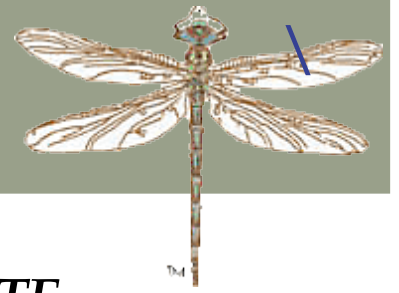




Missouri Master Naturalist



THE GREAT RIVERS GAZETTE

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

HIDDEN CREEK SAVANNA WORK STATUS



Taken from the hill behind the creek with stone bridge visible

Forest Park conducted a controlled burn at Hidden Creek and Steinberg Savanna. Above, and following are four photos taken during the burn at Hidden Creek. The first two were taken from the hill behind the creek and the stone bridge is visible in both as a reference. The third was taken across the street from that area of the site filled with trees. The fourth is an overall shot of Hidden Creek.

BIRD SURVEYS AT HIDDEN CREEK CREEK



Sherri Schmidt continued her dedication to recording wildlife at Hidden Creek Savanna with two bird surveys this quarter. On Feb. 16, a breezy, clear, cold but sunny morning, Sherri, Bill Hoss and Lori Purk ventured out to look for birds in conjunction with the Great Backyard Bird Count. They positively identified birds of 9 species; most numerous were robins, juncos and Canada geese. They noted that, despite the cold, water was flowing in the creek and a dandelion was blooming.



On Apr. 26, Bill, Marypat Ehlmann, Jen Grable and Faith Williams joined Sherri on a cloudy morning with temps in the 50s. The group was rewarded with sightings of many birds of various species, some busily building nests. Robins, starlings, red-winged blackbirds, grackles and tree swallows were most numerous, but the group was especially delighted to watch the brown thrashers building a nest.

The site of the controlled burn is recovering well. Water was flowing in the creek and spring beauties, violets, bluebells and celandine poppies were in bloom.



Sherri Schmidt, Bill Hoss, MaryPat Ehlmann, Jen Grable

NEW BRUSH CUTTER IN ACTION!

Below we see a picture of the new brush cutter with Bill Hoss, veteran operator of complicated machinery, at the fore. The cutter worked like a charm in spite of the thickness of the brush. A little slow to get it started that morning, but overall a successful day.

So much honeysuckle vine in there! I always come home from Parkway work far more fatigued than Seibert work. It's those vines. Husband Al was there too. The bottoms of our feet hurt the rest of the day! We both blamed the vines.



Bill Hoss

(Submitted by Cori Westcott, above article slightly revised by Toni)

Members of the Gazette Staff are sincerely hoping that Brave Bill got out of the thicket and safely home that evening.

A NOTE FROM COLLEEN SCOTT and KENT RIPPERDA

I believe John Lennon is credited with the observation, "Life is what happens when you are busy making plans." Aaron was planning to come home in May, and we were looking so forward to having him with us again.

Then Life happened.

And, along with our heartache, my husband Kent and I realized one thing.

We are also blessed.

Because of your thoughtfulness, your kind words, your precious gift of an oak tree, we are learning.

Life goes on. We will continue to grow.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Colleen Scott and Kent Ripperda

Colleen's son, Aaron Ripperda, was one of the Marines who was tragically killed in a training accident recently."

GUIDELINES FOR COUNTING ADVANCED TRAINING (AT)

YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO ASK THE AT COMMITTEE whether or not a particular program "counts" toward AT hours if one of the following exists:

- 1. The program includes direct instruction in any topic related to the flora, fauna and ecology of Missouri; or*
- 2. The program is presented by staff of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), the Missouri Extension Service, or any of our MMN partners (see list below); or*
- 3. MDC, the Missouri Extension Service or any of our MMN partners are hosting or supporting the event.*
(see page 4)

Only one of the above criteria is necessary. For example, St. Louis Community College is not a partner but most of their master naturalist certification courses meet the requirement in #1. OR, for example, workshops presented by the Extension Service meet the requirement in #2. Another example is programming hosted by MDC at their conservation area meeting places.

Programs such as "Grant-writing for Natural Area Development", "Supporting and Maintaining Community Gardens", or "Yard to Table Projects for Middle Schools" MAY count if they are DIRECTLY RELATED TO YOUR VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY. Only you know the answer to that question.

Again, you do not need to contact the AT Committee for any of these. Just remember to post your attendance on the reporting page of the Great Rivers chapter website.

