



SE MN Prairie Partners Chapter Newsletter

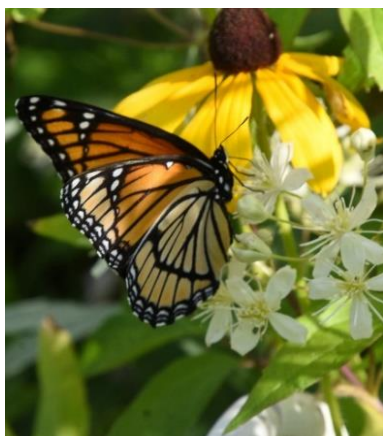
September 2022 Volume 11 issue 3



Joel Dunnette shows some of the native flowers during our tour at Whitewater. Photo by Sandy Hokanson



Sweet Susans in the Whitewater State Park native garden. Photo by Sue White



Viceroy on Virgin's Bower flower. Whitewater State Park native garden. Photo by Sandy Hokanson



Civilian Conservation Corps Shelter from the 1930s at Ledges State Park in Madrid, Iowa



Cylindrical Liatris, Whitetail Woods Park. Photo by George Watson



Tricolor Bumblebee on Culver's root, Whitewater State Park.



Whitetail woods tour with guides Aaron (front right) and Meagan (back right). Photo by George Watson

Prairie Partners Chapter 2022 officers

President – Barb Bolan
Vice President – Nancy Schumacher
Secretary – Pat Johnson
Web Master & Treasurer – Jim Sipe
Membership Chair – Alice Burmeister
Newsletter Chair – Ann Dybvik

Wild Ones Mission: Native Plants, Natural Landscaping promote environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

Wild Ones National Address: 2285 Butte des Morts Beach Road, Neenah, WI 54956
www.wildones.org

Membership: Sign up/ renew online at www.wildoneones.org/membership.html or by mail at above address. Cost is \$40 per year for a household (family) membership. Student and other membership types also available.

Northfield Prairie Partners Mission Statement: To preserve, maintain and provide knowledge of native and restored plant communities in a way that fosters friendship.

SE MN Prairie Partners online:

<https://semnprairiepartners.wildones.org/>

[Wild Ones: SE MN Prairie Partners | Facebook](#)

Newsletter Committee: Lead: Ann Dybvik, Chief Photographer: Bruce Dybvik, Committee: Nancy Schumacher, Jim Sipe, Gary Bullemer, Barb Bolan

Submitting articles for the newsletter – We welcome stories about natural areas, a native garden you have visited or designed, a nature-based vacation, a special flower, bird, butterfly, etc. Please contact Ann Dybvik at anndbvk@gmail.com to discuss your ideas.

Prairie Partners member local Services

(Please let us know if you have one to list)

Minnesota Native Landscapes (MNL), INC:

Dwayne Vosejpka 651-214-2357

Intergenerational Nature Connections -

Breanna Wheeler -

RBNC –River Bend Nature Center, www.rbnc.org,

Packy Mader, Board of Directors

Halfpint Hollow Miniature Donkeys:

Rod and Sue White, 507-263-2716

Goat Dispatch: Jake Langeslag, Faribault 507-333-5959

CRP – Clean River Partnership: Paula Corsi and Bill Jokela at [Home - Clean River Partners](#)

Upcoming Chapter Programs –

Oct 13th, 5:30PM– *Fall and winter trees* –

Breanna Wheeler – Hauburg Woods - in church if weather doesn't allow outside tour.

Nov 10th, 6PM – *Unseen and untold stories of Native gardens and their visitors*, by Bonnie Harper-Lore Emmaus Church

Dec 8th, 11:30AM Lunch – Location TBD

January 12th, 7pm via Zoom – *Native garden design and development* by Becky from Metro Blooms.

July 14 - Lashbrook Park led by Ken Kirton



Ken Kirton,
Photo by
Bruce
Dybvik

A group of interested and observant Wild Ones met at Lashbrook Park to learn more about how this small but important park came to be. Ken explained how it has evolved over decades. The land was occupied by an Aboriginal people shortly after the ice withdrawal! It later became part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, then part of the Minnesota Territory in 1849, then part of the state of Minnesota. A series of private owners held the land until it became part of School Land Patents in 1994 and annexed into the city of Northfield. Later it was purchased by a consortium of the with the neighborhood, St. Olaf College, and the city of Northfield and was dedicated as a park. The prairie has been seeded and planted with native plants over time.

