



Field Notes

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The Neglected Cattail

by Betsy Kuchinke, '06

Cattails, Cucumbers, Cossacks, and Corn. I know you've been waiting to learn how these four words are related. Lying awake at night...wondering, and pondering, and Googleing, and just plain so curious that you can't stand it! Well, here you go – the answers can be found in this totally awesome article from 1976, by William B. Walker. He spent a year at the University of New Hampshire studying the cattail. Here's an excerpt from his article titled "Our Neglected Food Source."



"Cattails produce more valuable food than any plant in New England – and most of it rots in our marshes each year. Acre for acre, the cattail can out produce corn, rice, wheat, or potatoes, not just in quantity, but in quality and variety as well. One acre of healthy cattail swamp can provide an average family with an abundance of vegetables and more flour than it can possibly eat in a year."

Wow! Tell us more Mr. Walker.

"In a country plagued by soaring food costs, millions of tons of perfectly edible food goes to waste each year – simply because we have forgotten how to gather and prepare it. The cosmopolitan cattail is a perfect example.

The cattail's four vegetables and two types of flour should be gathered between October and mid-June. With a few simple tools and a little practice, anyone can learn to harvest the neglected cattail.

Man began to benefit from the cattail thousands of years ago. Moses, who really had little choice in the matter, once avoided death by floating down the Nile in a basket woven from cattail leaves. Cossacks, Poles, Germans, and Egyptians have all used the cosmopolitan cattail for food. American Indians not only ate cattails, but also developed dozens of other uses for this common herb. They used cattail leaves for cordage, to patch leaky canoes, and to weave floor mats and baskets of all types."

Let's skip ahead to where he describes how to harvest and enjoy cattails in many of your meals. You may not share the love of wild edible foods that I've had since I was small, but you're sure to find it fascinating how many parts of this plant are delicious!

"Long before winter settles in, the cattail marsh prepares for the next growing season. By October, yellow green sprouts begin to grow from the cattail's underground storage facility – the rhizome. Hidden beneath mud and water, the sprouts may grow six to eight inches before winter ice blots out the sun.

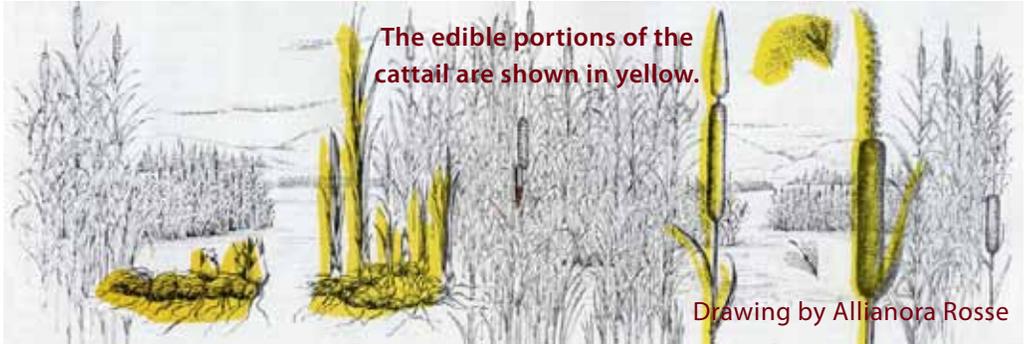
When ice-out begins the following spring, these sprouts renew their headlong rush for fresh air. As each sprout breaks the surface, it turns a darker green and opens

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The Neglected Cattail (continued)

into a dozen or more flat leaves, which surround a single reproductive stalk. (See illustration)

When the reproductive stalks stand eighteen inches above the water's surface, they are ready for harvesting. They have a texture much like that of a carrot, taste like cucumbers and are perfectly edible raw. If you wish to cook them, slice them like green beans, boil until soft, drain, and serve.



[The] cattail [is] monoecious... each plant bears both male and female flowers. These twin flowers, which develop during April and May, first appear as a green swelling at the top of the reproductive stalk. The female does not fully mature until late summer, when it turns into the familiar brown shaft that many call the cat-o'-nine-tails.

The male flower, similar to the female in size and shape, is fully mature by mid-June. Always located above the female, the male flower turns golden yellow when ripe. When the male is just beginning to squeeze out of its leafy sheath and change from green to golden yellow, sever it from the top of the reproductive stalk. This early vegetable has a taste very similar to corn-on-the-cob and should be prepared in exactly the same manner – peel off the sheath, boil in slightly salted water, and serve with butter.