Programs such as "Climate Change and Species Diversity in the Tundra", "Butterflies of the Serengeti", or "Ferns of Nepal", or great nature movies will not count but should never be avoided.

MMN Partners include but are not limited to:

- Audubon Center at Riverlands
- Forest Park Forever
- Forest ReLeaf of Missouri
- Little Creek Nature Area
- Litzinger Road Ecology Center
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Missouri Prairie Foundation
- River des Peres Watershed Coalition
- Shaw Nature Reserve
- St. Charles County Parks
- St. Louis Audubon Society

- St. Louis County Parks
 - The Green Center
 - World Bird Sanctuary
- (Submitted by Mark Katich, VP)*
314.920.0870

AN INTRODUCTION

I want to introduce myself as a new person in Great Rivers Chapter. I'm Mary Harris. I have lived in St. Louis all of my life, city girl during the week and country girl on the weekend. Country is my mom's farm in Phelps County. I have always enjoyed being outside. Several years ago, a friend and I went to Maple Sugars Days at Rockwood. It was cold and snowy, but it was great fun. I noticed the badges worn by the volunteers and was surprised to see the name of a group that I knew nothing about. Thinking "I could do this". I went home, did some research and found MMN. I sent an email to Nathan Brandt to put me on the list for classes.

Well, long story short, I'm now an intern with Great Rivers. I was so excited to start the classes and equally surprised at the level of instruction and the depth of knowledge of the fantastic training staff. I want to pass on all that I have learned so far, and share my future training with all that will listen. I want to thank all MDC and MMN members that I have had the pleasure of meeting so far in my MMN career. Looking forward to a fun time with my new MMN "family".
(submitted by Mary Harris, class of 2012)

Thank you very much Mary for agreeing to speak to the 2012 experience. And we are always happy to hear from other members of your class regarding their impressions of MMN and the Great Rivers Chapter.

MEETINGS SUMMARY

New chapter chairs were announced at the February meeting. They are: Advanced Training – Mark Katich; Hospitality – Cindy Lueder and Vaughn Meister; Projects & Partners – Shawn Thomason; Communications – Faith Williams.

Also, Cori announced that the chapter has purchased a Stihl brush cutter with the help of a donation from the Missouri Nature and Environmental Photographers (MONEP) group, represented by Lori Purk. The group donated half of the \$300 purchase price. Bill Hoss will store the brush cutter at his home. The chapter authorized reimbursement to Cori Westcott for the purchase of a pair of protective chaps to be worn by anyone using the equipment. Nathan Brandt provided Advanced Training with his informative “Organic Gardening” presentation.

In March, we addressed the topic of communications, and how best to keep members informed of service and training opportunities. The topic will be discussed further by the board and possible solutions discussed further at future meetings.

Member Gina Staehle gave an excellent overview of this year’s MMN Leadership Academy held Feb. 23 in Jefferson City. Chapter members agreed that we should work to implement several suggestions from the academy to increase outreach and to encourage participation by new members in chapter activities.

Shawn Thomason provided an update on service opportunities at the Claire Gempp Davidson Conservation Area in South County. Mark Katich will be scheduling workdays in the future.

Guest speaker Nancy Schnell described the work she is doing through Geese

Peace St. Louis to control the local population of Canada Geese in a humane way.

President Cori Westcott presented an honorary membership to Mitch Leachman of St. Louis Audubon in recognition of his outstanding contributions to conservation efforts in our area.

Cori also announced that a tree and stone have been donated by our chapter to Columbia Bottoms Conservation Area in memory of Aaron Ripperda, stepson of Colleen Scott. The tree is a *Quercus Schutteii*, a cross between Bur and Swamp White Oak. The tree will be planted and the stone placed when a spot is selected and engraving completed.

Shawn Thomason, Michael Meredith and Marypat Ehlman toured Missouri Prairie Foundation facilities in conjunction with Deer Creek Watershed activities. MPF is a possible partner of Great Rivers MMN.

Loren Crandall of the Missouri Coalition gave April’s Advanced Training presentation for the Environment. Currently focused on the Kiefer Creek Restoration Project, Loren gave us extensive information on the health and status of Missouri’s water bodies and efforts to establish policies to protect them.



Mitch Leachman accepting honorary membership in MMN GR Chapter from Cori Westcott

CASTLEWOOD'S COLOSSAL CLEANUP

On 03/16/2013, I participated in the Clean Up of the outskirts of Castlewood Park. It was between the railroad tracks and the Meramec River. Mostly, rolling Bottomland and open woodland. This ground had the rock foundations of old resort cabins. St. Louis elite took advantage of the new travel machine, the train, to escape the dangerous city air laden with dirty coal smoke. Every weekend, they would come to stay on the Meramec's bottomlands. I found an old wing-tip shoe from the 20s or 30s. Lots of rusted unidentifiable stuff, Chlorox bottles (yes, brown glass bottles), aluminum and various glass products.

