



Confluence Chapter Newsletter

Volume No. 01 Issue No. 02 Date: May, 2007

Highlights

Welcome to the May edition of the Missouri Master Naturalist Confluence Chapter Newsletter!

- A new feature for our newsletter is the Spotlight on a Master Naturalist. Leslie Limberg will be interviewing individuals and sharing their stories with us.
- Program update talks about the new chapter being formed
- Update on a couple of our chapter's interesting projects
- A section titled 'Do you know?' by Leslie Limberg will feature tidbits of useful information into our natural world.

What else would you like to see in our newsletter? Contact us with your thoughts or comments. The contact information is on the last page of the newsletter.

From the desk of our Confluence Chapter President, Connie McCormack

Fellow Master Naturalists:

So in my mind spring has sprung and does it feel wonderful!

There are so many opportunities this spring that it is really hard to keep up with all the emails, phone calls that are coming in asking what, can, when and where we as a group could help.

Projects that are short, long, big and small some that didn't get off the ground before it got put on hold but all great opportunities for us as Master Naturalist.

First and in my opinion most important: 2nd Annual Statewide Conference & Advanced Training. May 18-20, 2007 at the Quality Inn, Columbia, MO. Registration final deadline is May 1, 2007. I hope that lots of us can go - relax and enjoy meeting lots of other like-minded people.

MO River Relief – River Camp 07 runs May 4- 12, 2007 at Pelican Island ramp near Florissant MO (in Sioux Passage County Park). There are days of so many different activities you will have to ask for the flyer and read it to really realize all this activity has to offer. For more information click on this link: <http://www.riverrelief.org/events/rivercamp07/>

June 26-29, 2007 will have us at the Boathouse teaching teachers and ourselves how to utilize the Walk of Discovery Garden that was our Capstone Project last summer – it hasn't been so long ago that we can't remember all the hard work we all did there at the Boathouse.

The next set of Master Naturalist classes will be at Powder Valley in late summer and with that will bring a new Chapter. We need to Name that Chapter and elect officers. All that said it is time to get out and get going.

Enjoy

Program Update

The Missouri Master Naturalists are starting a new chapter the new chapter will be located in Forest Park and encompass residents of St. Louis city and county. During the past few months, we have seen a lot of interest in forming a new chapter based within the city area and with the recent article in the February edition of the Conservationist, we now have over fifty folks interested in forming a new city chapter and attending the next training class and becoming Master Naturalists. The next class of the Master Naturalists is scheduled for Tuesday August 21 at Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center. This training will provide new master naturalists for both the new chapter and the Confluence chapter.

Current members of the Confluence Chapter have the choice of joining the new chapter or remaining with the Confluence Chapter. In order to prepare for this new chapter the current members of the Confluence Chapter wishing to transfer will hold their first meeting in on Tuesday July 17. At that first meeting, the group can accomplish all the basics required to get the chapter up and rolling; elect officers, appoint committee heads, pick a chapter name and whatever else might be needed in preparation for the training class starting in August.

The two chapters will offer some joint activities open to both chapters – we as Master Naturalists have the freedom to participate as a volunteer or training project hosted by either chapter. Many friendships have been formed in the Confluence Chapter and this will give us all the opportunity to cultivate the old friendships and form new ones.

If you are currently, a member of the Confluence Chapter and wish to join the new chapter, email your name along with the request to transfer to John Vandover at jtv4000@sbcglobal.net.

The Native Plant Nursery, a project to call our own - John Vandover

The Native Plant Nursery, nestled into a corner of Gateway Greening's Urban Farm, is located on the western fringe of downtown St. Louis. Its dedicated mission, growing native Missouri forbs and grasses for distribution to community gardens throughout the St. Louis area. To Master Naturalists, the Nursery presents a truly unique volunteer opportunity that doesn't come along very often. This, quite literally, is the level of project that is more than just simply volunteering our time. This is a project where we can have meaningful involvement in all aspects of nursery operations, from plant propagation to all growing stages to plant division and distribution. Gateway Greening also anticipates introducing at the Nursery a program of community education programs that would rely upon us to serve as instructors. Simply put, the Nursery is a project that we can get our hands around and exercise a high degree of ownership. And working in close concert with Gateway Greening and MDC, we can indulge our passion to learn and

