic terrain and were rewarded with the sighting of a [western pygmy rattlesnake](#). The next day was sunny, much to our delight, and I considered going back to Blackjack Knob where we had seen a good number of adults the previous day. In the end, I decided I'd played that card and rather than continue trying for photographs I'd rather see if the beetle could be found at another glade complex further to the east at [Long Bald Glade Natural Area](#) in [Caney Mountain Conservation Area](#). Things didn't look promising, as I found bumelia trees occurring only sporadically across the main glade complex—with no sign of the beetles. Nevertheless, we enjoyed

the day and spent a bit of time chasing after some enormous robber flies that later proved to be *Microstylum morosum*, a new record for Missouri and [a significant northeastern range extension](#). I thought that would be the highlight of the day, but as we were heading back to the car I spotted a small glade relict on the other side of the road. It was overgrown and encroached, apparently not receiving the same management attention as the glades in the main complex. Regardless, I went over to check it out and immediately spotted several bumelia trees amongst the red-cedars, and within minutes I saw a beetle—low on the trunk of a very small bumelia tree! Once again I froze, then slowly geared up with the camera and began my ultra-cautious approach (remember, this was only my second photo chance after a combined four days in the field). Like last time, I took one shot while still some distance away, then moved in for closer attempts. Unlike last time, there was no



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* adult on lower trunk of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

bothersome vegetation cluttering the view, and when I moved in for close-ups the beetle turned around, crawled up the trunk a short distance, and then paused. I snapped off a small series of shots while it sat there, and then suddenly it became alarmed and flew away. Though still not perfect, these photographs were better than the previous ones I had obtained (check out the pronotal armature in the last photo!), and the finding of this species at Long Bald Glades also represented a new county record.

Missouri populations are assignable to the nominotypical subspecies (southeastern U.S.), which is distinguished from subspecies *plicatum* (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and northern

Mexico) by the bronze or cupreous tints and weak transverse rugae on the pronotum (Linsley 1964). The distributional ranges of the two subspecies intermingle in [northeastern Texas](#)



*Plinthocoelium suaveolens* adult on lower trunk of living *Sideroxylon lanuginosum*.

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## Publications by Members

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**MacRae, T. C. 2009.** Book review: Review of the genera *Calodema* and *Metaxymorpha* (Coleoptera: Buprestidae), by U. Nylander, *Folia Heyrovskyana*, Supplementum 13, 84 pp., 44 color plates (2008). *The Pan-Pacific Entomologist*, 85(1):26-28.

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## Eagle Watching at the Pierre Menard Home

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On Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the Friends of the Menard Home will be sponsoring a day of eagle watching from the front porch of the Pierre Menard Home. Everyone is welcome to come out and watch the eagles as they fly across the Mississippi River and sit in the trees just a stone's throw from the home's front porch. Warm drinks will be available, and you are welcome to bring binoculars and spotting scopes. The home opens at 9 A.M. and the porch will be available for viewing until closing at 5 P.M.

This will be a first-time event, and any input that you may have to make this event better will be greatly appreciated. You can email Friends of the Menard Home at [helpthemenardhome@live.com](mailto:helpthemenardhome@live.com) or call the home at (618) 859-3031; please ask for Andrew Cooperman, Site Services Specialist.

The Pierre Menard Home State Historic site is an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century home built by the first Lt. Governor of the State Illinois and is open to the public Wednesday – Sunday from 9 A.M. – 5 P.M. The Home is located at 4230 Kaskaskia Road, Ellis Grove, IL 62241. More information about the home can be obtained by calling (618) 859-3031 or by visiting the Friends of the Menard Home Blog at [www.friendsofthemenardhome.blogspot.com](http://www.friendsofthemenardhome.blogspot.com) Thank you for your time, and we look forward to seeing you in February.

*Pauline Happel  
Friends of the Menard Home*



## Free Adult Lectures at the St. Louis Zoo

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Join the St. Louis Zoo for in-depth discussions on hot topics in the world of science and wildlife. All programs are free and located in The Living World. For more information, call (314) 646-4544 or visit [www.stlzoo.org](http://www.stlzoo.org)

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**CONSERVATION CONVERSATIONS**  
Co-sponsored by the Academy of Science-St. Louis. No reservations required.

### **Return of the Peregrine Falcon**

Jackie Fallon, Midwest Peregrine Society  
Tuesday, November 17, 7:30 – 9 P.M.

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**SCIENCE SEMINAR SERIES**  
Co-sponsored by the Academy of Science-St. Louis. No reservations required.

### **How to Make Embryonic Stem Cells without Embryos**

Dr. Michael Roberts, University of Missouri  
Wednesday, December 2, 7:30 – 9 P.M.

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## Go Green—Receive *Nature Notes* by Email!

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*Nature Notes* is now available 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 print your electronic copy of *Nature Notes* if you wish (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 (pre-installed on most computers, available for free download at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>). Send your name and email address to the Assistant Treasurer at [whittex@aol.com](mailto:whittex@aol.com) to receive *Nature Notes* by email.



## Call for Articles, Announcements, and Reports

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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](mailto: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!



## Group Activity/Walk Schedules

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### 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.**

|             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| November 21 | Des Peres Park |
| November 28 | Des Peres Park |
| December 5  | Des Peres Park |
| December 12 | Des Peres Park |

#### 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](mailto:chainjac@sbcglobal.net)



### BOTANY GROUP

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

#### Botany Walks

Fr. James Sullivan, Leader

(in his 43<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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, November 22, 7:00 P.M.** Kyra Krakos, 2009 WGNSS Menke scholarship winner, will talk about her research, "Specialization of pollination systems in *Oenothera*." Come to the meeting to find out what insect species pollinate the seven species of *Oenothera* found in Missouri. 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 the reserve's conference center. For assistance with directions contact Richard Thoma at (314) 541-4199.

There will no Entomology Group meeting in December due to the holidays. However, the January meeting looks like it will be a good one, as Chris Hartley from the Butterfly House has agreed to give a talk on the decomposer beetle community, with special emphasis on Cucujoidea. Details will be forthcoming.



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

