



Missouri Master Naturalist



THE GREAT RIVERS GAZETTE

August 2012

Volume 2 Issue 3

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



Year to Year Comparison of Wetland at Hidden Creek Savanna

Top view was taken one year ago in July 2011

Lower view was taken June 2012

See next page for full explanation from John Powers

Hidden Creek Savanna

Above are two photos of the wetlands at Hidden Creek from the same point-of-view - one taken a year ago July when the creek was dry, and the second this June after the flow was reestablished last fall and Michael Wohlstadter had led a fall planting. The area is remarkably lush.

It seems that the source of the water in the creek is probably a pool on the site of the Jewel Box that is kept full by makeup water from a standpipe and the excess water is drained away.

I could not find a shot of the wetlands from the same month in 2010 when the site had not been touched yet and the City was mowing it. The area essentially was barren. If any one has this photo I would appreciate a copy.

(Text and photos submitted by John Powers, Chair of Hidden Creek Savanna Project)

Water Quality Testing at Hidden Creek Savanna

Help Wanted

We need volunteers to help with water quality testing at Hidden Creek Savanna on Oct. 20 and perhaps to learn enough to lead/coordinate future testing. Sue Schoening was our water quality expert and, with her departure, Darlene Hawn of St. Louis Stream Team has offered to conduct the testing on Oct. 20, inviting others who work in the River Des Peres Watershed to help, but as the site is Great Rivers' Focus Project, we should participate and resume responsibility for testing in the future. If you are interested in helping, please contact John Powers or Sherri Schmidt

Hidden Creek Savanna Surveys

Our dedicated survey team (I'm sure they'd welcome others to help)

conducted spring plant and pollinator surveys on three dates in May and early June and a bird survey in mid-July. A plant survey was also conducted based on the new grid system (results of grid survey not included here.) Their observations are recorded in detail on our chapter website.

On May 18, Sherri Schmidt conducted a solo plant survey, noting a variety of grasses. Several types of bees, butterflies and birds were also observed.

On June 8, Steve Hoyt joined Sherri, and on the 9th, Marypat Ehlmann and Joanne Johnson participated with her in pollinator surveys. They spotted dragonflies, Japanese beetles and a damselfly, as well as a variety of butterflies and bees. Many Black-eyed Susans were in evidence, along with purple and yellow coneflowers, magnolia, common milkweed, cattail and a couple of rabbits.

Despite the heat, a sizable team, including Jen Grable, Bill Hoss, Steve Hoyt, Joanne Johnson, Beth Lewandowski, John Powers and Sherri Schmidt, conducted a bird survey on July 14. They were rewarded right away with the sight of an indigo bunting in the wetland! Other birds identified included chimney swifts, finches, flickers, Carolina and house wrens, an Eastern kingbird and Eastern wood peewee, as well as mourning doves, redwing blackbirds, starlings and robins. Most were observed by the stream in the middle of the prairie restoration area. The group also noted a variety of plants in bloom, including blazing star, iron weed, mallow, monarda, rattlesnake master, and royal catchfly, and several pollinators. The creek had flowing water on all four occasions!

Thanks to all, but especially Sherri, for your faithful surveying efforts! See Sherri's photos p 8

Highlights

The **May** meeting opened with a presentation by John Hickey, Director of the Missouri Chapter of the Sierra Club. He described their work to protect the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, which includes the Current and Jacks Fork rivers. Another important issue is the degradation and pollution of the Missouri River. For more information, go to their website

www.missouri.sierraclub.org.

With the departure of treasurer Sue Schoening, Barbra Stephenson stepped up to take over treasurer duties until the November elections.

Jennifer McBride announced that Great Rivers now has a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MMNGreatRiversChapter to facilitate communication and outreach. You don't need a Facebook account to view the page, but if you do have an account, you can post information, photos, links, etc. to the chapter page.

In **June**, the chapter picnic was enjoyed by many. Thanks to John and Cricket Vandover for providing the meat, and to Mark Katich for leading a hike through the woods.