A week or two after the corn-on-the-cob stage has passed, the male flower ripens into a fluffy golden shaft. When fully ripe, the male flower gives off a fine yellow powder, or pollen. This delicious, fine-grained flour makes excellent pancakes, muffins, and cakes.”

Rhizome flour? Hmmm. I'm thinking cookies...Oh, wait, there's more to learn before snacking!



“...A single uncultivated acre of cattail swamp will produce nearly three times as much rhizome flour as the most intensively cultivated wheat fields in the Midwest. This high-gluten flour is similar in texture, color, and taste to bleached wheat flour, but it is far more nutritious. Rhizome flour has more protein than corn or rice flour; more fat content than corn, rice, wheat, or potato flour; and more minerals than corn, rice, or wheat flour.

The rhizome is truly the backbone of the cattail swamp. When you look out across an expanse of cattails waving in the summer breeze, you may think there are thousands of plants per acre, but that's not the case. All are parts of a single plant, bound together by their subterranean storage facility—the rhizome.

In addition to all the edible uses, this productive plant is also a source of building insulation, caulking, soundproofing material, cordage, life-jacket stuffing, industrial drying oil, cattle and chicken feed, ethyl alcohol, and fibers suitable for weaving in to cloth.”

You may be thinking Mr. Walker is really going over the edge with statements like that, but according to his colleague, Professor Leland Marsh, cattail farming is possible with conventional farm equipment.

“There is nothing particularly difficult about setting up a cattail farm. All the necessary techniques are presently employed in some form of agriculture ... Although the commercial feasibility of cattail farming has not been assessed, a potentially lucrative new industry is possible, and then the cosmopolitan cattail could serve mankind throughout the world.”

If you're interested in harvesting cattails, check out Samuel Thayer's book, *The Forager's Harvest*. His website is extensive and beautifully done: <http://forager-sharvest.com>. (Two photos used with permission from Sam's book.)

From the President

by Eileen Borgia, '07

First, let me say that I am honored to serve as president of the ECIMN Board. I'd also like to send thanks to Mike Miller for leading our Board in 2010.

We have been spending the cold season changing things we've outgrown and strengthening our structure.

Select Current/Ongoing Efforts:

- By-Laws and Policies and Procedures modification, a draft will appear on our website later this spring and voting will be held at the Annual Meeting. Please send comments to Carl Altstetter.
- A major revision to our Website. Special thanks to Diane and Ed Wilhite.
- Planning for the 2011 Master Naturalist class.
- Master Naturalist Business Cards designed by Henry Koertge, chair of the Library committee (available free at the Extension office).

New Projects and Committees:

- Library Committee. Chair, Henry Koertge, '10. Three experienced librarians will catalogue and organize our collection, add bookcases, and recommend additional titles. Contact Henry with suggestions.
- Publications Review Committee. Chair, Cleo D'Arcy, '09. This committee will review documents intended for public distribution, and make recommendations to help ensure that such work reflects the mission and goals of the ECIMN.

- The Invasive Plant Task Force crafted the, "Invasive Plants of East Central Illinois" Informational Booklet (see our website).
- National Public Lands Day programming in September.

On behalf of our shared community, I'd like to ask all ECIMN folks to seriously consider serving on a committee. We need YOU—make contact! I look forward to seeing you out on the prairie or deep in the woods!

NEW Continuing Education Policy approved 2/21/11 by ECIMN Advisory Board

Acceptable continuing education is that which supports the mission and goals of the ECIMN chapter, and/or furthers knowledge and skills related to service in the ECIMN region. Examples of continuing education might be: programs sponsored by ECIMN, sponsors, and partners, as well as seminars, courses, conferences and events offered by colleges and universities, and online courses and webinars.

Members shall review the stated mission and goals of ECIMN, and if they think the activity furthers the mission and goals and their own expertise, then the educational program should be submitted as continuing education hours.

This change takes effect immediately and will be included in the next revision of the ECIMN Policies and Procedures.

Cattail Cookies

- 2½ c. rhizome flour
- 1½ tsp. double-acting baking powder
- ¾ tsp. salt
- 1 c. sugar
- ¾ c. oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Sift first 3 ingredients together. Combine sugar and oil then add the eggs and vanilla and beat well. Add the other ingredients and beat well. Shape into ¾ inch balls and flatten as thinly as possible and lay them on a lightly greased baking sheet. Sprinkle with granulated sugar and bake approximately 12 minutes.



