

SE MN Prairie Partners Chapter Newsletter

March 2024 Volume 13 issue 1



Inside a yurt at Afton, a popular new way to spend the night. Photo from Gary Bullemer



Scenic vista on the trail to the Afton State Park beach on the St. Croix River. Photo by Gary Bullemer



A flock of Rusty blackbirds migrating through. Most are females (lighter brown) or males in non-breeding colors.



Which of these two are actually in the blackbird family Icteridae? The above grey catbird or below, the Baltimore Orioles? See pages 11 and 12 for answers.



Prairie Partners Chapter 2024 officers

President – Barb Bolan
Vice President – Nancy Schumacher
Secretary – Polly Hendee
Web Master – Jim Sipe
Treasurer – Jim Sipe
Membership Chair – Ann Dybvik
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 <https://members.wildones.org/> or by mail: <https://members.wildones.org/renew-by-check/>. Cost is \$40 per year for a household (family) membership. Student and other membership types are also available.

SE MN 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, 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): Dwayne Vosejka mnlcorp.com

Bluff and Wildlife Products: Matthew Brueske sales@blufflandwildlifeproducts.com or [The Deer Cage](#)

Enabling Healthy Habitats: Dawn Littleton

Friends of Nerstrand State Park: Katy Gillispie [Friends of Nerstrand Big Woods](#)

Friends of Whitewater State Park: Joel Dunnette - [Friends of Whitewater](#)

Zumbro Valley Audubon: Joel Dunnette – Board member zumbrovalleyaudubon.org

River Bend Nature Center: Packy Mader, Board of Directors www.rbnc.org

Halfpint Hollow Miniature Donkeys: Rod and Sue White halfpinthollow.com

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

Member-Sponsored-Native Garden program – Get paid to plant natives!

We are offering up to 5 native garden grants, for reimbursements of up to \$300@ for native plants purchased and installed in your yard or landscape project again in 2024. The gardener

must either be a member or be sponsored by a member. Please contact Barb Bolan at bdbolan@hotmail.com for an application.

2024 Chapter Events schedule –*Inside, in-person events will typically be held in the Emmaus Church at 712 Linden St. North.*

Jan 11, 7PM zoom –**Shoreline Restoration with native species**- Taralee Latozke DNR

Feb 8, 7PM zoom – Heather Holm. **Creating and Maintaining Habitat for Bees.**

March 14, 7PM at Emmaus Church– **Native Seeds: Tips for collecting, cleaning and storing** – Nancy Schumacher

April 11, 6PM - **Annual anniversary dinner** – Fireside in Dennison

April 25th, 7pm – **Ephemerals tour – River Terrace SNA** – Cannon Falls – DATE, TIME AND LOCATION MAY CHANGE, depends on season.

May 18, 9AM – **Native Plant Sale** – Emmaus Church parking lot - Nancy Schumacher

June 13 – **Foraging event with Tim Clemens**, Ironwood Foraging

June 23 (Sunday) –**Field Day on insect signs and tracking** –Eric Vehe

July 11, 7PM – **Tour Scott and Kathy Regenscheid gardens**

July 21 (Sunday) 2PM - **Native Garden Tours – Northfield - Pat Johnson, Penelope, Carl Caskey**

August 8, 6:30PM – **Mud Creak WMA** – restored prairie, wetland area

Thursday August 22, 2:30pm - Tentative date – **Prairie Moon tour, Winona, MN**

September 12, 6PM - **Dr. Dick Huston’s Restored Prairie Tour** started in 1999.

Late September– **Native Seed harvest days**

October 10, 7pm, Emmaus Church - **Mn terrestrial invasives: Terrestrial plants** - Breanna Wheeler Chair, Terrestrial Invasive Species Funding Subcommittee DNR

November 14 6pm, Emmaus Church - **Annual meeting, voting for 2025 officers, appetizer potluck, Native seed share, 7PM: Presentation: Native plants and wildlife, restorations...** Shelley MN DNR

December 12 11:00AM – **Luncheon – St Olaf**



Prairie Partners Board meetings are open to all chapter members.