More recently the woods surrounding part of the park have become infested with buckthorn and reed-canary grass, but these are being monitored and controlled by volunteers. More native seed mix was planted in 2014, and our Prairie Partners chapter planted native species in 2020. Some tree species in this small but lovely park are Black Walnut, Choke Cherry, Hackberry, Maple, and Elm. It is a great place to see Bottle Gentians, Oxeyes, Northern Bedstraw, Dogbane, butterflies, pollinators and so much more. There are walking paths and open areas. It is well worth a few hours to enjoy this hidden gem.

August 11 – “Whitewater State Park native garden tour” led by Joel Dunnette

The Friends of the Whitewater State Park group, led by Joel Dunnette, have created a wonderful oasis of native wildflowers and grasses that



2013 – the new native garden. Photo by Joel Dunnette



2022 tour - The native garden has grown into a mature beautiful garden.

attracts many butterflies, bees and birds, and people. For self-guided tours, plant signs

provide identifications

for the native plants. Joel made sure they would have blooming plants throughout the season so that pollinators would always have nectar and pollen, and visitors would find beauty during each visit. His love for the park and native plants are obvious and his knowledge is amazing. Whitewater Park is truly beautiful, with limestone bluffs and deep ravines, the Whitewater River and Trout Run creek. They host about 50 species of animals (including 3 kinds of trout) and 250 species of birds. We saw Virgin's Bower (native Clematis), Liatris species, Culvers Root, Purple Prairie Clover, Verbena and Cup plants and so much more.

Links: [Friends of Whitewater](#)

And a bloom-time chart for Whitewater Native Garden: [whitewater blooming chart.pdf](#)

This chart can be very useful for anyone designing a native garden.



Partridge Pea in the native garden

Native Plant Profile – Figworts *Scrophularia species* by Nancy Schumacher

During my many years growing and selling plants, one of my primary goals was to get more native plants into landscapes. My customers were largely urban and suburban, and some were just testing the waters of native plants. I was learning along with them. This meant that I focused on native plants that work well in a home landscape. Showy, shorter and shade tolerant ruled.

I have generally followed the same line of thinking in writing plant profile articles and will tend to continue in that direction, but wanted to do something different this time and was considering figworts (*Scrophularia* sp) but had some reservations. Then, this past week during our tour at Whitetail Woods we saw several patches of figworts which generated some fun conversations, and I knew I had my plant.



Early Figwort
Courtesy Minnesota Wildflowers

Our Minnesota Figworts are unlikely to win any beauty contests, but they do have somewhat of a superpower in that they are one of the absolute best pollinator plants.

There are two figworts native to Minnesota, Early Figwort (*Scrophularia lanceolata*) and Late Figwort (*Scrophularia marilandica*)

They are quite similar in appearance and their cultural requirements.

The biggest difference, as suggested by their common names, is the

blooming time. Early Figwort typically blooms in June and July while Late Figwort follows later in August and September. Early Figwort tends to be a bit shorter at around five feet versus six feet for Late Figwort. While both tolerate a wide range of soil moisture conditions, and both do well in average to dry situations, Early Figwort is more likely to be found in moist conditions.

A few other useful attributes of Figworts are that they are fairly shade tolerant (think woodland edge or opening) and because of the high alkaloid content of the foliage, the plants are rarely grazed by deer or other herbivores.

Figworts produce copious quantities of seed that germinate easily. If planted in a garden or smaller landscape, dead heading before seed formation will help to prevent masses of unwanted seedlings. Alternatively, they are easily hoed out in the spring.

I have a handful of Late Figwort planted in a shadier, back edge of a garden where its somewhat weedy appearance is screened by showier plants. It has done well and lived up to its reputation as a pollinator magnet. They are constantly covered in a variety of bees, wasps, flies, ants, and even hummingbirds from July into September. I hope to introduce it into some of the shadier, wilder areas on our



Figwort Blossoms
Courtesy Xerxes Society

property. I also plan to try some of the Early Figwort to see how it will fare in my rather dry conditions.