Groups You Should Know:

The Citizen Scientists—River and Nest Watchers

by Daniel J. Olson

We have a special treat for 2011's "Groups You Should Know." This year we will be featuring the often overlooked but incredibly important world of the "citizen scientist." Each year around this country, millions of volunteers spend time collecting data, observing trends, and recording facts that are in turn used by other groups to record and report scientific findings. The good news is that you don't have to have a degree in advanced microphysics to be considered a scientist and contribute important data to the world. Citizen Science comes in many different forms and opportunities. You can participate in a local training and hit the field for data collection, or do simple observations at home in your own yard. Either way, the two main components to citizen science are to observe and then report. In some cases, your hobbies can help science take flight!

The River Watchers

RiverWatch was started several years ago as one of the many EcoWatch programs funded by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Unfortunately due to statewide budget cuts, the entire EcoWatch program was dropped. But the work they did continues to be important. Not wanting to lose any opportunity to get yearly trends of stream data, The National Great Rivers Research and Education Center recognized the vast importance of this program and began offering trainings and equipment needed to run the program. Today the program known as the Illinois RiverWatch Network asks that participants attend one of many trainings held throughout the state and then immerse themselves in local streams and rivers to collect water quality samples and survey invertebrates. Sampling is done just a couple of times a year. I have had the opportunity to use this data to assess the health of our streams and inform management decisions. To me, this is the greatest use of this data. I have also had the opportunity to wade alongside trained participants. One thing that was common for all of them was the genuine excitement and joy each time they discovered aquatic macroinvertebrates under a rock.

There are a handful of trained participants in cen-

tral Illinois who are always willing to have someone along for the experience, and more trained volunteers are always needed. **The next training will be held on Sat. April 16th, 2011 from 9 am to 4 pm at the beautiful Homer Lake Forest Preserve in Champaign County.** (This training is a little more intensive than with other Citizen Science programs because of the number of monitoring tools used). For more details, visit the calendar at www.ccfpd.org or <http://www.ngrrec.org/index.php/riverwatch>.

NestWatch

This is truly a neat opportunity for those who care deeply about birds. Developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, NestWatch teaches people about bird breeding biology and engages them in collecting and submitting nest records. These records include information about nest site location, habitat, species, and number of eggs, young, and fledglings. The Lab has collected tens of thousands of data sheets submitted by citizen observers from around the nation for almost four decades. The archive of data is being merged with data being collected today, to create one of the biggest sets of data on nationwide bird nesting ever established.

Like many citizen science opportunities, you get to choose your study location. The Champaign County Forest Preserve District Nest Box Monitors can perform double duty by establishing nest boxes that provide the much needed habitat for certain species and then reporting their yearly findings to the NestWatch program. So if you have nest boxes under your care, consider reporting your activity to NestWatch. Though the Cornell Lab is a critical piece of this effort, NestWatch is, at heart, a continent-wide citizen science project. The internet-based program provides training, support, and reporting features that are easily accessible on-line. Visit <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/home/index> to get started.

One more opportunity: Join citizen scientists **Rainspotters (CoCoRaHS) for training on March 9, 6:30 PM at the Extension office.**

Wild Things: Spring Cleaning for Feathered Friends

by Esther Lutz, '06, Coles County



It's March, and winter weather seems to finally be on its way out. It's a little early to think that we've seen the last of it, but warm sunny days are coming more regularly now. As the sun peeks out from behind the clouds and temperatures start to rise, the activity level in our rural neighborhood is picking up. The wildlife are venturing out of their

winter hiding places, and we're seeing a flurry of springtime bird activity as they find partners for the nesting season and burst out in song.

In my childhood days, this was the time of year when my mother's thoughts turned to spring-cleaning. She'd put screens in the windows and open them wide, carry the old musty rugs out into the sun for a good airing on the porch, and hang the clothes out to dry for the first time all year in the bright sun and cool spring breezes. I remember well that first fresh smell of the outdoors on Mother's newly washed clothes and wind-whipped sheets. After several long dark months of braving the biting cold, wind, and snow, moving things outdoors and escaping that cooped-up feeling was literally like a breath of fresh air. Spring just never could arrive soon enough!