promote responsible stewardship of natural resources through meaningful hands-on community service and providing once scarce native plants to be readily available throughout our area. Yes, the Nursery is more than simply volunteering to move dirt about and stick plants in the ground. It is a commitment where we can make a contribution. And quite frankly, Gateway Greening and MDC want us to accept this challenge. To that end, active work at the Nursery will commence in April in anticipation of this year's growing season. An email, detailing upcoming work dates will be sent very soon to all Confluence Chapter members. Those who have already signed on as Nursery Volunteers get ready; you will get specific work dates and assignments. To those chapter members who have not signed on as of yet, well it is my hope that the combination of this article plus the upcoming email will encourage you to make the Nursery commitment. I assure you, you will be amazed both by its scope and the depth of personal satisfaction this project represents.

I want to take advantage of this article to list the Nursery Work Teams and briefly detail the depth of involvement opportunities each team offers our volunteers. It is my hope that you will come away from this article with a real sense of the Nursery project's scope and excitement. I encourage you to get involved with as many of the Nursery's Work Teams as you wish. The more you can get involved, the better; not just for the Nursery, but for you as a Master Naturalist. So read the Work Team descriptions listed below, become invigorated and join us at the Nursery.

Native Plant Nursery Work Teams

MAJOR WORK DAY TEAM

- Site Prep Day: Saturday, April 28
- Planting Day: Saturday, May 19 with May 26 as a fall back date in case of rain
- Greenhouse / Tool Shed Construction: June date to be set
- Fall On-Site BBQ: September date to be set
- Winter Prep / Planting Bed Closure Day: November date to be set

WEEDING, WATERING & MAINTENANCE TEAM

TEAM MEMBERS IDENTIFIED AND WEEKLY WORK SCHEDULES TO BE DETERMINED ON SATURDAY, 28 APRIL SITE PREP DAY

- Weekly weeding, watering and basic bed care:
- Path maintenance throughout growing season
- Deadheading and Thinning

EDUCATION TEAM

NOTE: THIS IS A FUTURE NURSERY ACTIVITY. Specific educational activities have yet to be defined by Gateway Greening.

- Conduct native plant educational programs with school children and interested citizens

WINTER MONITORING TEAM

WEEKLY MONITORING STOPS ON 28 APRIL, RESUMES AFTER NOVEMBER WINTER PREP DAY

- Weekly checks for vandalism, maintenance
- Report nursery conditions to project coordinator

Shaw Nature Reserve Activity Report

A few Saturdays ago eight Master Naturalists volunteered at Shaw Nature Reserve with their Tale Travelers event. Holly, Lynn, Martin, Bob, Marypat, Leslie, Barb, & Steve read stories to kids and engaged them in related outdoor activities. In the wetland, woods, pond and prairie, parents and kids of all ages gathered to hear nature tales of everything from amphibians to frontier living to oak trees and decomposers. Bob, of course drove the wagon ride of visitors to each ecosystem. The day was fun, educational, and pleasant and enjoyed by all.

Courtship on the Plains – Prairie Chicken Style

- Lee Phillion

Missouri's Greater Prairie Chickens are fighting for survival. From tens of thousands in the middle 1800s, their numbers have plummeted to less than 1,000 remaining in Missouri's dwindling prairie habitats.

The rarity of these birds is precisely what enticed six Master Naturalists to drive ten hours, get up before dawn, hike uphill into a 35 mph wind in 20 degree weather, and sit in an unheated blind for two hours hoping to see chickens fornicate.



Dunn Ranch, a 3,000-acre prairie tract owned by the Nature Conservancy, is located in Harrison County in northwest Missouri some two miles south of the Iowa border. Each year from mid-March through April, Greater Prairie Chickens gather at the same spot on the Ranch to mate. Visitors may observe the ritual from a permanent blind nearby.