I got to see a deer skeleton. That was interesting.

Not too many folks. 150-200 were expected. This was a joint project with Missouri stream teams, park visitor volunteers and us. I was the only one from our chapter. Besa S. and her husband and parents (from Miramiguoa) were there. We had fewer than forty, half gone halfway through the morning. But, we did pick up a lot. We filled one dumpster with tires and another dumpster the same size with trash.

(Submitted by Cori Westcott)

Our president certainly gets around!

CAUTION, UNDER CONSTRUCTION!

Those of us partaking in the spring bird survey had an added delight - watching nests being built. In the wetlands area of Hidden Creek Savannah three nests were spotted. In a bush near the edge of the creek two brown thrashers were busy at

work building their nest. They were busily gathering beakfuls of leaves and other things from the creek bed, one flying back to the nest as the other one would leave to go gathering. Then the material was pushed into place as the thrashers tail went straight up, much like a duck diving to the bottom to feed. Again and again the pair worked in tandem creating their new abode.

In a well leafed out maple tree about 10 ft. away, a pair of robins were beginning their nest. Some twigs or grasses were already in a "y" split in the branches. Most important to one of the robins was a 10-inch strip of plastic. The plastic was in the space but blew down before it was secured. So she, or he, would fly down to the ground, pick it up again and fly to the nesting spot with this long piece of plastic protruding from its beak. We observed the air lift twice before going on our way.

A third nest was spotted in another tree. For the most part this tree and nest both seemed bare, perhaps a leftover from last year or the beginning of another story.

(Submitted by Marypat Ehlmann)



(Marypat)

MORE PICTURES FROM THE SAVANNA



Tree Swallow on birdhouse



Bluebells at the Savanna

RECENT MEMBER ACTIVITIES

While we know that work is ongoing at Seibert Park, Parkway Middle School, and members have been working at Castlewood Park and Southside Naturescaping, a few members notified the Gazette of their participation in other conservation activities this spring.

Nancy Burgess was inspired by our March speaker from Geese Peace and joined her at Earth City to help replace Canada goose eggs with wooden ones.

Kari Pratt and Vaughn Meister helped Forest ReLeaf to pot 3,000 tree seedlings.

Cori Westcott completed an American Water Grant Application for Seibert Park Restoration.

Faith Williams helped staff the MDC booth at Earth Day passing out the very last of 1100 tree saplings and helping kids to make tree cookie necklaces.

EDITORS NOTE

After the Aug. 1 and Nov. 1 issues of the Gazette, I will have served as editor (with Toni Vafi) for 3 years and am ready to let someone else have a turn. I will complete the next two issues but wanted to give enough notice to find another editor to prepare the Feb. 1 2014 issue. Contact a board member or me if you are interested.

Faith Williams

Deadline for submitting articles for the Aug. 1 issue is July 30.

Faith Williams, Editor

Last but not least, the remaining pages of this Gazette are devoted to recordings of adventurer, MMN GR Communication Committee member, John Vandover. Take it away John!

A DAY IN THE SMOKE OF THE KETTLE CORN FIRE!

Wreathed in smoke, stoking the fire, manhandling a gleaming copper kettle, listening for subtle popping sounds, I was performing an intricate dervish dance simply to meet the steady flow of Kettle Corn Pam and Kathleen demanded. While they robotically scooped, bagged and served non-stop for hours on end, I kettled the corn and kept their hopper full. The eager hungry crowds flowed hands out to our serving table like cattle to the mangers. A multitude of folk that was seemingly endless. The scene was right out of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. Except we weren't dealing with buckets of water, we were dealing with corn; I mean hordes of kettles of Kettle Corn. And we were barely keeping up with the demand.

Well the weather was fine and my best estimate, through the smoke of course, was that we had half the Metro Area crowding our Kettle Corn area. It was a stampede. I'm certain however the actual numbers (something like 3000) far exceeded Kevin McCarthy's wildest anticipation. They were a statistical cross section of Greater St. Louis because they came in all ages and sizes. From petit toddlers in carriers and waves of small kids, through adolescents, young adults, mature adults to the bone fide old timers. And they ranged from slim and trim to corpulently large. Attire, what a sight, it ranged from good-ole-boy bib coveralls to Neiman haut couture and every style wearable in between. It was quite a gathering. Hell I don't believe Moses had a more diverse mob before him when he waved those schist tablets. Oh the compelling power of maple sugar spiked popcorn. Is there a religious message here that I'm

missing?