The plan is to hold them at 10AM on the 2nd Tuesday of each quarter.

Prairie Partners MARCH Board Meeting abbreviated notes

In attendance: Barb Bolan (President), Nancy Schumacher (Vice President), Ann Dybvik (Membership and Newsletter), Jim Sipe (Treasurer and Webmaster), Polly Hende (Secretary), and Breanna Wheeler

Secretaries Report: Minutes of October 2023 meeting were approved.

Treasurer’s Report: Combined accounts total \$14,875.

Membership: We have 69 household memberships.

Member Sponsored Native Gardens: We will continue this program, now offering \$300 for up to 5 grants total.

Plant Sale: Our native plant sale will be on May 18, with Nancy Schumacher leading again and will be looking for volunteers to help. We are looking into electronic payment options.

Materials for tables at events:

National rolled out their new logo so we are working on updating materials. Jim and Nancy are making 3 smaller tri-fold poster boards that will fit on a table and be simpler than our current setup.



Signage: We will be creating native planting signs, with the new logo. A work in progress.

Little Libraries: The board members will be visiting the little libraries to see if our book donations are being borrowed.

We approved \$500 for Dawn's Oronoco Native planting by Oronoco city hall. These plantings will be on display for Oronoco's annual Gold Rush Days in August.

No Mow May? *By Barb Bolan*

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about the "No Mow May" campaign. Is it beneficial? Not helpful? Alternatives? The jury is still out on how beneficial the program is for us, but the bottom line is that participation in it is really a personal decision.

No Mow May started in the UK as an effort to support early season pollinators with more flowers by not mowing them down during the month of May. It then caught on in Appleton, Wisconsin and has spread throughout the country. Some initial studies have shown huge increases in the diversity and quantity of pollinators in non-mowed lawns.

Some pros of No Mow May: Allows more species to flower, providing more early season food for many pollinators, and so attracts birds and other wildlife too.

Gives homeowners more free time in May and reduces pollution from mowers. Greener.

Raises awareness of pollinator needs.

Some cons of No Mow May: Can allow non-native plants to thrive and outcompete native flowers. The native flowers may provide the only food for specialist pollinators.

Enticing pollinators to a yard then suddenly mowing down their food can starve them out.

Some folks mow extra times in June to 'clean up' the area, negating fuel/work savings.

Some alternatives: Plant more native spring flowers to reduce mowing area while providing native food for pollinators and wildlife. Some specialist pollinators need specific native plants to survive.

Mow, but set mower setting higher so violets and other short native species can flower.

Participating in No Mow May is a personal choice, but planting more native flowers is always a good thing to do to attract pollinators and other wildlife and it can save time and energy by reducing the area of lawn to be mowed.



Violets are the only host plant for Fritillary butterfly caterpillars.

Member Profile – Matthew and Claire Brueske



We are Matthew and Claire Brueske. Our business (The Deer Cage) became a member of Wild Ones late in 2023.

I grew up in Plainview, MN and was blessed to spend many hours

on our family farms just outside of town. From a young age, I was enthralled with the outdoors. One of my biggest passions to this day is deer hunting. However, as the years have gone on, it has been equally, if not more rewarding to participate in land stewardship and habitat management projects on the family farm. Through these projects, I was able to see how certain actions had a direct effect on wildlife.

Today, my wife and I are fortunate to have a home just outside of Faribault, MN. We have two young children that keep us very busy! Each year we try to improve the landscape to better the local wildlife. This has included planting a small orchard, converting some of our yard to prairie and installing a few small pollinator gardens.

Although it is great to provide for the local wildlife, we've also learned that it is equally important to protect some plantings from them as well. Like many others, we were struggling with keeping deer away from our young plants. This led us to start a company, "The Deer Cage". We focus on making products that blend into the home landscape, but also protect plants from unwanted wildlife damage.

We wanted to join Wild Ones as a business to help make a greater impact. The organization has been extremely helpful in providing information to newer native plant enthusiasts (like us) as well as offering first time financial assistance in establishing new plantings. We look forward to learning more from the group through the years to come.