The Home

But what about spring-cleaning in our little bird neighborhoods? Now is the time to turn our attention to doing a little tidying up for our feathered friends. Although it's still a little nippy out and we really don't want to think about cleaning out birdhouses, it's an important job that needs to be done. The birds will soon be returning in their northward migration, and they'll join those that have remained all winter to vie for nesting sites in our backyards. If the birdhouses didn't get cleaned last fall when they were put away for the winter, then they are due for it now! Any houses left up during the cold months for birds

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Workdays

The Red Bison Group

Meetings are held most Sundays at 1pm at the YMCA, 1001 S. Wright St. in Champaign. Workdays and events are all listed on our website at <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/ro/www/RedBison/>

Allerton Allies

First Saturday of every month (except August and January) Meet at 8:30AM for treats then off to work from 9–12AM. Check with Sandy (PH: 217.333.7672 or slmason@illinois.edu for meeting place.

Urbana Park District

Second Saturday of every month:

Busey Woods, 9–11AM: Meet at Anita Purves Nature Center

Weaver Grove, 1–3PM: Pull off south of intersection of Main St. and Smith Rd.

Fourth Saturday of every month:

Meadowbrook Prairie, 9–11AM: Meet at Race St. parking lot

Perkins Road, 1 – 3PM: Meet at the Dog Park parking lot on Perkins Road, ½ mile east of Cunningham Ave.

Prescribed fire training with field day

March 19, 2011

The Rock Island County Soil and Water Conservation District will be holding a field day for completion of online course work to become NWGC certified for S130/190, I 100 and L 180. This fulfills the required coursework to become an Illinois Prescribed Fire Manager. For registration go to www.qcnags.org <<http://www.qcnags.org>> For further information contact Marilyn Andress 309/292-0690

Links of interest:

If you have not yet signed up with the Ecostewards Community List, check it out! Several folks forward Ecosteward announcements to Master Naturalists. But we hate to overload your inbox with duplicate e-mail. SO... sign up today! <http://lists.communitylists.org/listinfo.cgi/ecostewards-communitylists.org>

Wild Things (continued)

to roost in will need to be freshened up for this year's new families. Open them up and clear out any leftover debris and old nest materials. They also need to be disinfected to get rid of any parasites, which are common in birdhouses and will feed on roosting birds and their babies. A thorough washing of the inside is usually all it takes to resolve an insect parasite problem. And we must be sure to give it a thorough rinsing and drying before making it available to the birds again.

If the birdhouse needs a fresh coat of paint or stain, now is the best time to take care of the job. Selecting natural tones like brown, tan or green will blend in better with the natural surroundings and seem to be preferred by most birds. Bright, shiny or colored houses are sometimes rejected, the theory being that they may more easily catch the attention of predators.

The Dining Room

Once the birdhouses are clean and ready for move-in day, it's time to turn to the birdfeeders. Chances are, there wasn't much cleaning going on during the winter months, and the feeders are sure to have accumulated dirt, dried or moldy food, or other bird waste, and they can be quite unhealthy for the birds to feed on. Whether it's a ground feeding tray, suet feeder or non-wooden hanging feeder, the procedures are pretty much the same. Soaking the feeder first in a mild bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) to kill the bacteria is always a good idea. Then using toothbrushes, pipe cleaners, or bottle-brushes to get into all the nooks and crannies is always helpful. Tube feeders can be a challenge because there can be so many parts to them, so removing as many of those parts as possible and using a solution of bleach and water to soak them first can make the job easier. If soaking alone doesn't get it clean enough, then a little elbow grease with that toothbrush may be required. For wooden feeders, a mild dishwashing detergent in warm water and a stiff bristle brush should prove helpful—no bleach solution. Always rinse and dry thoroughly before refilling with fresh seed or suet. Don't forget to periodically rake beneath your feeders to rid the area of birdseed hulls that may harbor bacteria that could spread bird diseases. This is an often overlooked, but important, maintenance activity.

Hummingbird feeders may take some different approaches. They can get quite grimy and with their

many nooks and crannies can be difficult to clean. Disassemble, empty, and wash with detergent and hot water, then rinse thoroughly. An easy solution would be to mix one part vinegar to four parts water and throw a handful of rice grains into the inside of the small or narrow nectar receptacle. Swish around vigorously until most or all of the inside has been completely cleaned. The abrasive action of the rice grains can be quick and effective. Clean the feed-holes with a fine bottle brush or wire probe. Sterilize the feeders next in a bleach solution. Rinse thoroughly and let dry before refilling them with nectar or sugar solution.

