



Missouri Master Naturalist



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Volume II Chapter 1

Our mission is to engage Missourians in the stewardship of our state's natural resources through science-based education and volunteer community service.

EAGLE DAYS 2012 OLD CHAIN OF ROCKS BRIDGE

Unsung Hero John Vandover on the Bridge

A Day in the Deep Freeze

Thursday, 12 January 2012, brought new meaning to volunteer dedication.

Allow me to refresh your memory concerning this particular Thursday. This was the day when local temperatures plunged over night and we received a light dusting of an inch and a half or so of snow over rain in the wee morning hours. And this was also the day when MoDOT decided to stay snuggled around their garage potbelly stoves and leave the road-clearing task to the spinning tires of morning rush hour commuters.

When I emerged from bed at 5 am, I was surprised to find everything outside the window covered with snow. I could hear and even feel the wind moaning about the eaves of the house. The trees were leaning heavily in the face of the strong gusts. It not only looked cold outside, it was really cold outside. Remember the day before was in the balmy low 50's. Today obviously was a totally different scenario. Numbing low teens with a wind chill lodged somewhere in the frigid single digits. So, forewarned for the worst, I piled into layers of cozy cold weather hunting gear, including insulated coveralls, fleece Balaclava and a pair of arctic mittens.



I emerged from the house looking like someone akin to the Michelin tire man, but I was prepared for whatever the elements had in store.

The shortest route from my Webster Groves home to Chain-of-Rocks Bridge, per my reckoning and considering the weather, is Interstate 270. Giving myself plenty of leeway in case some slow traffic was encountered, I slipped out of my driveway at 6:15. And to my amazement I didn't arrive at the bridge until 9:15. Three hours to transit 33 miles, unbelievable. Highway 270 was an ice covered parking lot thanks to MoDOT.

And compound that with hundreds...no thousands of Missourians who don't have a clue about how to drive in winter weather. Thankfully, I wasn't the only volunteer to arrive significantly late. The MDC staffers and other volunteers all arrived late. And as if adhering to some sinister winter script, several schools simply cancelled their Eagle Day attendance, and those schools still committed to coming all ended up running about an hour late.

In dibbles and drabs, all MDC staff and the day's volunteers gathered in the mess tent for a couple of soul warming cups of coffee or tea. For those in need of a quick carb fix to stave off the cold, there were several boxes of Crispie-Cremes. Jamila Harris, the very talented MDC staffer who orchestrates Eagle Days, gave us all a briefing on the anticipated status of the day's events and what we as volunteers could expect prior to sending us out to perform our various tasks. My specific mission, along with eight MDC staffers, was to man spotting scopes on the central span of the bridge so attending grade school students could get a chance to see any Bald Eagles that might be in the vicinity.

It was very cold when we exited the tent and it got colder and colder the farther we moved onto the bridge until finally it achieved deep freeze status when we got to our spotting scope stations. The wind was literally howling through the girders and across the deck of the bridge. In fact the wind was strong enough to cause the bridge's structure to vibrate. Truly a sensation that made me wonder about the accuracy of the stress and load analysis computed by the bridge engineers' slide rules 80 some odd years ago. Snow came in horizontal wind driven bursts. The atmosphere was grey; the river's banks were faint at best. While the weather was truly vicious, I was snug in my garb and honestly rather comfortable. My only complaint, and a minor one at that, was the exposed parts of my face stung on occasion from the cruel wind. Standing on the bridge

in the cold and the wind was an extremely interesting experience. Being an avid history buff, I easily imagined myself on the bridge of a heaving warship, mid Atlantic, lashed by gale force winds, standing into an angry winter sea.

The first of six busloads of public school kids...from somewhere in deep south St. Louis City...arrived a little past ten. I guess they were 5th or 6th graders. Their clothing ranged from warm for the conditions to "My God! You are going to freeze". Most were eager to see an eagle or one of the resident falcons, and they crowded the scopes. Inquisitive excitement marked their faces and probing questions constantly flowed from their lips. They wanted to learn as much as they could and were in awe at what they saw through the scopes. In spite of the weather, this was an exciting event for them. For a few others however, the trip to the bridge was simply an opportunity to be out of the classroom. They didn't care a whit about eagles or anything else beyond their little world. However, after about 15 minutes of exposure to the elements, just about all of the kids were ready to head for the warming tent to thaw before their trek back to the Missouri end of the bridge.