Matt and Claire Brueske

Endangered Rusty patched bumble bee may delay road construction project.

Our only endangered bumblebee, the Rusty-patched, may delay a major road construction project adjacent to the U of MN Landscape Arboretum in Carver County. The arboretum is known to be a home to the Rusty-patched. The endangered status of the bee requires that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) study the potential impact and sign off on a mitigation plan, but staff shortages and a high volume of projects are causing extensive delays.

Since this is the first time the species has been discovered in the path of a project in Minnesota, the USFWS will more need time to develop a plan to assess the adverse effects of the project and determine a mitigation plan to limit the impact on bees yet let the project move forward.



Rusty Patched Bumblebee. Note diagnostic yellow below the 'rusty patch'. Photo by Tilton Davis.

Afton State Park *by Gary Bullemer*



Interpretive Center at Afton State Park

This spectacular park on the St. Croix River east of St. Paul was established in 1969 but did not open to public use until summer of 1982. The remarkable story of how Afton became a state park can be found on the Parks and Trails Council of Mn website. Samuel H. Morgan was the president of that organization in 1969, and his book “Environmental Recollections” describes the process he and his group took to get the park created. More on this great accomplishment later, but first I would love to write about the present-day park, and what you will find on your visit there.

I went to Afton last fall, a warm and cloudy weekday in November, well past the peak fall colors. There was still a great deal of late season color with the deep reds and burgundy of oaks, and some yellow aspens along the ravines and river valley walls. Much of the uplands above



Example of oak savanna at Afton

the river valley have been restored to prairie and oak savanna, and those areas have a special beauty in the fall as well. Park Naturalist Linda Radimecky told me the restoration of savanna is a major source of pride for all the park staff, as this type of plant community is mostly gone in Minnesota. You can find stories of restoration efforts along with descriptions of flora and fauna to explore and enjoy at the park in the wonderful Interpretive Center which Linda manages.



Interpretive signs help everyone understand and enjoy the park.

The focus of recreational development for this park was more about daytime exploration, in the form of hiking, biking, winter skiing and snowshoeing, and spending time at the nice sandy beach on the river. Overnight camping was offered only for walk-in tent camping, and the hike to the campsites is almost a mile from the parking lot, with a steep climb up and down the river valley to get there. The reward is a quiet site high above the river, and a night to remember!

Many years after the initial park began, camper cabins and yurts were added to the mix for an overnight stay. These camping options are easily accessible by car. There are three cabins and two yurts, and all are open year-round.

As a Wild Ones member, I believe we all share a love of many of the attractions of parks like Afton. Namely, the birds, bees, trees and blooming plants, which are many and very diverse at this location. With the emphasis here on restoring and fostering healthy prairie, savanna, woodlands and the river corridor, there is always something to see and enjoy.

Just under 200 species of birds have been recorded at Afton, making the park a hit with birders. With the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers just a few miles to the south, the connection to one of North America’s major migratory routes of birds just adds to the importance of preserving and protecting natural settings such as Afton State Park.



Hikers on an upland trail through restored prairie

On my visit, I wanted to get a taste of the trails and vistas of the river valley, and it was easy to find rewards. The trails were carefully built to allow for people of all abilities to enjoy them, whether on dry ground or snow! The trip to the beach was not too long, but I could feel the need to do a bit more hiking and get in better shape. Again, finding a public place to hike along the shore of one of our most scenic rivers, and the natural sandy beach, is a testament to the visionaries that teamed up and made it all happen in 1969!