The Bath

Maintaining a clean birdbath is always an important part of keeping birds healthy and eager to return to our yards. It needs regular cleaning to remove algae and harmful bacteria. A mild solution of bleach will usually suffice, followed by multiple rinses. A good stiff brush may be necessary to remove stubborn stains or algae. Be careful when refilling it--the water should be shallow enough for the birds to stand in. A few pebbles placed in the bottom can help them to keep their footing in the water. Too deep, and the birds won't stop to bathe and enjoy! Having a water source in your yard can be useful for all birds, but is especially nice for attracting several spring and summer species that don't use birdhouses and will not typically eat from feeders. Keeping a clean water source in your yard will keep them coming back for more!

Getting our spring-cleaning chores out of the way early can be like putting out the welcome mat for the spring return of our feathered friends. It's best to get everything cleaned and ready before the start of the nesting season. If we can fulfill this obligation, it won't be long before we have lots of birds flocking to call our backyards "home." And all that's left for us to do is sit back and enjoy!



Illinois Green Business Association

by James Treat, '08

The economy may be awash in red ink, but some central Illinois businesses are going green thanks to a few enterprising college students. What began three years ago as a modest effort to promote curbside recycling has evolved into an ambitious management assistance program specializing in the certification of sustainable business practices.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is the state's flagship public university; its sprawling campus straddles the line separating the twin cities. Urbana residents have long enjoyed the convenience of curbside pickup provided by a municipally managed recycling program. But most students live in Champaign, where the only recycling option for multi-family residences was a drop-off site far from campus, especially inconvenient for those without vehicles. In the spring of 2007, several members of an environmental student group began discussing the need for a more user-friendly recycling system in Champaign, one that would serve the many apartment buildings near campus. Later that year they formed Community Organized Recycling Efforts (CORE) to address the issue. "We want to start in the student community," co-director Cassie Carroll told a reporter for the campus paper, "and then spread it to the rest of Champaign."

Their first project aimed to encourage recycling within the university's Greek system, which is the largest in the country. Eleven fraternities and eleven sororities signed up for the Green House Competition, a two-week effort to raise awareness by collecting recyclable materials. Each house appointed a recycling chair and CORE members coached them on ways to increase yield. Coordinator Mara Eisenstein enlisted the help of campus waste management staff in assessing the results, and afterward, she organized the Greek Environmental Chairs Coalition to ensure that house-based recycling would continue.

Heartened by this success, CORE announced a university-wide recycling event. Campus Cleanup was scheduled for the day after a notorious annual drinking bash that leaves Campustown, the student-oriented commercial district, littered with recyclables. Forty volunteers representing seven other student groups showed up to help CORE members collect empties and promote "a greener mindset on campus."

The Green House Competition and Campus Cleanup would both become annual events, and there were other CORE accomplishments as well: distributing recycling bags during a crowded football tailgate; and, establishing a recycling program at one of the largest buildings in town, a privately owned seventeen-story residence hall. A significant turning point came when CORE leaders responded to a university request for proposals to promote environmental efficiency on Green Street, the main drag through Cam-

pustown. Facilities and Services awarded CORE a small planning grant for "Greening Green Street," and CORE member Anthony Santarelli began interning with the office of Environmental Compliance. It was not long before their plans were taking them beyond Campustown, and beyond the purview of a student group.

After graduating in May 2008, CORE members Carroll and Eisenstein visited San Francisco to learn about the Bay Area Green Business Program. They realized a similar venture might work in the Midwest, and might also offer them more personal satisfaction than the regular job market. "We love our projects, we love what we're doing, we love where the group is headed," Eisenstein asserted. "Why stop?" That summer Carroll, Eisenstein, and Santarelli founded the Champaign-Urbana Green Business Association (CUGBA). They networked with business leaders, incorporated as a nonprofit organization, and held their first board meeting in December. The CUGBA (<http://greencu.com>) opened for business in July 2009; a local bank funded their startup salaries, while a local developer donated office space in a trendy new high-rise.