We started popping and serving about 8:30 and went damn near non-stop until 3:00. Pam's eyes started puffing and running cause of the smoke at 8:35, but like the stalwart she is, she kept at it until the last of the corn was in the palm of the last served. Kathleen, well she was our grand choreographer. She orchestrated our every move; she called the corn's cadence and kept the flow going until our forty-pound kernel tub was clean empty. It was hard work. I doubt the oarsmen on a Greek Trireme worked any harder. We all in turn cursed the kettle we popped in as we wore ourselves to the bone, but when it was all said and done, it was a hoot; we had fun and look forward to doing it again next year.

In parting I want to pass on a "serious" question asked of me by an interesting older woman clad in a full length mink fur coat. "Young man, (that was me) where are the automatic controls you use to control your cooking fire?" I guess she took a day's leave of her Central West End condo to sample "Rural" and forgot that cooking open air was definitely not Jenn-Air. The poor thing.

(Submitted by John Vandover)



John Vandover

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE JOURNEY!

Remember the summer of 2012? Remember its tenacious, malignant, searing hot grip? It was oppressive, a seemingly eternal inferno of almost biblical proportions. It sapped our strength and zapped our zest from pursuing much of anything. And if the heat wasn't enough, we were also cursed by its bone-dry cousin, drought. Remember how parched our spirits were, how desiccated the land? Forests, fields, streams and ponds, and all creatures that lived within and upon were stressed to nigh near their breaking points by these twin climatic curses.

Hell, it seemed like we were doomed to a roast and toast existence. There appeared to be no end in sight. But as the hot grist of summer ground inexorably toward September, a glimmer of faith that allowed me the hope that ultimately heat's vice grip would slowly diminish as the weeks of summer began to shift into fall. With that reassuring thought in mind, I got off my duff, the heat be damned, I had to prepare for the coming October archery season. So several mornings each week, I would venture out to Buder Park's archery range. I would arrive early, when the sun was still young and the atmosphere somewhat cool, well before the day's round of incineration began. And for a few pleasant hours each session I would send sleek carbon shafts whistling 20, 30, 40, and even 50 yards to accurately impact a six-inch diameter paper plate attached to a target butt. It was great satisfaction watching arrow after arrow rapidly recede from my bow to impale that distant plate. In the eye of my fertile imagination it wasn't a paper plate I was shooting, it was a mossy-antlered buck; a vast 7x7 elk bugling in dark timber; or a massive bison bull charging across a rolling prairie. In my mind that plate was a bestiary of any number of challenging animals, both real and mythic and I accurately arrowed them all. By the end of August I was consistently placing 6 out of 6 shafts, over and over, into that magical plate from any of the ranges listed above. And then

unexpectedly one morning my practice paid off. I was blessed with my first "Robin Hood"..... archery's version of a Hole-In-One. This stunning event for me occurred at 30 yards when I placed an arrow dead center into the nock of an arrow already proud into that paper plate. My second arrow buried itself well over 15 inches into the shaft of the first. In my mind, that sealed it, with the exception of scouting and polishing my woods skills, I was ready for the chase. I yearned for fall, cool weather and the upcoming deer season.

Learning the skills of a hunter is an extremely Zen like disciplined study in patience and observation. For me, it all began when I was very young, learning from my father and uncles. The goal was to hone the acuity of my senses of sight, hearing and smell to razor sharpness.

Through intense practice and many hours afield, you build your situational awareness capabilities to almost mythic levels. You literally develop a shaman-like ability to subconsciously sense what is occurring in the woods around you. You resurrect the critical skills our ancient hunter/gatherer ancestors possessed that enabled them to hear, see, and smell the presence of game. And to this day I always spend numerous days in late summer and early fall re-establishing those skills by slowly walking and patiently sitting in the woods. I look for rubs and scrapes deer leave along their travel corridors on the ridges and slopes of the forest. These are the "social networking" formats pre-rut bucks use to communicate their presence to the local does they lust to date. It's hard, fun work, but the more I can learn about the woods and deer and their daily patterns, the more effective I can become as a hunter.