I always put in a bit of research for these articles rather than rely solely on my own experience. I found a lot of praise for these plants despite their absolute lack of showiness. I'm going to finish with a quote from the Xerxes Society: "The odds are pretty good that you've never encountered figwort, or if you have you've taken no notice. Hopefully, after



Late Figwort -
Courtesy Xerxes Society

reading this you will seek it out. Figworts are amongst the most prolific nectar producers in the plant world. If the common name of 'figwort' doesn't endear you to it, perhaps you will prefer to call it Simpson's Honey

Plant as it was known in the 1880's when it was mass-planted in parts of the Midwest where beekeepers claimed a single acre could produce 400 to 800 pounds of honey that was prized for being light, clear, and aromatic." Hard not to admire a plant that has that kind of superpower!!

Member-sponsored Native Garden - Our Native Garden Project by Penelope and Pat Johnson

Planting – Penelope - We gathered eleven different native plants, all under five feet tall because the DM (dad) didn't want them to block the road. Here's our list: blue sage, prairie drop seed, little blue stem, butterfly weed, coneflowers, asters, wild petunia, wild geranium, coreopsis and Russian sage. There were a lot of plants.

Working Together - Penelope - my grandma made me plant some of them; it was really hot (but fun). I ended up doing all the watering and my grandma did the weeding.

Planning -Pat - planning the garden was fun. Penelope was very good at working out the design she wanted, with a bench in the middle. We looked at pictures of plants together and chose things that might satisfy the DM (her dad). It was a hot day when we planted, but she was a trooper until almost the end! I was so pleased that she took on the watering and was really loyal at making sure the little plants survived. Most of them made it—even though the fence did not keep the squirrel out.

Future Idea or Plans - Penelope - I hope to, in the future plant more flowers, get the plants to grow at least four feet to hide the bench, and take the fence down. The reason we have a fence is to keep the chickens out.

Pat - We need to replace a few plants that died this year and see what comes back in the Spring. Penelope's mom wanted some Russian sage. I moved that from my yard, and it has not done well. Next Summer we will figure out how to get that going better. The chickens are a problem, but this is the year for the garden to sleep. Next year it can creep and so will probably still need the fence. The third year let's hope it leaps!

Credits: Wild One's SE MN Prairie Partners, DM and Grandpa Sam for digging, Mom (Aimee) for sign creation with help from Penelope.



Pat and Penelope in the garden



Ledges State Park by Gary Bullemer



Grand entrance to Ledges State Park

Toward the end of my career as a park ranger for Mn State Parks, my wife Susan

and I were looking for a place to live in retirement. Besides the choices in Minnesota, we looked at states surrounding our own. We often took a camping trip to a state park, using it as a base to explore the nearby area and took a number of trips to Iowa, an area we really liked. One memorable trip was to Ledges State Park in 2012, Ames and Boone are nearby cities. We have always hoped to make a return trip to Ledges and believe that many of you would enjoy this area as well. Here are some of the enticing features and attractions....

Ledges State Park borders on the Des Moines River, with several creeks within the park that flow into the river. With high bluffs and deep valleys, and a variety of woods and prairie openings, the beauty throughout the park is stunning! The park was created in 1924, the second oldest state park in Iowa, so the protection of this important natural area goes back a long way. The park benefitted by the same works programs as many of our



Minnesota parks, namely the CCC program of the 1930s.

We went to Ledges in mid-October, when there was still a lot of fall color in the area. Much of the forest

in the higher elevations of the park was a mix of white oak, red oak and shagbark hickory that provided a lovely mix of amber and burgundy colors. The drive-in campsites, and some very enticing, remote walk-in sites are in the uplands. In addition, a picnic area with an open shelter is near the camping areas.

Just past the shelter, the park road quickly drops into the valley of Pea's Creek where there are additional picnic areas and parking for the hiking trailheads. The road has a couple of low-water crossings of Pea's Creek, which is always an exciting adventure! A large CCC picnic shelter is in the lower portion of the park, not far from the Des Moines River. Trails are strategically located to give outstanding views from the edges of sandstone ledges, looking down into the various valley floors. Besides the multitude of large trees and water, the park is known for the rich diversity of flora and fauna found within the park boundaries. As we know, acorns and hickory nuts provide



food for a whole lot of critters!

