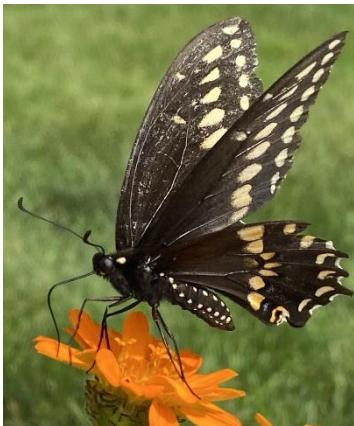


SE MN Prairie Partners Chapter Newsletter
September 2025 Volume 14 issue 3

Mike Larson's and Linda Nelson's prairie



Which of these is the real female Tiger Swallowtail? (answer on p11)



"A" Photo by Polly Hendee



"B" Photo by Jerry Wicklund



"C" Photo by Barb Bolan

2025 SE MN Prairie Partners officers

President – Barb Bolan
Vice President – Nancy Schumacher
Secretary – Polly Hendee
Treasurer – Jim Sipe
Membership Chair – open
Newsletter Chair – open
Webmaster & Social Media Lead- Matt Brueske
Member-at-large – Breanna Wheeler
Grant Manager – Jim Sipe

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: Nancy Schumacher, 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.

Prairie Partners member local Services

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

Whitewater Gardens Farm: Lonny and Sandy Dietz [Whitewater Gardens Farm](#)

Blazing Star Gardens: Dustin Demmer [Blazing Star Gardens](#)

Minnesota Native Landscapes (MNL): Dwayne Vosejpk mnlcorp.com

Bluff Land 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](#)

Please let us know if you have something to add to this list. Thanks!

2025 Chapter Events schedule –*Inside, in-person events will typically be held in the Emmaus Church at 712 Linden St. North.*

October 9th, 7pm - Shelley Gorham, DNR – restorations/wildlife

November 13th, 6pm start – Seed share, led by Scott R, seed germination demo by Nancy S, winter sowing by Polly H, plus appetizers, socializing

December 11th, 11am - Luncheon

Twilight walk, Fireflies, Frogs and Moth watch – a family event with the Cannon Valley Master Naturalists – led by David and Laurie Hougen-Eitzman



Carleton Arboretum was our venue for this evening family outing. Our event leaders, David and Laurie, deserve a lot of appreciation and praise for doing such an excellent job as well as for filling in at the last minute to take the lead. Very impressive leaders! We learned a lot.

Though the frogs were mostly silent, moths were flitting about, and fireflies were doing

their thing to entertain us while David enlightened us with some of their secrets. It turns out that each firefly species has their own unique flashing patterns and come out at different times of the season, making our 6 Minnesota species easier to identify.

Fireflies are actually winged beetles, not flies. Their larvae, and most adults, produce light by an efficient chemical process, using the enzyme Luciferase, that produces almost no heat. In several species, the male flies around flashing his signature pattern until he finds a female flashing back at him from the ground inviting him to come and mate. While the larvae eat smaller insects, adults of most species do not feed.

We can increase firefly populations by reducing pesticide use, reducing light pollution, and creating more native habitats for them.

Native Seed Harvest



Nancy shares information on identifying plants of interest to some of the seed collectors.

For one last time, before they complete their move to town, Nancy and Jim opened up their prairie to members and friends to come and harvest native prairie seeds. Nancy started the event by showing examples of plants with seeds ready to harvest and where to look for them. We were also treated to dozens of monarch butterflies feasting on her flowers to prepare for their journey to Mexico.

Plant Profile – Little Bluestem by Pat Johnson



Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem) is in the Poaceae family. It is sometimes sold under an outdated name, *Andropogon scoparius*. There are a number of varieties, but *scoparium* is the species of the prairies that once covered much of Minnesota. Minnesota Wildflowers reports that there is a powder blue form that may be currently included in some native seed mixes. This form may be native to some Iowa prairie remnants but does not do well in Minnesota. Use regionally sourced seeds and plants.