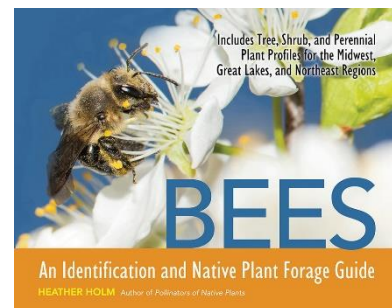
Beautiful beach on the St. Croix River at Afton

Heather Holm Presentation – Creating and managing Habitat for native bees,

by Ann Dybvik

Heather Holm is a pollinator conservationist, author, and writer who has written several books about often overlooked pollinators such as Wasps and Bees. Our Wild Ones group was privileged to hear her excellent virtual presentation. She has extensive knowledge about plants, bees, wasps and more. It was instructive as well as inspiring. Here is a link to one of her presentations:

[Heather Holm, Creating and Managing Habitat for Native Bees - YouTube](#)



Lakeshore Restoration with Native Plants with Taralee Latozke

In addition to her informative presentation, Taralee provided some very helpful DNR links for shoreline restoration projects:

[Restore Your Shore \(RYS\)](#)

[Native Plant Encyclopedia](#)

[shoreline alterations lakescaping.pdf](#)

Determination of Vegetation: Or why native plants are growing where they are. *By Ken Kirton*

As the surface of planet earth cooled billions of years ago, a crust comprised of seven main plates formed. These plates remain in constant slow motion, floating over the molten interior of our planet. The colliding edges are frequently the site of earthquakes and volcanoes and, over millions of years, may cause mountain ranges to develop. Mountain ranges provide barriers to the prevailing flow of air, resulting in downwind, dry “rain shadows”.

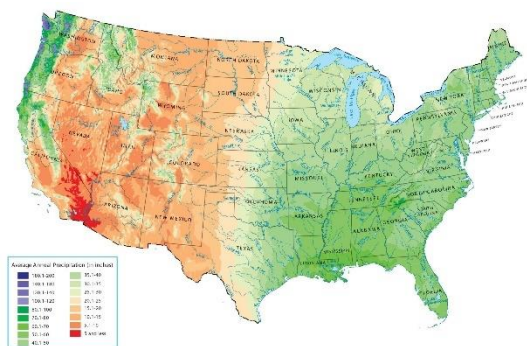
With the onset of photosynthesis over two billion years ago, organisms were able capture the sun’s energy and convert it to energy rich molecules. This resulted in the evolution of all species of life on the earth today. Single celled microorganisms came first, but eventually the eukaryote, (a cell with a nucleus) appeared. Higher plants and then grasses followed.

Jumping forward to the present, plants occupy about 40% of the planet. Locally, the type of vegetation present is determined by a very complex set of factors involving sunlight, rainfall, temperature, fire, soil type, evaporation, fog, altitude, and direction of slope of the land as well as the amount of wind, relative humidity, frequency and intensity of fire, and the amount of ground cover. Chemical soil composition, microorganisms present, physical makeup, depth, and organic matter also have an influence. Past catastrophic events such as periodic asteroid impacts, and the wobble of the earth spinning on its’ axis, can cause changes, even ice ages, on a larger scale.

Major grasslands occur on most continents. The rise of the Rocky Mountain Cordillera about 50

million years ago led to the development of the midwestern prairie complex. The lands just east of the mountain range were in a rain shadow. The amount of rain increases from the west to the east, thus forming a gradient of rainfall and vegetation. First desert, nearest the mountains, then grassland and finally forest. As the mountains weathered, the alluvial runoff influenced the type of soil. The amount of rainfall and frequency of fire in the grasslands were determined by the availability of Gulf and Pacific moisture carried on the wind. Altitude also affects temperature and vegetational makeup. No two sites are exactly the same. Niches suitable for specific plant populations that evolved to fit them were created. But even these niches are constantly changing. Periodic fluctuations in temperature and rainfall, sometimes very large such as the droughts of 1910, 1934 & 1988, cause the edges between types of vegetation to shift, sometimes dramatically. These changes in vegetation can then persist for extended periods of time.

The future is difficult to predict with any certainty. However, humans have had major effects, by replacing the native vegetation with crops, buildings, cities & roads, and indirectly through effects such as increasing the density of herbivorous white tail deer. Over 70% of the prairies have been destroyed. These human induced types of change will probably continue.