It was pitch dark at five a.m. as we drove along a hilly, country road searching for the spot where we would meet our guide. Headlights on a dirt road just off the blacktop told us we had arrived at our destination. As soon as we stepped from our cars, however, we knew that we were underdressed for the occasion. An April cold snap produced a record low temperature on the day of our visit, and the wind was "whistlin' down the plain" with a vengeance.

Wrapped in every bit of fabric we could find in our cars (*Someone slapped the pocket knife from my hand before I could get to the leather seat covers.*), we followed the light of our guide's flashlight up the hill. We leaned into the wind and pushed resolutely forward toward our destination – a blind on the top of the hill a half-mile away.

The blind was a canvas-enclosed metal structure atop a 12-foot flatbed trailer surrounded by camouflage. Canvas flaps had been sewn into the viewing side. Below the flaps, a board running the length of the blind served as a table for cameras and binoculars.



We lined up metal folding chairs in front of the flaps and settled in to wait for dawn's early light. Visitors must be inside the blind long before the birds arrive, so there is a considerable waiting period before the action begins. The respite from the wind was comforting at first. Unfortunately, the cold settled in a lot faster than we did and wind pushed through small cracks in the canvas and flooring.

Our guide found three sleeping bags in the blind and suggested that we wrap them around our legs for warmth—four legs per bag. My bag-sharer Martin, originally from Germany, displayed the kind of Teutonic ingenuity that produced the Volkswagen by suggesting that we SIT on our bag instead. Our legs were cold, but at least our *farfignugens* didn't freeze.

For roughly an hour, our guide talked about the natural history of the Greater Prairie Chicken.

For their springtime courtship, open knolls with short grass cover are preferred. Since they nest and roost on the ground, they also need tall grasses (10-18 inches high) for those activities. They eat native plants and insects as well as grains.

Breeding season runs from early spring to June. After conception, male Prairie Chickens have no further responsibility for offspring. Hens build saucer-shaped nests of dead grass (around 7 inches in diameter and 2-3 inches deep) in high, arching clumps of grass, and produce about a dozen eggs that are slightly smaller than domestic chicken eggs. Eggs are dark olive-buff to grayish olive with fine spots. Incubation is about three weeks, and the peak hatch period occurs in late May or early June. Chicks will leave the hen after approximately two months. Their lifespan is two to eight years.

Just before dawn, the guide said that if we opened our viewing flaps, which we had kept closed against the wind; we might see

the first chickens to arrive. Sure enough, on the top of a knoll about 250 yards away, eight to ten male Prairie Chickens had gathered to begin their ritual dancing.

In poor light at that distance, a two-pound bird looks like a small, dark shape. Several smaller, dark shapes arrived. I watched the small, dark shapes spar and parry. Occasionally one would suddenly shoot up three feet or more into the air like a dud roman candle. Even in the air, it was still just a small, dark shape.

Listening quietly, we could hear the “booming” call. Males produce the sound, which is more like a low “whoom whom” than a boom, to attract females. A dominant male will usually breed with all of the females who show up. That would explain the bit of rough housing and bravado we witnessed.

Three of the watchers had hoped to photograph the ritual. Scott, who had brought an impressively long lens for the occasion, complained that the blind was moving too much to get a clear shot. We all made an effort to stop shivering. Martin said his lens was too short. Probably just the cold, I suggested. I kept my mittens and lens cover on, figuring that I could download a Prairie Chicken photo while enjoying a glass of merlot in my living room later.

When it was my turn at the spotting scope, I trained the lens on a male who was strutting and dancing like an avian Sanjaya with inflated orange air sacs. This guy was clearly looking to get laid. I voted for him even though he wasn't the best boomer or dancer.

“Look,” whispered a fellow voyeur. “It's a coyote!”

A scrawny coyote was slinking through the tall, brown prairie grass toward the knoll. He kept his eye on the chickens as he circled the booming ground. Something on the ground distracted him and he pounced on what appeared to be a rodent. Fast food, but not fast enough. His main course was on top of the knoll.

Admittedly, part of me was rooting for the coyote. He was hungry and cold. So was I. His half-hearted leap into the flock, however, yielded nothing but a view of chickens in flight. As soon as the coyote moved on, the chickens resumed their courtship ritual.