Little Bluestem is a clump-forming grass with light green to blue foliage, growing 2'-3'. It thrives in well-drained sand or loam but doesn't do well in heavy clay or damp areas. Though it prefers full sun, it will grow in partial shade. It is beautiful throughout the growing season. It is slow to emerge in the Spring and does best if mowed or burned. In Summer its foliage adds to prairie plantings and to landscape use. It functions well in mixed borders, along

walkways, and in foundation plantings as well as in prairie plantings. In the fall, the foliage turns rich red-orange shades, and its slender stems hold silvery white seed heads with feathery hairs. It holds its color well into Winter.

The plants grow in large, tight clumps and sometimes spread through short rhizomes. Leaves are crowded at the lower part of the stem, are flat or folded lengthwise, green to blue-green, up to 10 inches long and about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, sometimes finely hairy but usually hairless except for sparse, long spreading hairs near the base. Flowers form a single spike-like cluster at the tip of each branch. Flower clusters (spikelets) are in pairs along the spike. Many of the spikelets are sterile, sometimes containing a single male flower. A fertile spikelet will contain a single fertile, perfect flower, having both male and female parts. Spikelet stalks are densely covered in fine hairs that spread out as the spikelets mature.

Little Bluestem serves as a larval host for nine species of skipper butterflies including the common wood nymph, Dakota skipper, and Leonard's skipper. It also provides overwintering habitat for a variety of other insects. Female bumble bee queens will nest at the base of the bunch grass. The seeds of Little Bluestem are eaten by songbirds.

Little Bluestem is one of my favorite grasses. I have it in small prairie plantings and have recently added six plants along a walkway at the front of our home. We removed a large ash tree last year, and a new tree was planted late in the Summer of 2024. I added the walkway planting at that time. Already this Summer the Little Bluestem is beautiful growing vigorously.

Byllesby tours summary by Sue White

Our tour of Mairi's was very peaceful with all her natural "pocket prairies," two of which were thriving in her ditches along her roadside. Her bee balm was loaded with two-spotted bumble bees. Down by the lake she had built a gorgeous patio around the humongous cottonwood tree. Some of us went with her to and from Tim and Sue's place on the opposite side of the lake. On arrival back at Mairi's place, we were greeted by fireflies flitting about. Magical!



One of Mairi's pocket gardens in a roadside ditch in front of her home

Our tour of Tim and Sue's place on Lake Byllesby was delightful. The two-acre lot had been in her family for years. They moved the original log cabin off to the side and built their lovely home in its place. They have beautiful gardens and are expanding their use of native plants. We were



A garden bed Tim and Sue are transitioning to native plants. Photo by Sue White

treated to fresh chunks of kohlrabi from Tim's vegetable garden before heading out in their pontoon for a tour of Lake Byllesby where we watched the gorgeous sunset.



Tim took us on a boat ride around Lake Byllesby. Beautiful evening!

Whitewater Garden Farms and Larson/Nelson Prairie Tour



Shopping for the perfect native plants!

First Mike and Linda shared their beautiful prairie with us and then Sandy and Lonny Dietz treated us to a native plant shopping spree and visit to their Whitewater Gardens farm. We relaxed, chatted and enjoyed treats while taking cover from the brief rainstorm. Sandy's plants

were very impressive and highly desired by tour participants.



Native Plant growers Sandy Dietz and Nancy Schumacher enjoying a chat.

Reciprocity with the Land— Our Prairie Restoration story *by Mike Larson & Linda Nelson*

We changed the land and the land changed us. In 2004, married in Minneapolis for 20 years, a talk on the value of darkness awakened my wife, Linda. “I can't go the rest of my life without being able to walk outside and see the stars.” We heard the call of the Land. In 3



Mike Larson and Linda Nelson

months, we answered the call, crazily purchasing 62 ridgeline acres adjacent to the

30,000-acre Whitewater Wildlife Management area.