We used the park as a springboard to the many nearby adventures. For hikers and bikers, the nearby High Trestle Trail is something you must see to believe! The total length of the trail is 25 miles, but the section from Madrid to Woodward crosses over the Des Moines River with the High Trestle Bridge. This former

railroad bridge was rebuilt with a pedestrian and bike riding surface, and the addition of artistic steel frames creates an unusual look and feel. At sunset, a portion of the bridge is lit with blue neon lights. Quite spectacular!



High Trestle Bridge



Nighttime view of the bridge



Sunset on the High Trestle

Another nearby attraction is the short railroad trip from Boone on the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad. The route goes from the railroad museum in town out into the Des Moines River valley and back and lasts about 90 minutes. The locomotives are restored historic diesel and steam engines, which pull various restored passenger cars for riding and dining.

The nearby Iowa Arboretum and Gardens, devoted to displaying trees, shrubs and native flowers and grasses of Iowa, was interesting to visit, and has a wide variety of plants to enjoy! This gives me an even deeper appreciation for our Minnesota Arboretum. We truly have a treasure that most states would be envious of!

We ventured farther out and visited two more sites east of Des Moines that are well worth a visit. The Amana Colonies, an easy drive down I-80, are a collection of seven small towns. These colonies were created by a group of German immigrants in the 1800s who wanted

to preserve their self-sufficient way of life in America. What we see there now are the remains of this historic experiment where many of the fine buildings from the original settlement remain for visitors to explore and enjoy.

On the way back toward Des Moines, we took a tour of the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge just east of the city. It is a very large reconstructed tall grass prairie and includes a bison herd that you can observe from your vehicle as you drive through the refuge. There is an interpretive center where visitors can learn about the project to build this very impressive refuge, and the work that has been done to create this vision of original Iowa.

I hope you get a chance to see some or all of these wonderful scenes and attractions in our great neighbor to the south. Although we decided to make Northfield our home, it could have easily been Boone, Iowa where we chose to put down new roots.



Typical campsite at Ledges, deep valley behind site. Our mobile home!

Barred Owl (*Strix varia*)— by Barb Bolan



“Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?” hoots our barred owl. Though it is probably our most frequently heard owl, it is not as well recognized as the Great horned owl. With a mottled back, vertical brownish bars on the breast, a neck collar of horizontal bars, and more bars on the wings and tail, it’s easy to see how it got its name. A rounded head with no visible ear tufts puts it in the *Strix* genus of



owls. *Strix* owls typically inhabit wooded or forested areas, and the barred owl is no exception as they are often found in mature woods or forests near swamps or marshes.

Unlike other Minnesota owls, the barred owl has dark eyes. The only other dark-eyed owl we even occasionally have is the barn owl that is seen in the state only once every few years. Though not huge for owls, barred owls are large birds with a wingspan of about 3.5’, stand up to 21” tall and weigh about 1.5 pounds. They have excellent hearing, and like most owls, can triangulate on their prey due to the uneven placement of their ears - the right ear is higher than the left. Even their large eyes are specialized into tube shapes to provide better depth perception and let in more light to help them hunt at night. The barred owl looks similar to the larger great horned owl, but with the diagnostic black eyes and no ear

tufts. The great grey owl, which migrates down to northern Minnesota in the winter, also resembles the barred owl, but has bright yellow eyes and different streaking.



Great horned owl. Note ear tufts and yellow eyes.



Great grey owl, Sax-Zim Bog. Note yellow eyes.

Barred owls nest 20-40 feet up in existing cavities of old or dead trees or on top of old nest platforms of squirrels, crows or hawks. With their life-long mates, they begin nesting season in March or early April and typically lay 2-3 white eggs. The eggs hatch in about a month then four to five weeks later fuzzy young owlets emerge as “branchers” that can’t fly but walk and hop back and forth on branches, testing their wings out with short flight hops. At about 10 weeks old, they can fly and are ready to take on the world. The huge dark eyes of the babies make them look like cute zombie owls.



Owlets emerging from their nest in a tree cavity.

One of the eeriest animal noises around is the begging call of these young owls. It is a long loud screechy racket, like fingernails on a chalk board, but louder. Adult females sometimes resort to using the call too as they beg their mates for more food for their family. The young owls are able to climb up tree trunks using their bills and talons to dig into the bark while flapping their wings for balance, so if

they fall off their nest platform, they can get back home on their own. It's best to leave the nests alone. Barred owls will aggressively protect their nests and young and have been known to dive-bomb people and animals that come to close.