An hour later, the wind was at our backs as we headed down the hill toward our cars. In the daylight, we could see the acres of rolling prairie that comprise Dunn Ranch and marveled at how beautiful it must be in bloom.

A rush of camaraderie – the kind that comes from leaving no man behind – overcame us as we downed a hearty breakfast before heading home. Our trip to Dunn Ranch made us better naturalists and better friends to each other and to the Prairie Chickens, who dance not for tourists, but for survival.

Their survival in Missouri depends upon preserving and restoring more of the habitat they require. The following

websites will provide more information about Missouri Prairie Chickens and land management practices that benefit them as well as information about visiting Dunn Ranch.

Natural History: <http://mdc.mo.gov/nathis/birds/chickens/>

Land Management:
<http://www.mdc.mo.gov/documents/nathis/endangered/prairiechicken.pdf>

About Dunn Ranch:
<http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/missouri/preserves/art447.html>

Missouri Prairie Foundation – Dedicated to preserving Missouri’s Prairies: <http://www.moprairie.org/>

Bird Bath with Connie Alwood - submitted by Linda Kalicak

The Wood Duck reprinted with permission - appeared in the 03/04/2007 St. Louis Master Gardener E-newsletter entitled: March 2007 MGNews

North America, being in the temperate zone, certainly doesn't have the diversity or the number of bird species that the tropics offer; nevertheless, we have a few species that can compete in ostentatious beauty with any Costa Rican toucan, motmot or tanager. Witness the Wood Duck.



The beautiful wood duck...once headed for extinction

The male is brazen in pattern and spectacular in color. In fact every crayon in the box has been judiciously used to paint this striking bird. Almost every part of its body is highlighted. With a drooping crest and a long tail, large blazing red eyes, and a white bridle and neck separating the cinnamon, polka dotted chest while another white bar sets off the buffy flanks, one could almost call this bird majestic. Or is it just Donald Duck dressed in motley?

Like Mallards, Wood Ducks are dabblers, tipping over to eat a variety of foods from seeds and berries to aquatic and terrestrial insects. Only a few duck species breed in trees and obviously this habit is how the bird got its name. It often uses holes made by Pileated Woodpeckers to build its nest. The trees are usually located in swamps, sloughs or near beaver dams. Another nesting source is man made nesting boxes, usually placed by conservation groups and Ducks Unlimited, an organization solely dedicated to providing much needed habitat for all waterfowl.

In the 1930's the Wood Duck was considered by many as a bird headed for extinction, but because of conservation practices, the bird has fully recovered. However, some surveys show that the bird was never in as much danger as originally thought.

In mild winters, some Wood Ducks stay in the St. Louis area, but most leave and return by March. As with most ducks, the cryptic looking female rears the young—the males serves just one purpose. Usually by May, I will notice the proud mother leading as many as eight of her ducklings across the pond in our subdivision.

Spotlight on: Patrick Hurst, Master Naturalist:

Family:

My three sons, Cody 12; Jesse 9; and Garrett 7; currently live with their Mom but on weekends they are with me. On weekends I help them with reading, writing, arithmetic and good manners. They are naturalists too, learning the rules of nature and the appreciation of nature.

Residence:

I have property in Lincoln County - near the Elsberry and Foley township line. Lots of wildlife – pileated woodpeckers, kestrels, turkey, flying squirrel, coyote, red fox, deer and horned lizards...and there's some kind of King snake or Milk snake or Coral snake, I don't know, I think one the endangered Missouri ones.

Background:

I attended Tech School in the Building Trades and Auto Mechanics. This prepared me for doing the maintenance and repair work needed at the Boathouse. In addition I also do electrical repairs, plumbing and painting for commercial or residential buildings. Mimi and Darold own a few buildings in town and I do the commercial maintenance for them south Main Street, St. Charles.

The tattoo on my arm is called a dream catcher or spirit catcher - the bison skull and feathers, stars, a tribal sun. It stops bad dreams ... it returns us to the spirit way. My dad was a full blooded Cherokee from Arkansas. My Mother was the third generation Irish immigrant she was a talented artist and cartoonist turning down an offer from Walt Disney to move to California to work.