We had no plans to move to the Land. We wanted to restore it. Having already fallen for prairies and planted a patch in Minneapolis, we arrogantly thought we could restore 62 acres. We needed to be humbled, and the land was about to do that.

We set out with a handful of garden tools, cut and dug wild parsnip until defeated. Dripping sweat, we looked at the tiny room we had cleared amidst a sea of yellow, acres of wild parsnip. Boxelders suffocated the draws. Cedars dominated the fence lines. Read Canary grass choked two silted-in ponds. Linda and I and our garden tools were no match for the invasive thugs. We needed help. Lots of help. Miraculously, over the years, help would arrive.

We purchased an old tractor and brush mower. Every July Linda mowed the yellow sea of parsnip just before it went to seed. It greatly diminished. But we know the land taught us our next lesson. The parsnip would never go away. We had to let go of another idea. This is not a battle of good versus evil. The land makes no such distinctions.



Drilling seed into the prairie sod

This is a journey toward balance. The land would teach us how to engage the thugs, like

wild parsnip, who can be all about themselves, encouraging them not to overly dominate and throw off the balance. The land taught us we can let go of parsnip as enemy, helping us seek peace and balance within ourselves.

We then learned the value of reaching out, partnering, and learning learning learning from others going down this road. In 2007 a miracle occurred. Minnesota and USDA combined efforts to form a new program called CREP. We enrolled 40 acres which we dreamed of restoring to prairie but feared it could never happen. Until now. They gave us the money to purchase all the prairie seed.

But they first wanted us to herbicide the Eurasian grass cover. No, we cried. This would kill the few rare cream gentians who told us everything would work out if we didn't spray. We believed them. The government relented. We drilled the prairie seed into the existing sod.

The result is breathtaking. 130 prairie species bloom from April to October. Grassland birds including Henslow's sparrow nest and feed their little ones upon an insanity of insects. Fox snake lays her leathery eggs in our compost bin. Bobcat peers into our front window.

Yes, in 2011 we did build our dream off-grid, land connecting house and move to the land. Then even more help arrives. Our dear and generous neighbors at Whitewater Gardens sell us the 16 acres on our side of the road, giving us enough land to enroll 70 acres into a permanent conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust. The land, our legacy, that which matters most to us, will be protected forever!

Now we all
get excited
together.

Seeing the
amazing
results,
what the
land has



[Protecting the land!](#)

brought forth, especially Henslow's, the DNR wants to restore the Whitewater Wildlife Management area around us. The Minnesota Land Trust gives them the money to do so. 80 more acres of prairie, savanna and forest restoration are underway. Now every day we walk the firebreak trails, never knowing what life-changing thing we'll experience. We feel so grateful.

In reciprocity, we try to be better custodians. We humble ourselves before the land. We help keep the balance. We give and receive help, keeping the land and ourselves open to partnerships, like the Wild Ones. And we keep dreaming. Who knows, maybe we can dream back the bison?



[Henslow's sparrow on Wild White Indigo seed stalk](#)

Native Garden Tour

On July 26th we had the pleasure of visiting four native plantings in Northfield. Each was unique, beautiful to people, pollinators, birds and more, and designed to fit the nuances of the site.

Our first stop was at Alice Burmeister's. She has many beautiful native plantings of her own, but we focused on the city's restoration of the drainage pond behind her house. Many cities are helping pollinators by planting natives around such ponds. Alice had asked if we could supplement it in the first year, 2023, with plants that would bloom that year so everyone could enjoy it right away.



Wild Bergamot and Vervain at the drainage pond.

Stop two on our tour was at Will Schroeer and Pam Fickenscher's place.



Will shares the story of converting their yard to native plants.

Their lot is shady and has black walnut trees nearby so they had to carefully plan and design what species would work best in their space to create the inviting habitat for our pollinators and other wild creatures. Will and Pam were awarded a Lawns to Legumes (L2L) grant in 2020. They did a great job using the grants to create a wildlife and nature lover's landscape.