The pilot project they launched last fall enlisted thirteen area businesses, including a shoe store, a boutique bakery, a hair salon, a gift shop, an upscale bar, and two insurance agencies. Working closely with this eclectic group of clients has allowed CUGBA staff to refine their policies and practices and to expand the range of services they offer. Each business is evaluated in nine areas of sustainable

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Green Business Association (continued)

performance: energy conservation, water conservation, waste reduction and recycling, pollution prevention, transportation, landscape, general employee practices, purchasing, and community development. The CUGBA identifies opportunities for improvement and offers guidance regarding government agencies, grant writing, contractor referrals, and education. Clients who successfully complete the process receive certification as a green business and public recognition for their environmental leadership.

CUGBA leaders hoped to enlist three hundred businesses in their program during 2010. They've already fielded inquiries from other parts of the country; they now envision the CUGBA as the founding local chapter of a new Illinois Green Business Association. Young entrepreneurs Carroll, Eisenstein, and Santarelli are back on campus, providing internship opportunities for other students at the University of Illinois.

Oh, and the City of Champaign finally agreed to offer curbside recycling for multi-family residences!



What a Great IDEA!



The I.D.E.A. Store Update

by Carol Jo Morgan, '07

The I.D.E.A. Store opened on September 30, 2010, and has been successfully interrupting the waste stream in our community by taking all kinds of no-longer-needed items from homes and businesses for creative re-use in arts and education. The store is tucked away in the back of 28 East Springfield Avenue in Champaign and we're open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 2-7 p.m. and Saturday from 8:30AM-12:30PM. The place buzzes with the activity of donors coming in with items, volunteers sorting and pricing, customers getting inspired by the wide variety and low cost of "cool stuff," and the excitement of workshop participants. You have to see the incredible inventory to believe it, and to understand that what seems worthless to one person is just what someone else has been looking for! Proceeds from sales go to the store's operations and to its parent organization, the Champaign Urbana Schools Foundation that supports excellence in our local public schools by providing grants to local classroom teachers.

What does all of this have to do with Master Naturalists? I am the I.D.E.A. Store's co-founder and its Education Coordinator and also a Master Naturalist who believes that protecting our Earth's precious natural resources begins with raising awareness of our personal impacts on the environment and in making educated consumer choices. Removing invasive species, tending our prairies, and choosing to reduce, re-use, and recycle are all important ways of reaching the same goal.

Beyond promoting resource re-use, another of The I.D.E.A. Store's missions is to emphasize environmental protection through its education programs. Artists and crafters of all ages and abilities are often inspired by and express an appreciation of nature, but they may choose to create their art with materials that have negative impacts on the natural world. Each I.D.E.A. Store workshop, party, and class contains an environmental lesson and features reusable materials that help translate appreciation into more educated, sensitive choices for creative projects. Education isn't limited to our "Green Room" workshop space at The I.D.E.A. Store. Creative re-use ideas and examples can be found throughout the space, with new ones added regularly!

How can you get involved?

- Carol Jo welcomes assistance to develop a range of education projects, including upcoming workshops. Your cre-

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I.D.E.A Store (continued)

ative talents are valuable, and teachers and great ideas are always needed!

- Come to the I.D.E.A. Store first when you need things for your own around-the-house projects.
- Leaders of youth groups and other programs will appreciate how much they can get for their dollars, because lots of things are available in bulk.
- Encourage your friends, family members and co-workers to think of shopping at The I.D.E.A. Store for traditional and unusual art, craft, and office supplies including tools, paper of all sorts, nature books and magazines, yarn, fabrics and notions, one-of-a-kind finds, and much more. For the complete list of accepted items, map and directions to the store, upcoming workshops, and to see our Facebook and Twitter sites, visit the website at www.the-idea-store.org.

We have to keep the cycle of donations and purchases going for the store to grow and expand its services. Literally tons of materials have passed through the I.D.E.A. Store in the last four months, bound for at least one more use instead of going directly to local landfills! The store has already outgrown its current space and expansion is inevitable, but dependent upon dedicated volunteers and continued income, both of which have exceeded our expectations to date. The education aspect is critical and we hope to take eco-edu-art projects into area schools this coming fall.

Join Carol Jo at The I.D.E.A. Store on March 16th from 6-8 PM for a tour, special presentation, and a “make and take” experience just for Master Naturalists. Look at upcoming notices on the listserve about this opportunity. Feel free to contact Carol Jo with questions at 352-7878 or email her, caroljo@the-idea-store.org.

Get the IDEA?