One particular young lad was clad in camo, head to toe, from his heavy-duty boots, insulated coveralls, and thermal gloves to his snug hat. He could hardly wait to see an eagle and was full of well thought out questions. After talking to him for a few minutes and considering his camo clothing, I asked him, "Do you hunt?" "Yes sir!" he responded with a big smile, "Killed my first deer this year". I gave him a congratulatory high five. Kids like this young man, and he was representative of the majority of the attendees, made our day on the bridge definitely worthwhile.

Our day at the scopes transitioned from very cold to extremely cold and from strong winds to absolute gale force winds. We experienced periods of no snow, then little snow gusts to

absolute white out conditions where the horizontally blown heavy snow blanked out everything. This was when the river's banks disappeared, the Interstate 270 bridge, about three-quarters of a mile to the north, vanished from sight and the old water intake towers were diminished to faint grey shapes. We were then left standing in a grey, cold wind and snow whipped void. It was an eerie but exciting. Our spotting scopes now useless, all we could do was lean into the wind and enjoy the experience. Yes, it was a lot of fun and I look forward to doing it again next year.

(Submitted by John Vandover)

See page 7 & 8 for pictures of our own Usual Suspects valiantly working the scopes on the Bridge.

Random Thoughts and Notable Numbers from Chapter President, Michael Meredith

I hope the new year finds all of my fellow Great Rivers Missouri Master Naturalist in good health and even better spirits. So as we kick off the year, I'll give you a quick look at the previous one.

The members of Great Rivers accounted for over 3,700 hours of volunteer service in 2011... over 3,700! Perhaps the best part is the diversity of activities and beneficiaries of our efforts. Here's a quick snapshot of where many of Great Rivers service hours were gathered:

- 803 - World Bird Sanctuary
- 516 - County and City Parks (250 hrs at our Hidden Creek Savanna capstone site)
- 418 - Mo. Botanical Garden (inc. Shaw Nature and Litzinger Road Ecology Center)
- 416 - Schools and Education efforts
- 398 - MDC projects and areas

That's pretty cool stuff! And would you care to take a guess at the single most Great Rivers participation event? Given the number of Great Rivers members that you probably saw at Eagle Days 2012, there should be no surprises at the 163 hours we put in at Eagle Days 2011!

So keep them coming this year my friends! Report your hours and maintain your certification. It's a privilege to call you friends and colleagues!

Food - Wonderful Food!

Seems like we've been doing food quite well these last few months. Of course, along with food, comes warmth, conversation, socializing, and getting to know one another. Food seems to be a conduit for bringing people together.

What a great Holiday Party we had in December. It was potluck, and we do pot luck well. Along with the dinner, we had for the first time, a Silent Auction. I know that I came home with a lot of items. Did you buy something? Did you like the Silent Auction? Do you have another idea for the Holiday Party? Let me know your thoughts.

We also had a potluck dinner before our November meeting. I think we'll do that a couple of times a year. It's just fun!

The best way to get to know others in our chapter is to work side by side with them. Our Capstone Project is coming along beautifully as are other on-going and one-time projects.

If you should have any other ideas on how we can bond, please let me know. I'm eager to continue making the Great Rivers Chapter of the Missouri Master Naturalists a warm, friendly and dedicated group.

(Submitted by Maxine Stone)

Regarding The MMN Program; A Comment from a Graduate of the Class of 2011

Although this was an introductory course, our instructors did not try to dumb down the material, but instead offered information designed to satisfy and even whet our appetites for more in depth information obtainable in our future chapter participation.

I have always been intrigued with the earth in its natural state. By this I mean the environment lacking the obvious trappings of man's artificial civilization, and I felt that our instructors were committed to portraying this picture. The instruction given and the goals identified were in no way idealistic or pie-in-the-sky unobtainable goals. What we witnessed were how real professionals can take the ecosystems we are given, identify real goals, and manage their evolution into a closer proximity to what we may like to call the natural environment.

I believe that this plan of action was most successful in our Saturday field trips that took place in Fisher Cave, Shaw Nature Reserve, Riverlands/Columbia Bottoms and the Meramec River. Everybody likes a field trip, and adults, are no exception. In Fisher Cave we were given a brief history of cave geology and animal life, along with the not so glowing report of past human destruction. As bad as things have become, we were introduced to a few real naturalist unsung heroes who in a small way are currently turning the tide and making a difference in repairing cave formations.