At the **July** meeting, there was a discussion of ordering polo shirts embroidered with the MMN logo and chapter name. Pam Wilcox will research vendors and Michael Meredith will have the shirts embroidered.

Certifications and awards were announced at May and July meetings as follows:

Certifications - Nancy Burgess, Vaughn

Meister, Susan Orr and Kari Pratt
Recertifications for 2012 - Kathleen Evans, Bill Hoss, Mark Katich, Richard Lesage, Michael Meredith, Susan Orr, Sherri Schmidt and Pam Wilcox
Bill Hoss received his 250-hour pin and Michael Meredith his 500-hour pin.

Congratulations to all!

Seibert Park Update

Cori Wescott has spearheaded the Seibert Park project since last fall and has made great progress with the help of several Great Rivers members. Removal of invasives is ongoing, including crown vetch, white and yellow sweet clover, Johnson grass seed heads and Japanese hops (need we mention honeysuckle?) MDC Forester Mark Grueber visited the site and made various planting suggestions, and Manchester Parks Director Eileen Collins is applying for a grant from MDC for trees to plant. She is also in the process of having injured trees removed from the area. Cori plans to ask owners of adjoining property for permission to remove honeysuckle on their permission to remove honeysuckle on their property as a buffer to make future maintenance easier.

Reminder

The MMN Annual Conference will be held Sept. 21-23 at the Windermere Conference Center at Lake of the Ozarks. Registration packets were mailed several weeks ago and it sounds like a fabulous weekend! If you didn't get one, there is a link on the Great Rivers website to the packet with detailed information about the conference and a registration form.
Registration deadline is August 31!



Left to right are Faith Williams, Jennifer McBride, Pam Fournier, Chris Vodicka, and Beth Lewandowski

Great Rivers Members Participate in Operation Brightside

On June 9, the Great Rivers Chapter helped celebrate a milestone with Operation Brightside—phase two of the organization's demonstration garden.

Several Great Rivers members were on hand to staff an informational table, and later stayed for the unveiling ceremony, which included plans for an ornate entry way to the garden and the installation of silva cells, the latest technology for growing urban trees.

Located on the corner of Shenandoah and Kingshighway in St. Louis city, the garden was originally a filling station, but has since been transformed to showcase a variety of Missouri habitats including wetland, glade, prairie and woodland. Brightside's website describes the garden as a place to "help educate visitors on best planting and environmentally sustainable practices—ones that can be implemented in yard and neighborhood gardens."

The space includes a variety of features, such as porous surfaces to help manage storm water drainage, that could easily

be installed in a home or industrial setting. The garden also contains a number of native plant species. Brightside promotes the use of native plants through its Neighbors Naturescaping program. This program awards up to \$1500 to neighborhood associations, community groups or block units for a neighborhood greening project.



Naturalist Activities at Summer Camp

Great Rivers Master Naturalists Mary Ann Meyer, Kari Pratt and Faith Williams, and Jennifer Moore from the Confluence chapter have spent 3 fun and hot summer mornings at the City of Manchester's summer day camp. Working with between 30-68 per session, they have helped elementary kids explore their world through books, crafts, bubbles, games and food! With the help of our naturalists the kids have learned about recycling, air and spiders. The counselors report the kids can hardly wait for us to come back next year. Thanks to all who were able to help!

(Submitted by Kari Pratt, photo on next page)



Manchester Park Recycling

Upcoming Events

Aug. 14 - Our Mississippi educator workshop onboard the Motor Vessel Mississippi at the National Great Rivers Museum. Sponsored by U.S. Corps of Engineers, the curriculum is geared towards 5th & 6th grade educators but there are activities for all ages. Go to www.ourmississippi.org for details, or contact Angie Smith at 618-462-6979 for more information.

Aug. 14 and Oct. 9 - Two more topics in the 2012 Tap Root Series from Forest ReLeaf of Missouri. Aug. 14 topic is Sustainable Plants in the Public Landscape; Oct. 9 title is What if the Storm Hits Your Trees. Both are at Schlafly Bottleworks in Maplewood from 7-8pm. Cost is \$15 per session in advance (call 636-970-3000 to register) or \$20 at the door.