The eggs and young are sometimes dinner for hungry raccoons, hawks and weasels, but other than people, the great horned owls are the only predators of adult barred owls.

Their favorite foods are small animals such as mice, chipmunks, rabbits, squirrels, frogs, snakes and even fish, but they are happy to eat songbirds as well.



Female eating a snake gift from her mate to regurgitate, and feed to her nestlings.

While they are primarily nocturnal, barred owls hunt and hoot day and night. They perch on a branch, feeder, or post, calmly scan and listen for prey, then silently swoop down on it. Owl feathers are soft and comb-like to allow them to fly silently through the trees and to dive at prey.

Fossil evidence shows that barred owls have lived in North America for over 11,000 years. We are on the very west edge of their original range, which until the mid-1800s was east of the Mississippi river. They have now expanded into the Pacific NW where they are displacing their *Strix* cousins, the smaller spotted owls. As barred owls outcompete the native spotted owls for food and rudely disrupt their nesting, they are considered nuisances or invasives in that area. The USFWS has implemented a program to eradicate them. It is believed that the owls were able to expand their range west

partly due to the lack of bison grazing and wildfires that had maintained treeless prairies for centuries. Now groves of trees grow in parks, natural areas, farms, and towns and have allowed their movement west through the US and Canada. We have changed our natural world to our liking to the benefit of some species but detriment to others.

Barred owls do not migrate and in fact most will spend their entire lives within a few miles of where they hatched so their range expansion has been slow but impressive.

Barred owls like large stands of mixed species mature trees near water but keeping old trees, providing nest boxes, planting native plants to attract birds and wildlife and even having bird feeders can encourage these owls to visit yards (but they will happily feast on feeder visitors).

Sep 2022 – “Whitetail Woods Regional Park tour

During tours we often learn unexpected little tidbits of knowledge. During the Whitetail park tour, one of our naturalist guides, Meagan, explained how you could tell if flying squirrels had eaten hickory or other nuts – instead of just chomping away at it like most squirrels, they make a little indent in the nipple end so they can carry it, then very neatly chew the top off in a clean circle and eat out the meat.

Whitetail Woods Park, which opened in 2014, is 456 acres of prairies, woods, wetlands and lake. Trails are well cared for, though we went off trail to see the remnant prairies. Grey goldenrods, low and bent over, uncommon cylindrical liatris, many leadplants, the pollinator magnet late figwort and many more plants were spotted and discussed.

Member Profile: Breanna Wheeler



Breanna leading a tour

My early nature mentors were my dad and grandparents. My dad would take my sister and me to a gravel pit not far from where we lived in rural Steele County, MN, where we would skip rocks into the water and notice all the bugs and birds and “weeds.” An early memory was climbing one of the gravel hills and coming face to face with a bull snake--I probably never moved so fast as I scurried to the top and was afraid to come down. Some evenings, we would take a drive to look at deer, and there were many trips to Morehouse Park in Owatonna to look at and feed the geese and ducks (this was before we knew the harm caused by feeding waterfowl).

My grandparents took me on a lot of fishing trips and we loved to wake up early and go out on the lake with our grandpa who loved to fish. He made it so easy for his granddaughters: setting up the rods and lures, baiting hooks, driving the boat, filleting the fish. I wish he would have taught us how to do all that ourselves because today, even with all the hours of fishing I did, I’m pretty helpless.

In high school and college, my friends were my next nature mentors. We did a lot of tent camping and hiking at state parks and exploring all the beauty of Minnesota far and wide. I joined the Student Conservation Association to complete my internship and

spent a summer on the central coast of California in the redwoods and the mountains--rise-out-of-the-ocean magnificence of Big Sur. I learned the natural history of that region as a naturalist at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park where I led the junior ranger program, interpretive hikes, and campfire programs.

Upon my return to Minnesota, I had hoped to become a naturalist. But my career took a different path, and I worked in the field of aging as a nursing home activity director getting to know hundreds of people and their families and finding what brought their lives meaning and purpose with challenges they faced. I really enjoyed getting people outside and the stories they would tell me about their lives.

Meanwhile, I learned of the Minnesota Master Naturalist program and completed the Big Woods, Big Rivers and Prairies & Potholes biomes. The learning, the volunteering (MN Frog & Toad Calling Survey, Nerstrand Big Woods wildflower id, tree walk, night hike leader, among others), and the people who also loved this stuff as much as me helped me feed my passion for nature connections while I built my career in aging.