Our birding and wetland field trip illustrated how two differently managed areas can each be successful in providing various bird habitats, while the SNR nature hikes illustrated how a functioning tall grass prairie could be created from old worn out farmland.

I have heard that past MMN classes are envious of our float trip on the Meramec River, and in that context, I have no argument. The day was perfect, the water was warm, the scenery was spectacular, and the wildlife both small and grand. Although birds like the Great Blue Heron and Turkey Vultures are always great to view, I believe the water insects clinging to the underside of river rocks gave us the greatest thrill as Sam Faith explained their life cycles and their part in the food pyramid.

It would be a mistake and a disfavor to try and summarize all fifteen sessions; a mistake because there is no way to capture each individual's experience, and a disfavor because there is no way to grade the professionalism, knowledge and enthusiasm of our instructors. I know each of us have our particular likes and dislikes, and as experienced adults we all have different backgrounds, but we did all sign up for a program with a core mission. So - we have been given a foundation but it is up to us to put our varied experiences and new knowledge together in a way that will allow us to achieve great things.

There are two quotes from a book I recently read "The Beast in the Wilderness" I would like to leave that I find both provocative and instructive for our time. "*If nature has grown artificial, then restoring wilderness requires human intervention*" and "*We must manage nature to leave it alone.*"

What a great way to meet people with similar values! It seems a shame for us to break up and go our separate ways into the three St. Louis area chapters.

(Submitted by Richard LeSage, class of 2011)



The Snowy Day at Hidden Creek Savannah

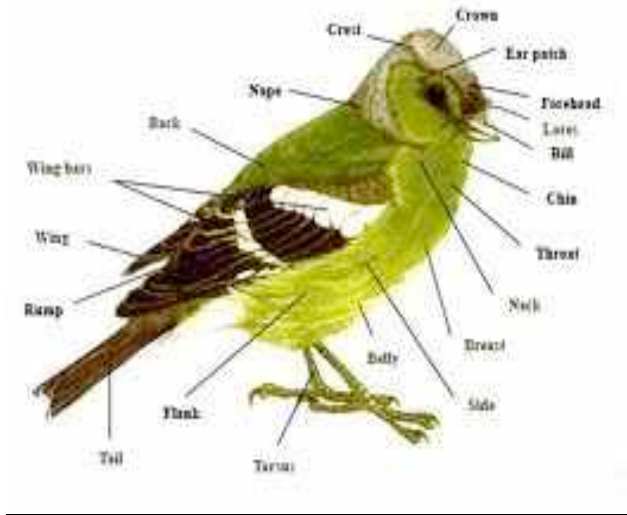
Seed scattering and fishing took place one snowy day at Hidden Creek Savannah managed by the Great Rivers chapter. Creek Oats (*chasmanthium latifolium*) were sown in the shade areas as well as the swales in the site. Ironweed (*vernonia baldwinii*), New England Aster (*aster novae-angliae*), and Wild Goldenglow (*rudbeckia laciniata*) were seeded in the swales also. These were seeds collected by GR members from the Deer Lake prairie this past fall. Blue Indigo (*baptisia australis*) was sown in the open dry area and Fowl Mannagrass (*glyceria striata*) was sown in the shaded area. The two later seed groups were donated by FPF. The seed was scattered on top of the snow throughout the site with hopes that the melting snow will carry the seed into the ground. After the seeds were sown, a couple of good sticks allowed a brief fishing spell ... in this case fishing litter out of the chilly, yet flowing, water of Hidden Creek.

(Submitted by MaryPat Ehlman, photos by John Powers)



First Annual Ladies Day Out

On a beautiful sunny Saturday in December, the ladies of the chapter were invited to a fun day in Kimmswick, Missouri, as part of their “Girlfriends Day Out” event. The morning began by learning about the history of the historic town at the Kimmswick History Museum followed by shopping in the many quaint little stores located within the houses and a few buildings dating all the way back to the mid-1800’s. In the afternoon, we enjoyed tea, lunch and dessert at the Blue Owl, which was closely followed by, yes, more shopping! I can personally attest that the Caramel Pecan Levee High Apple Pie is worth the trip itself! Many thanks to Pam Wilcox, Mary Mierkowski and Emily Horton for attending and making this outing so much fun! We hope to schedule more fun events in 2012 for both guys and gals!