Aug. 28 - Great Rivers and Confluence chapter members (no spouses) are invited to the Miramigoua Picnic/Potluck at the Jay Henges Shooting Range (Antire & 44) from 6:30 to 8pm. Advanced Training (archery and gun shooting) begins at 5pm. Bring lawn chairs and a dish to share.

Sept. 7-8-9 - Great Rivers MMN will have a table at Manchester Homecoming Friday 6pm-dark, Sat. 11am-dark and Sun. Noon-5pm. This is an opportunity to teach and inspire others to respect our Missouri treasures and perhaps recruit new members. Cori Wescott will give a slide show on her laptop, but we need to staff the table, preferably two people to each two-hour shift. Bring water, a chair and your enthusiasm. Call Cori at 636-256-6893 to sign up to help.

A Spring Turkey Hunt Revisited

The following tale of love and luck in the Missouri wilds was contributed by John Vandover. It arrived a bit late for the May Issue but it was so riveting that we saved it for August.

As spring approaches and the weather begins to warm, nudging the buds on trees and plants to barely emerge as green wisps, any hunter worth his salt starts anticipating the opening of turkey season. Getting goose bumps at the primitive yodel of a Tom's love call echoing out of the dark forest's dawn mist is what it's all about. Possessing the required skills to get a Gobbler to respond to your playing the seductive sounds of a hot hen, well that borders on virtuoso and is fodder for tall tales over drinks and wings. Conning a Tom to continue this amorous conversation and then seduce him into coming to where he thinks this feathered hussy's located is not only high woods craft art, it firmly places you on the pedestal of great awe amongst your hunting buddies. Laurel wreaths are not sufficient. Turkey hunting is not just putting a Tom down. It's a finely choreographed melding of tradition, craft, art, and skill intertwined with plain old-fashioned luck. That's what makes turkey hunting so compelling and satisfying.

In Missouri, our annual Turkey Liturgy opened on Monday, 16 April. It's always a Monday and it's always close to this date. Now I must admit I could hardly wait for the season opener. I dreamt about hearing the gobbles of horny Toms wafting out of the hollows. I could visualize myself seated against clump of trees hopefully calling like the county's hottest hen. I was confident I had the skills to convince a love sick Tom to throw caution to the winds and a come running to what he knew would be one hell of a tryst.

Well, as it turned out, my turkey dreams were all delightful flights of fantasy. I had spent a couple of weeks at my country place in March scouting and listening in prep for what I thought would be one hell of a season. However our 2011/2012 winter had been a non-event. Spring-like weather prevailed from mid-February through the entire month of March. The woods started greening up weeks prior to when they usually begin to show leaves. Interestingly, the last gobbling I heard on my property was about three weeks prior to the opening of the season. I must admit all of that concerned me. It was definitely way too early for gobbling to cease and for the forests to basically leaf out. This did not bode well success in my area.

Opening day was truly beautiful. Temperatures were on the cool side. Shafts of sunrise slashed through the woods like golden rays. Several deer idled past me totally oblivious to my presence. I worked my slate box like someone playing a symphony on a Strad. No self-respecting Tom could possibly my clucks and purrs. But try as I might, nary a response, nada. It was almost as if

the local Toms had en masse joined a monastery to seek absolution for their bouts of debauchery. Very perplexing. Now it wasn't that I didn't see turkeys on my property. The fact is I did. The problem was I only saw them mid to late afternoon, well after legal shooting hours were over. I had a small bundle of six to seven birds, both gobblers and hens, cavorting almost daily about the pasture behind the cabin. I could almost see the gobblers sneering at me over their snoods. I also had birds running up the driveway in front of the cabin and flying down my power line cut. Hell they were everywhere. This was all mid to late afternoon activities timed obviously to occur after legal shooting was long over for the day. These birds are not dumb.