Native Plant Profile, Black Chokeberry

by Pat Johnson



Aronia melanocarpa is commonly known as Black chokeberry. It is a tough, reliable shrub that can be used in mass plantings, shrub borders, or as a specimen. I came to learn about it, walking by my neighbor's yard. It had been used to make a border along the side of the yard. He told me what it was, and I began to read about it.

The bush is native to Minnesota. While it prefers partially acidic soil, it is highly adaptable, growing in wet and dry conditions, full sun to light shade. It grows 4 to 6 feet tall and 3 to 6 ft wide. It has a mounded shape with dark green, glossy foliage that turns red in the Fall. The leaves are alternate, simple, and fine-toothed, 3-4 inches long. In May it has white flowers that grow in corymbs about 2½ inches wide. These turn into small black fruits which are very tart. Birds will eat them, but not as a first choice. They make good jelly when mixed with juice from a sweeter fruit (and plenty of sugar!).

Black chokeberry is easy to transplant, grows best if untrimmed, and produces suckers which can be trimmed if you don't want it to spread. These can also be rooted to form a new plant.

I have planted six bareroot plants along a fence that separates the Cannon Valley Friends Meeting from the new apartment building at

the corner of Fifth and Washington in Northfield. The new construction disturbed the meeting house rain garden and backyard environment. I am hoping that the bushes will conceal the fence a bit and add to the natives that we have already planted. All six plants have settled in well after their first year. I have noticed that, even though I put some chicken wire around each plant, our backyard bunnies have "pruned" several at the top. I will need a higher fence for a few years until they take off!



Zhiiwaagamizigan – by Barb Bolan

As we think of the benefits of native species this time of year, maple trees and syruping come to mind. The Ojibwe have a name for maple syrup – Zhiiwaagamizigan.



If you see buckets, bags, or tubes, on individual trees or as a network running between trees, in the early spring, it is likely for maple sap collection, either for family fun or for a business.

The indigenous people of North America were the first to make maple syrup and sugar, starting at least by the early 1500s. They often used an axe to open a cut in the tree, then collected the

sap and boiled it down into sugar or syrup. Maple sugar was used for bartering.

One legend says maple syruping started when an Iroquois Chief pierced the bark of a maple tree with an axe one day. The next morning his wife found a bucket beneath the cut was full of water and used in making a stew for dinner. After hours of boiling, the stew had a wonderful maple aroma and taste, and the rest is history.

Indigenous people taught early settlers how to collect and process the maple sap. In the 1800s, syrup makers started using large flat pans that provided more surface area for evaporation than buckets did. Many producers still use this system today, only with a small spile poked into the tree instead of hitting it with an axe.



Spile and sap tube in maple tree.

A reverse osmosis (RO) step is often included to reduce the amount of liquid to boil down. Sap is only about 2-3% sugar so it takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. Finished syrup is about 67% sugar. RO uses membranes to filter out half of the water with each pass, increasing the sugar content to 4% or, with some new systems, even to over 40%, thereby drastically reducing boiling time.



How does sap flow? As the leaves drop from the trees in the fall, unused starch, created during summer photosynthesis, is sent down to the trunk and roots to be held as starch. As winter wanes and daytime temperatures reach the 40F range but

nights remain below freezing, positive and negative pressures, aided by the freeze/thaw cycles and osmotic differences, send the sap flowing through the xylem tubes of the tree. Stored starch flows into the xylem where enzymes convert it to sugar. A positive pressure occurs as temperatures rise above freezing, causing the moving sap to leak out through the tap holes. As temperatures fall below freezing, negative pressure (suction) develops and water is drawn into the tree through the roots, replenishing the sap with water and minerals.

Maples and some other trees, including birch, and walnut have water-filled vessels and gas/air-filled fiber cells adjacent to the xylem in the winter. These cells respond to the pressure changes, moving the sap during freeze/thaw cycles. Oaks, and most other trees don't have gas filled cells and don't yield sap for syruping.

Quebec produces 72% of the world's maple syrup. Vermont comes in 2nd. Minnesota doesn't make the top 10 list, despite producing over 35,000 gallons of it.



Grandson Cooper taking a break for a drink while collecting sap.