I regularly find myself helping people out. Just standing in line at Lowe's, a customer was stealing stuff right in front of me and the cashier was about to get hit. I intervened and whacked the guy before he could hurt her. Another time intervened in a domestic dispute in public.

What attracted you to the Master Naturalist program?

Well, as a kid I was an Indian Guide, a Cub Scout, and a Boy Scout. I've always been interested in wildlife conservation. I met a Master Naturalist at the Boathouse garden and she always talked about the program. It seemed like the right thing to do and something I would enjoy.



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I make bird houses and we talked about selling them for the Master Naturalists. We could organize a work day for our chapter and make bluebird and bat houses in my shop. Also we could order a wood-burning stamp with our logo on it. The imprint would make it more unique for sale.

??? Did you know ???

We can attribute our knowledge of native Missouri plants to Lucy Meriweather Lewis, the mother of Meriweather Lewis.

Lucy Lewis loved plants, especially the herbs. As the family herbalist, Lucy repeatedly rounded up the children, trampled through woods and pastures, collecting & pointing out the wonders and medicinal qualities of plants they found. She grew medicinal plants around their plantation, Locust Hill in Albemarle City, Virginia (near the home of Thomas Jefferson) and became the herbal doctor for the family, as well as for slaves and neighbors miles around. She died at the ripe age of 85.

Of her 5 children, Meriweather was the most enchanted with the botanical knowledge. He proved his (and his mother's) frontier skills for all future generations on his Voyage of Discovery up and down the Great Missouri, Snake, and Columbia Rivers.

Upcoming Events

May 1st Deadline registration for the 2nd Annual Master Naturalist Conference is Tuesday, May 1st, Here is the packet:

<http://extension.missouri.edu/masternaturalist/staff/conference%20info%20PACKET.pdf>

Here is the form, to be filled out and returned:

<http://extension.missouri.edu/masternaturalist/staff/conference%20REG%20FORM.pdf>

May 4-12 Missouri River Relief

A "River Camp" is scheduled to be held at Pelican Island ramp near Florissant, MO. MDC will be setting up camp for a week, doing a large-scale education event on May 4, a large clean-up (St. Charles) on May 12 and several smaller clean ups, education events and pow-wows throughout the week. The week will be filled with programs targeted to other environmental, corporate and school groups focused on-the-river activities.

Some of the places our chapter might be able to help with:

- Habitat enhancement - probably at the Confluence or one of the municipal parks along the river.
- The May 4 learning festival - we could be involved along with MDC and others.
- We can also think of ways to implement some of these ideas and come up with ideas of our own

May 12th 9 – 11 am Rotary Park, Wentzville, MO
Class on **Tree Identification Workshop** (636)327-7665
<http://www.wentzvillemo.org/parks.htm>

May 14th 6:30 Missouri Botanical Garden Schoenberg Auditorium - evening lecture
Discovery Channel's Planet Earth: Pole to Pole
6:30 speakers: Dr. Peter Raven (MBG) & Doug Ladd (TNC)
7:30 discussion w/ speakers
RSVP Connie Browne (314) 968-1105 by May 9

May 17th 1 – 4 pm Shaw Nature Reserve
Class on **Native Container Gardening**
www.shawnature.org

May 18th – 20th Columbia, Missouri
2nd Annual Statewide Conference and Advanced Training
Quality Inn Columbia, MO

June 14th 1 – 4 pm Shaw Nature Reserve
Class on **Rain Gardening and Storm Water Runoff**
www.shawnature.org

June 26-29 Outdoor Classroom Adventures -if you would like to volunteer for this email nancy.snider@mdc.mo.gov or call Nancy at 636-300-1953x245

July 12 –Class on Gardening in **Dry Sun and Shade**
www.shawnature.org

Aug 9 - Class on **Prairie Reconstruction: Site Prep/Seed Collection** www.shawnature.org

Sept 6 - Class on - **Prairie Reconstruction: Seeding and Maintenance** www.shawnature.org

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