Snow Trillium

by Dick Robrock, 07

Trillium nivale, Lily Family (Liliaceae)

Snow Trillium, which is sometimes called Dwarf White Trillium, is a rare, native perennial and a member of the lily family. It grows 2.5”– 4” tall and sometimes lives up to its name by appearing through the snow in March and April. It is found in rich, moist woods along bluffs in the northern half of Illinois and at Allerton Park. It is an indicator of high quality upland woodlands. Its populations are usually small, scattered colonies, which are threatened by logging, quarrying, and grazing, as well as by invasive species.

The wildflower has a single, unbranched stem that rises from a thick rhizome and terminates in a whorl of three leaves. The leaves are up to 2.5” long and are green or olive green, oval, hairless, smooth along the margins, with parallel veins. The base of each leaf is more rounded than the tip, and the petiole is very short.

Mature plants produce a single flower up to 2” across, with three white petals, three green sepals, and six yellow stamens. Each fertilized flower produces a three-lobed fruit about ½” long. Snow Trillium can reseed itself, but it more often produces vegetative clones from rhizomes. Individual plants may live up to eight years, and should be protected wherever found.

Join allerton Allies to help protect these beauties.



Introduction to the Great Garlic Mustard Hunt

by Michael Daab, '09

As temperatures rise and the days grow longer, we begin looking toward spring and the return of abundant life and color in our favorite natural areas. However, emerging along with our beloved native wildflowers is a plant that is not welcome due to its unruly behavior. Garlic mustard (*Aliaria petiolata*) is an exotic, invasive plant introduced from Europe for culinary purposes. It has spread throughout North American woodlands. It can out-compete native plants for the light, moisture, and nutrients they need. This is your formal invitation to join in the inaugural Great Garlic Mustard Hunt where we unite to ensure that this disruptive plant does not overcome our forests. **Weeding in the woods events will be held at several East-Central Illinois locations throughout April and into May.** This is a great opportunity to rack up volunteer hours amid some friendly competition. The Hunt will be capped off with a celebration and potluck featuring garlic mustard recipes. Keep an eye on the listserv for more details soon!

One Martini too Many?

by Loren Wasson

Probably not. It was a Sunday afternoon, too early for cocktails, during June of 2004 and I was returning home to Mahomet from one of the first field trips of the year for the one-year old Grand Prairie Butterfly Club - this one to Coneflower Hill Prairie in Moultrie County near Lake Shelbyville. Driving north on a county road between a wooded area to the west and cropland on the east I had the shortest possible view imaginable of an animal rushing across the road into a cornfield about a hundred yards or so in front of me. The image stamped in my mind was of a large, cat-like animal, tawny colored with no markings, a long tail and a blunt face. My immediate thought was that it appeared very similar to a lioness although, outside of a circus or zoo escapee, not likely. The general impression of appearance was definitely not canine.

Later, out of curiosity, I reviewed a few possibilities, albeit remote. Bobcats do exist in Illinois, but they generally have spots, a short tail with black markings, and tufts on the tips of the ears and on the side of their heads. The image I remembered looked nothing like this. The Canadian Lynx does not exist in Illinois, and even if it did, it too looks nothing like my fleeting specimen. And there was no way it could have been a feral (or otherwise) domestic cat.

Like many other things I observe in the wild, but am unable to identify, this fleeting image gradually retreated to the back of my memory. But it was not entirely forgotten. At the time, I was unaware of the article in the Winter 2004 edition of The Illinois Steward mentioning recent con-

firmed sightings of cougar in Illinois as well as in adjacent states. If I had read it then, his description would certainly have rung a bell: "they are known for their slender bodies, small heads, small ears that lack tufts, short, buff-colored fur and long, rounded tails." A few years later, however, I did hear of anecdotal stories of sightings in Illinois, and in 2008 an article appeared in Grand Prairie Friends' "A Prairie Rendezvous" stating that three confirmed cougar sightings had been documented in the last ten years.

In his article in the Illinois Steward, William McClain wrote, "they are known for their slender bodies, small heads, small ears that lack tufts, short, buff-colored fur and long, rounded tails." Did I actually see a cougar? I couldn't say, but it was tantalizingly possible!



Field Notes is the newsletter for East Central Illinois Master Naturalists. We need your help! If you have any volunteer or continued education events of interest or would like to submit an article, please email Marya Burke [maryaclarefb@gmail.com] or mail information to Marya, Field Notes editor, at the address below. Please indicate information is for the newsletter.


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