After completing a master’s in public Affairs degree, I was hired as Executive Director at River Bend Nature Center, a nonprofit organization in Faribault, MN, where I served from March 2016 until July 2022. RBNC specializes in environmental education and hosts programs for schools from a 50-mile radius and programs for the public, conserves 743 acres of forest, prairie, and wetlands, and promotes outdoor recreation on a ten-mile trail system open year-round with no entrance

fees. Support this local gem by making a donation or becoming a member at rbnc.org.

In addition, I became a MN Master Naturalist Instructor and have taught two classes (will definitely do more of this soon!), and completed the Northwoods, Great Lakes biome. I am a superfan of this program and encourage you to get involved at minnesotamasternaturalist.org.

In 2021, I was appointed to the MN DNR's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee and have been working on a subcommittee to increase resources to better address the spread of terrestrial invasive species. An extension of that, I am particularly interested in how to connect cities, counties, schools, and private landowners (in towns and in the country) with the financial, people, and educational resources and the will to battle invasives and plant native species when possible.

My other focus is helping people discover, or rediscover, the joy and essential health benefits of being outside connecting with nature and empowering people to understand the important influence as nature mentors they have on others (especially across generations). We have a planet and a future to protect but that's hard to do if we're inside distracted by screens.

If you share an interest, are connected with, or want to connect with initiatives in these areas, please contact me at breannaw@gmail.com. Let's talk about how we might work together. See you outside!

Board Meeting: Following are highlights of the September 26th SE MN Prairie Partners Board Meeting. Attending: Barb Bolan, Pat

Johnson, Nancy Schumacher, Jim Sipe, and Ann Dybvik. Submitted by Pat Johnson

- **Secretary's report:** Pat circulated June meeting minutes prior to the meeting. They were approved.
- **Treasurer's update:** Balances: Checking = \$11,209.86, Savings = \$4,823.97. Expenditures have totaled \$x to date this year. Jim will check into a CD for part of the money to get more interest.
- **Membership update:** The Board discussed ways of getting younger people involved in the Chapter. Brianna Wheeler has offered to join the board to lead planning/succession/ and member surveys.
- **Plant Sale: Nancy:** Nancy will lead the plant sale again as well as continue to grow some plants and work with South Cedar GH to wholesale others. We may pick up plants a week earlier and hold in town prior to the sale – better quality selection.
- **2023 schedule.** Plans are nearly complete but inputs will be greatly appreciated.
- **Member-sponsored native gardens:** Three proposals were submitted and completed this year. We plan to offer this again next year for up to 5 participants, anywhere in SE Minnesota.
- **Bylaws project:** National Wild Ones has started a project to have all chapters follow the same bylaws. One outcome is that we are setting our board meetings for the 2nd Monday of each quarter for consistency and will make sure to send out notices to all members. Our 2022 annual meeting will be November 10th, prior to a presentation by Bonnie Harper-Lore on garden visitors.
- **Officers:** Barb, Nancy, Jim, Ann, and Pat are willing to remain on the Board for one more year, but everyone is more than welcome to ask to be nominated for an officer or board position. We thank Alice for her time and help and look forward to her continued work on committees.

Return Address:

Barb Bolan

9700 Baldwin Ave Northfield, MN 55057

Address Label



Penelope Johnson watering her new Member-Sponsored Garden



Pollinator Flies, wasps, and bees on Goldenrod. Photo by Bruce Dybvik



Beautiful smokey sunset as our Whitetail Park wraps up. Photo by Gail Gates

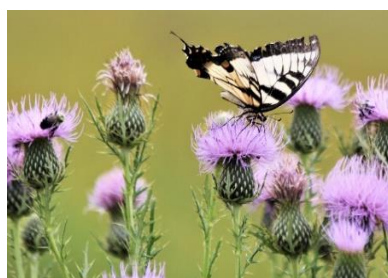


A visiting barred owl is a great way to clear out feeders. Photo by Barb Bolan



Grey Goldenrod, Whitetail Woods Park. Photo by George Watson

Native field Thistles (*Cirsium discolor*) attracts many pollinators. Photo by Barb Bolan



Rattlesnake Master at Lashbrook. Photo by Bruce Dybvik