Oxeye, or False Sunflowers add color to Will and Pam's boulevard garden

Next, we visited Jean Novotny's sunny yard. Jean went with multiple plant beds filled with native plants to reduce lawn and be able to walk around each bed and enjoy the flowers and visiting wildlife. She used one of our chapter's native garden grants to help fund her plantings.



Some of Jean's pocket prairie beds

We ended the day at Polly and David Hendee's amazing place. They have a large backyard that butts up to natural land maintained by the city and have made incredible use of the space to convert it into a true oasis for relaxing and

enjoying the flowers, as well as watching birds, butterflies, bees and other happy visitors.

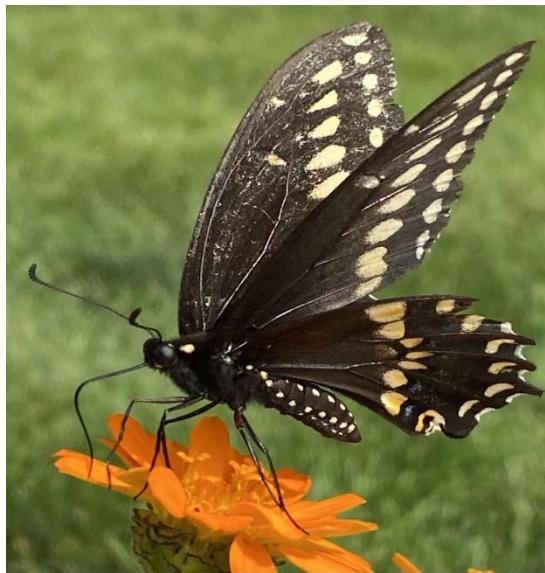


Polly and Davd's back yard Oasis. Photo by Davd Hendee



Color Morphs of Tiger Swallowtail Butterflies

By Barb Bolan with significant and greatly appreciated input from Mike Larson



Black Swallowtail male. Note the spotted body and limited bluish coloring. Photo by Polly Hendee

This year many nature lovers saw some unusual black or smoky greyish swallowtails hanging around that just didn't quite look like our Black swallowtails (*Papilio polyxenes*). That is because they are actually Eastern Tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) color morphs. Typically, a brilliant yellow with black stripes, female Tiger swallowtails sometimes appear with color variations. These pretty ladies can be black, or as have been seen frequently this summer, intermediate morphs that fall between yellow and black. Eastern Tiger swallowtail males are always yellow with the black markings.

Once you know what to look for, it can be relatively easy to separate true Black swallowtails from black or intermediate morphs of the Eastern Tiger swallowtail females.

First off, females of both species have more brilliant blue on the lower wings. Males have bolder, brighter yellow spots in the black swallowtails and heavier, deeper black tiger stripes and bolder yellow wing edge spots in the tiger swallowtails. (see photos)



Female Black Swallowtail – spotted body, blue on wings

Only the females come in different color morphs. The butterfly wing color variation gene is on their sex chromosome. In humans, females have the XX chromosome and males have the XY. Butterflies, however, do their own

thing; the female's chromosomes are ZW, while males are ZZ. Only the female has the "W", the sex chromosome. The color morph gene is on the "W" chromosome so only females have the color variants. Normally it would take multiple genes to make the range of colors they show, but these ladies do it with only one 'supergene'.



Male Eastern Tiger swallowtail. Note tiger striping and very little to no blue on lower wings. Photo by Barb Bolan

The bodies of tiger and black swallowtails offer big clues as to their species identity. Black swallowtail bodies are black and lined with bright yellow dots. Tiger swallowtail bodies are



Male Eastern Tiger swallowtail on native thistle. Note the very little blue on the wing margins, yellow body. Photo by Barb Bolan

yellow with black stripes. In some darker tiger swallowtail morphs, the lines don't show up so the bodies just look dark, but never spotted.