I actively hunted seven days out of the first two weeks of the season. With one glimmer of hope exception, my woods were silent from dawn til one PM when legal hours were over. The one glimmer of hope occurred on opening day about noon. I had a hen respond to my clucking as she came running to my position. Now as you know, hens are not legal game during the spring season. But it was sure a lot of fun to call her in. The brush was so thick with leaves that I didn't see her until she was almost on top of me. What a rush, that was really an enjoyable experience.

Well my season was a bust. In fact I don't know of anyone in my area that got a bird this year. But that's why they call it hunting. And I'm already dreaming and anticipating 2013s season. My hope is that the weather gods cooperate by giving us a very cold winter this so we can have a normal spring that encourages gobbling during the annual season.

Notable Achievements

Jim and Brenda Christ were nominated in the Special Achievement Category of Missouri Botanical Garden' Volunteer Awards for their work within the education department and for several special projects at Shaw Nature Reserve.

Nathan Brandt has an excellent article in the July/August issue of Missouri Gardener magazine. Check it out!

Bill Hoss has received Platinum Certification in St. Louis Audubon's Bring Conservation Home program. Bill's 48' x 314' lot has nearly 60% of the previous surfaces planted in native species. Of the approximately 110 varieties of plants, including trees and shrubs, Bill points to the striking Indian pinks (*spigelia marilandica*) and the stand of sweet coneflower, some nearly 7 feet tall, as noteworthy. But he is most pleased with the number of migrating birds and pollenators that are attracted by his native plantings. He estimates that 60 species of birds and many insects that he hadn't seen before now visit his property. We're trying to get Bill to invite us to a garden tour next spring.



Checkered Skipper nectaring on Aromatic Asters



Cedar waxwing.



Bill's backyard looking northeast about 2/3 of the way back. Taken Sep 9, 2009. The tall structure is a chimney swift tower.

Your yard is truly beautiful Bill. What a lot of work has gone into building this paradise.

Sherri's photos from Hidden Valley Savanna



Skipper



Bumblebee on bloom



Royal Catchfly

New Grid System Used for Plant Survey

On June 9, the Hidden Creek Savanna team, including Marypat Ehlmann, Bill Hoss, Joanne Johnson, John Vandover, Michael Wohlstadter and Sherri Schmidt, performed a general plant survey using the new grid system to get a larger overview of what plants are surviving and thriving. (See May issue for a description of the system.) The group is still reviewing results and refining the process.

Dominant plants observed were lizard tail, fog fruit, Canada wild rye, river oats and wild bergamot. Many others were observed in smaller numbers (under 20 plants in a given area). Details of the survey are archived on the chapter website.

(Submitted by Sherri Schmidt)

Memo from Michael

I hope everyone is surviving this historically hot summer in good fashion. There are just a couple things to mention on our immediate horizon.

First off, our friends at Miramiguo Chapter have planned a picnic and advanced training opportunity for Tuesday August 28th. at Jay Henges shooting range. That's located at Hwy 44 and Antire rd., just one exit past 141.

The plan is to have Advance Training beginning at 5:00 for archery and shot gun shooting. You will not need to bring a bow or a gun or ammo. Everything for AT will be supplied for you. We will be using compound bows the same ones

used at our 2010 conference. AT will go until 6:30 so if anyone cannot make it at 5:00 come join us when you can.

They ask that everyone bring a dish to share with others. There be a social/meal from 6:30-8:00 or when everyone is ready to go. Miramiguo will provide the paper products and drinks. Lawn chairs may be helpful if you wish to sit outside. There will be tables and chairs indoors for meal time. You just never know what the weather in August will be. It may be a beautiful evening to sit out or it may be so stinking hot we will all be ready to retire indoors to share our meal time.

Secondly, registration for the September State Conference is underway. If you haven't already seen the program, go to our website. It's going to be fantastic.

Also, remember that we have one scholarship to award to a chapter member that will cover the registration and program costs for the conference. If you're interested in applying, please drop me an email at michael.meredith.stl@gmail.com.

We will be announcing the winner at our August meeting.