Hidden Creek Savanna Surveys

The Survey Subcommittee will meet sometime in late winter to plan the 2012 surveys for Hidden Creek Savanna. Like last year, the first surveys will be bird surveys during the same time frame as the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). Those surveys are scheduled for:

Friday, February 17 at 10:00 am

Saturday, February 18 at 9:30 am

Also like last year, the results of our surveys will be forwarded to the GBBC. For more info on the Great Backyard Bird Count, please visit www.birdsource.org/gbbc/ If any members are interested in attending, please contact me. In case of bad weather, the affected survey will be rescheduled.

(Submitted by Sherri Schmidt)



Left to right are Kathleen Evans, Pam Wilcox, Mary Meirkowski and Emily Horton
(Article and photo submitted by Kathleen Evans)

On the Scopes



The Heretofore Unsung Hero of January 12, 2012, John Vandover



Our Esteemed President, Michael Meredith



And the Ever Present, Always Busy, Glen Horton

We wish to pay SPECIAL THANKS to Colleen Scott for her above and beyond the call in obtaining these wonderful photos of Eagle Days from MDC photographer, Dan Zarlenga.

Great Rivers Chapter Growth Chart

The Great Rivers Chapter of the Missouri Master Naturalists is growing each year. I thought the chapter might be interested in some of the 2011 statistics. These do not reflect hours entered after December 26th.

- Chapter members in the online directory – 77
- Chapter members reporting hours in 2011 – 44
- Chapter members from the 2010 class achieving certification in 2011 – 6
- Chapter members achieving *recertification* in 2011 – 28
- Average number of volunteer hours reported in 2011 – 85
- Average number of advanced training hours reported in 2011 – 22

The averages are influenced somewhat by the valiant efforts of Cori Westcott and Gina Staehle, who volunteer profusely at a number of places, including the World Bird Sanctuary. It is especially exciting to note that there are people in the chapter who certify within two or three months of the training. John and Bonnie Lorenz from the 2011 class are prime examples. Keep it up, everyone!

Don't forget to report your hours

Nathan Brandt

University of Missouri Extension, Great Rivers Chapter Advisor

Book Review

National Geographic RARE: Portraits of America's Endangered Species by Joel Sartore.

Verlyn Klinkenborg presents a poignant and compelling argument for sustaining our Endangered Species Act in her essay at the beginning of RARE. It's just shy of 40 years old and its short life may soon be snuffed out. Already the funds that go into the research once a candidate is submitted for consideration are being severely cut. Mr. Sartore's subjects pose before plain black or white backgrounds; eloquent in its simplicity, compelling in its truth.
(Submitted by Cori Westcott)



Update on White Nose Syndrome from The Center for Biological Diversity

In major news this week the crisis facing North American bats is far worse than previously thought. A new estimate, released Tuesday, says as many as **6.7 million** bats have already been killed by white-nose syndrome -- a mysterious, fast-moving disease first discovered in the United States six years ago. The latest estimate is dramatically higher than one issued in 2009, which estimated the disease had killed 1 million bats. The outbreak is the worst wildlife epidemic in North America's history and the Center for Biological Diversity has helped lead the campaign to protect bats since the outbreak began. Congress recently allotted \$4 million for research and management of the disease, but much more work, and money, is needed. "America's bats are in the throes of an unprecedented crisis, and some species face the very real prospect of extinction," said the Center's bat expert, Mollie Matteson. "While it's heartening to see some money allocated for white-nose syndrome, this new mortality estimate is a wake-up call that we need to do more, and fast."

(Fact excerpted from Center for Biological Diversity Weekly Newsletter)

This issue officially marks the beginning of the second year's publication of The Great Rivers Gazette. Faith and I have enjoyed working on this project and we hope members are enjoying it as well. Keeping in mind that the Gazette provides a documented history of our Chapter, we encourage everyone to share their parts of that history by sending in pictures and notes of interest.

The next issue of the Great Rivers Gazette is due out on May 1, 2012. We will welcome Faith back for the publication of that edition. The deadline for submissions to the May Issue of the Gazette is April 27, 2012