Grandson Griffin helping collect maple sap.

Minnesota Blackbirds of the Icteridae family by Barb Bolan

We have 11 species of birds in Minnesota that are in the blackbird, Icteridae, family. Not all are totally black, and some of our black colored birds, such as crows and starlings are not in this blackbird family. Most Icteridae species have strong dimorphism (males and females are quite different in looks), and many are spruced up with red, orange or yellow. Our blackbirds are migratory, some stay for breeding season, others just pass through. They typically eat insects during the summer, but grain and seeds for the winter.

Our most common blackbird is the Red-winged, while the most disliked is the cowbird. Cowbirds evolved to provide pest control for bison



Male Red-winged Blackbird displaying the bright red epaulets bordered by yellow.

herds roaming vast prairies, developing a symbiotic mutualistic relationship with them as bison kept them safe from predators. Unfortunately for other birds, because the cowbirds couldn't stay put to raise babies, they became brood parasites, laying eggs in nests of birds. The host bird is often fooled into raising the cowbirds as their own and host nest eggs or young are often killed by the cowbirds.



The male brown-headed cowbird, a brood parasite.



The common grackles are quite beautiful with their shiny iridescent colors and bright yellow eyes.



Yellow-headed blackbird, male. Lovers of marshes and wetlands, though they prefer deeper water than many marshes offer.



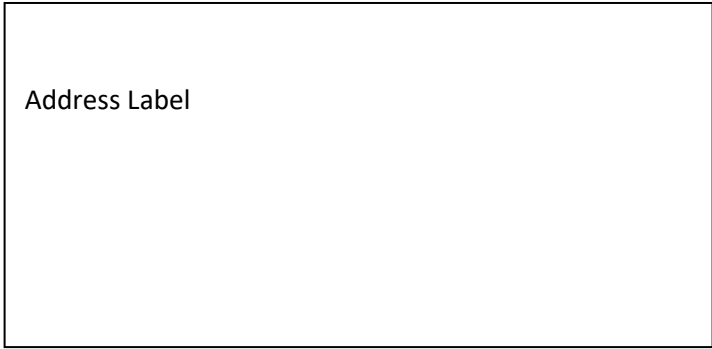
A Male rusty blackbird in breeding colors. Migrates through Minnesota.



Brewer's blackbirds. Female has light brown body, dark eye, male is shiny with purplish head. Can be a migrant or summer resident for us.

Return Address:

Barb Bolan
9700 Baldwin Ave
Ave Northfield, MN 55057



More of our Blackbirds. The birds on this page aren't usually thought of as being in the blackbird, Icteridae, family, but are true blackbirds. They are also some of our favorite and more colorful blackbirds.



Western Meadowlark. Meadowlarks are in the blackbird family. Note the strong bill.



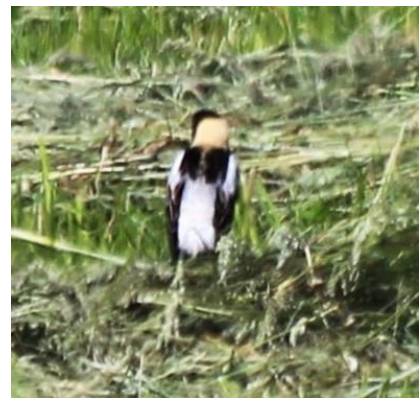
Eastern Meadowlark - best distinguished from western meadowlark by voice but has darker eye stripe and less of a yellow 'mustache'.



One of our most beloved blackbirds - the Baltimore oriole. We put a lot of effort into attracting these colorful cousins of the cowbirds to our yards! Orioles eat many insects as well as darker colored fruits. They often stab into fruit with their strong beaks, spread open their mouths then use their tongues to draw up the juice.



Orchard Oriole adult male. Dark brick red, smaller and much less common than the Baltimore oriole



Bobolink. Once very common but now much less frequently seen. They need large, un-mowed prairies during nesting season. They travel about 12,500 miles during migration, which over their lifetime, may equal the distance of 4 or 5 trips around the world.