Stay cool... stay hydrated... and stay committed! You are the people that make Great Rivers such a fantastic organization!

Michael

Peck Ranch Round-up – of sorts

What can be more appealing to a Missouri Master Naturalist than participating in the reintroduction of a major species to Missouri?

The elk reintroduction effort in Missouri is now in its second year, which means that the birthing season began in late May. The problem of course is that elk don't exactly book a birthing room in advance, so short notice was the name of the game. With additions to the herd imminent, the word went out for volunteers that would be able to help round up the newborns so that they could be radio tagged, and DNA samples taken. That's tough when it takes 4 hours or so to drive to Peck Ranch, and you have to be there at 5:30 am.

Nonetheless, the post-midnight hour of June the 14th found Kari Pratt, Steve Krchma and I meeting at the I-44/Hwy 141 commuter lot to carpool down to the ranch. Peck Ranch isn't exactly the easiest to find of Missouri's conservation areas, especially at 3:30 in the morning. But after blazing past the unlit sign once, and then exploring a couple of long gravel roads, we finally found right one. We waited an hour, enjoying the pre-dawn sounds of the forest until we were joined by Amy Bleisch (the Mizzou PhD candidate coordinating the project), her supervisor Dr. Barbara Keller of Mizzou and the rest of the team, which included a number of Missouri MasterNaturalists from the Lake Ozark chapter. Gina Stahle of Great Rivers also joined.

The instructions were pretty basic. Using the RF data from the mother, Amy would get a generalized location

for mother and child (no illusions here, the RF collar only reports location information every 4 hours or so. The rest of the team would then join her, form a grid search line and walk through the woods. If we located the calf, we were to corner it and restrain it as best we could. If that meant literally tackling the newborn, so be it. But once the calf was secured, the rest of the search team was to return to the trucks. That instruction dealt a quick blow to my expectation that there was a picture of me posing next to a newborn elk calf, and lead to the more remote hope that I might be the one to tackle the little thing (a fantasy that everyone on the team probably held as well). Everyone wanted the distinction of being the "catcher". We were also told that as yet, no one had been charged by a mother elk... as yet.

Sadly, there was no cool "me and the elk" photo ops. After about two hours of carefully walking through the woods, collecting little more than a few ticks and some multiflora rose pricks; and scaring up one whitetail deer fawn, the decision was made to give up the search. It was on the way back to the trucks that we found the calf. Or to be more accurate, the team stumbled upon the remains of a 5 or 6 day old baby elk. Ironically, had our search line stretched about 100 feet further to the left, we would have found it at the very start.

It was all kind of a good news/bad news Circle of Life kind of moment. On one hand, we found the calf we were searching for, on the other hand...well... you know. Amy and her team quickly moved into C.S.I Peck Ranch mode, assessing the carcass in hopes of getting some idea as to the calf's demise. What

was clear was that it had been dead for two or three days. The scavengers of the forest had already begun their jobs, so drawing a quick conclusion as to whether the death was caused by a predator or neonatal condition was not going to be easy. She did instruct her team to gather some tissue samples and a couple of legs though, so in the end, science will be served.

While our drive back to St. Louis didn't feature any stories about corralling a calf or watching it being released back to its mother, no one felt shortchanged. It was a gorgeous morning to be in the woods, made even more pleasant to be in the company of fellow Great Rivers Master Naturalists and others from around the state. Furthermore, just getting personal exposure to academics like Amy and Dr. Keller is an education unto itself.

With luck, we'll get further opportunities like this in the future. For now however, we'll have to close this episode of C.S.I. Peck without any court-worthy conclusions, but sometimes that's the way it is in nature.

(Text and photos submitted by Michael Meredith)



Amy Bleisch and Dr. Barb Keller (backs to the camera) consider the possible causes of death, as other members of the team watch and speculate.



Steve Krchma, Gina Stahle and Kari Pratt waiting for word to begin the search.



MMNs from around the state, including the four of us from Great Rivers

The next issue of the Great Rivers Gazette will arrive on Nov. 1. Please submit your articles and photos no later than Oct 26.