Often tiger swallowtail morphs are dark black, but there are many intermediate morph variations that range from muddy looking

grayish brown to mostly yellow with a sooty overcast. All are very pretty and unique.

It is believed that the dark morphs of the female tigers are a form of mimicry of the toxic Pipevine swallowtail. However, that doesn't really work for us here in Minnesota as the pipevine swallowtails are not found here. There must be other explanations for the color variations way up here in the North.



Female Eastern tiger swallowtail. Note yellow body with black stripes, blue on wings.

It has been suggested that smoke pollution may be a big contributor to color changes. Our smoke pollution was very heavy at times this summer and the color morphs were unusually frequent. Cold temperatures, short day lengths and environmental pollution issues are implicated as causes color morphs.



Female Eastern Tiger swallowtail butterfly in typical yellow coloration. Note the striped body, and blue on lower wings. Photo by Barb Bolan

The single 'supergene' that controls the color morphs can provide varying levels of expression, leading to a range of colors being



Dark Morph of the Eastern Tiger swallowtail female. Photo by Barb Bolan

expressed. Some morphs show the tiger streaking on wings and bodies, but do not have the spotted body of the black swallowtails. The spots or stripes on the butterfly body are a key indicator of which species you are looking at.



Intermediate morph of Eastern Tiger swallowtail female. Note the vaguely visible 'tiger' markings on wings, and yellow stripes on body. Photo by Barb Bolan



Yellowish intermediate morph of Eastern swallowtail. Photo by Dan Hennebry



Intermediate morph of Eastern tiger swallowtail. Note underlying tiger stripes plus blue colors on wings of females. Body is mostly dark. Photo by Barb Bolan

The butterfly quiz answer from the cover? "C" is the female Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, intermediate morph.

Return Address:
Barb Bolan
9700 Baldwin Ave
Ave Northfield, MN 55057

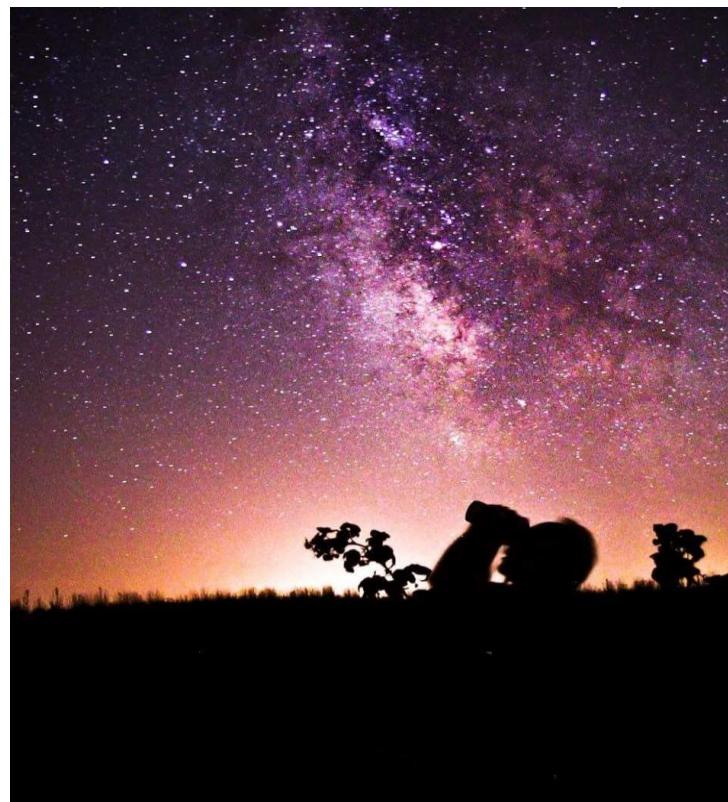
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Looking for fireflies at the Carleton Arboretum



Tree frog looking for lunch from his Ironweed perch. (photo just for fun)



Sky watching on the prairie. Mike Larson