In spite of the summer heat, I spent a lot of time in the woods. The only difference with respect to years past, this year my favorite ridge and hollow areas were baked and parched. The net result of this climate double whammy was extremely stressed land. The woods were devoid of adequate mast, available water and the normal signs of deer activity. This did

not bode well. These magical places that normally were a proliferation of rubs and scrapes this year had few to nada. The rampant heat and drought drove most of the deer from my area to distant locations where crop fields bordered the local streams that were still flowing. No, Deer ain't dumb. They simply went to places with secure sources of forage and water. Fall's compelling crispness however finally evicted summer's blast by mid-October. To say I was ready to hunt is an understatement. I embraced the welcomed crisp air by spending the entire last two weeks of October and well into early November in the woods. I hunted all day, every day; bow in hand, camo-clad head to toe. A scant few rubs and scrapes were discovered where before there were none. While these finds caused a small surge of excitement, they proved to be for naught. I hunted hard just about every ridge, hollow, slope and glade on my property, covering a lot of extremely pretty ground. And when it was all said and done, my archery season was a bust. I hadn't seen hide or hair of a deer, but it was a great adventure and I had a hell of a lot of fun.

Well as you know, time moves on and hunting seasons do change. And on Saturday, 10 November, the archery season morphed into the firearms season, it was opening day of our annual two week long autumn liturgy of the gun to the deer god. If archery hunting is all about solitary stealth, the gun season is the polar opposite. The "Gun Deer Season" is traditionally a group pursuit. It's all about camaraderie. This means hunting with your buddies, steamy cups of morning coffee, discussing rifles and cartridges at length, regaling each other with epic yarns of hunts past, volumetric beer consumption, savoring stick-to-your-ribs deer camp chow, and rehashing the day's results in glow of a roaring fireplace. The rifle season is early mornings, long days and late nights. It's a tradition across this land that harkens back to one's pioneer ancestors and times of yore. It's the annual hunting event that I have eagerly anticipated and participated in every year since childhood. And it's a

glorious two weeks when close friends get together and collectively enjoy good times in the great outdoors.

Now with the opening of the firearms deer season I just knew my luck would change. The weather definitely had turned cooler and I hoped this shift to more seasonal temperatures, including frost, would bring a re-appearance of deer. And to a certain degree it did. Opening day morning found me, rifle in hand, scrunched snug against the base of a huge, ancient, gnarly white oak. This location provided a secluded stand that gave me an excellent view deep along an open bench that ran along a hollow wall. It was a natural game travel corridor. I had slipped into this position when it was just light enough to see one's hand and safely walk into the woods without stumbling.

The wind was modest, the temperature, a comfortable mid thirty something with sun shafts randomly dabbling the now mostly leafless fall woods. A few squirrels, having returned from a long absence, could be heard in the distance scampering about. It was just about 7 am when just as I began to sense something stirring in the woods way off to my right. The squirrels began to chatter. This was a sure alert signal that something was about to happen. About that time a faint earthy parfum scent lightly tickled my nose. It was undeniably that alluring musky aroma of does. I could now hear far off the recognizable sounds of multiple hooves rustling the leaves on the forest floor...and getting closer.

Then it happened. Like an apparition, I had a grouping of fifteen does standing stationary in front of me. The nearest was at the most about twelve yards from where I was sitting. They saw me and I saw them. By now the wind had shifted and was blowing lightly from me to them and they didn't seem to care. I knew they could smell me but for whatever reason, my scent didn't appear to bother them. Tails wiggling, some stared intently at me while others grazed. Some nuzzled each other and others pawed the ground to locate more tender forage. This meeting of hunter and deer lasted about 4, maybe

5 minutes. There was no urge to flee; they were content to stay. I guess they sensed they had nothing to fear because I would never shoot a doe. After about 4/ 5 minutes they casually trotted off to my left and disappeared amongst the trees that populated the bench.

That was really a rare occurrence, so many deer, so close and for so long. I loved every minute of it. About five minutes or so after the does trotted off, I clearly heard the sounds of a single deer quickly approaching from my right. All of a sudden a fork-horned little buck lopped into view and, like the does before him, stopped in front of me. His mouth was open and his tongue dangled out over his left lips. He was panting and clearly out of breath. He looked me over carefully. But I guess he knew he had nothing fear because in Missouri, his fork-horn rack made him illegal to shoot. After a few minutes looking at me, he cantered off in the direction of the does. I guess he was looking to score. Good luck little buck.

Well that group of does and that single fork horned buck were the only deer I saw during the entire season. You know that wasn't a bad thing. Having all those deer hovering in front of me was a real gift and even though I didn't "get" anything, I still had a hell of a lot of fun. Hunting, when you get down to it, is all about the journey. It's about the anticipation, spending a lot of time in the woods, and being with close friends. What more could I ask for, I was blessed with a great adventure.

(Submitted by John Vandover)