

BIG BLUESTEM FLYER

Newsletter of the Mid-Iowa Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 24, No. 2

October 1989

MONTHLY MEETING

PEREGRINE FALCON PROJECTS

Pat Schlarbaum, Iowa DNR Nongame Biologist

PEREGRINE FALCON PROGRAM UPDATE

Steve Fettig, Michigan DNR, Isle Royale

PEREGRINE RELEASE PROJECT

Tuesday, October 10, 7:30 p.m., Room 181, Design Center, ISU, Ames

FIELD TRIPS

HAWK WATCH

From the vantage of the Luther High Bridge and points in Ledges State Park, we hope to see some of the fall hawk migration.

Meet on Saturday, October 7 at 7:30 a.m. at the Design Center parking lot or at about 8:00 a.m. at the Luther High Bridge, west of Luther at the Des Moines river.

WATERFOWL WATCH

Squaw Creek, MO or Desoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge.

November 10-11, 1989; an overnight trip is planned.

Contact Mike Meetz at the meeting or at home for details.

WATERFOWL WATCH

Saylorville Reservoir; November 18, 1989

Meet below the dam at 7:30 a.m. or meet to carpool at 6:45 a.m. at the Design Center parking lot.

BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS 1989-1990

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Tom Rosburg, 292-2361

Newsletter Editor and Membership Chair

David Edwards, 292-3790



PRAIRIE FIELD TRIP REPORT

About 16 people strolled the Doolittle prairie under the able guidance of prairie plant specialist Tom Rosburg. The cold air was countered by the bright sun to make a delightful day. First arrivers were greeted by an aerial battle between a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Blue Jay. There was no clear winner and they both rested in the same tree before starting out again. About 20 species of birds were seen, most interesting being a White-throated Sparrow. At least 25 species of prairie plants were focused at Doolittle Prairie. Noteworthy were Smooth Aster, Culver's Root, Blazing Star, and the numerous Stiff Goldenrod and Rigid Sunflower.

Most participants then went on to the managed roadside prairie that extends four miles west from Hubbard on State Road 175. Tom was pleased to find Nodding Lady's-tresses (or Prairie Orchid), Bottle Gentian, and Prairie Three-awn. Hardin County has just begun county-wide roadside vegetative management and this Hubbard prairie will be a jewel to maintain.

PRAIRIE SEED HARVEST

If you want some hands-on experience with prairie plants and their seeds, Story County Conservation Board will hold another seed harvest at Doolittle Prairie on October 8 at 2 p.m.

Seeds gleaned will be used in prairie restorations in the county.



AUDUBON ADVENTURES

Our chapter will be funding 23 classrooms at a cost of \$30 per adventure series. We budgeted for 13 and have received contributions for 3 more. We have 7 classes to fund. If you are interested in helping or you know of an organization that might be interested, please call Nancy Dionigi at 233-3195 or Barbara Heikens at 236-2999 for further details.

ACID RAIN UPDATE

From June 1st to September 14th our Nevada station collected and measured the pH of 28 separate samples. Total rainfall was 12 inches. Readings ranged from a low pH of 5.25 to a high of 6.5. The mean reading was close to 5.6, which is considered normal for unpolluted rainfall.

Our west Ames station collected 11 samples over the same reporting period. Total rainfall measured was 7.24 inches and pH readings ranged from 4.7 to 6.8. Mean pH reading was again close to 5.6.

Mike Meetz

ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

We have been hearing about new treatment of our public roadsides for some time now. Steve Lekwa presented an excellent review of the ideas and plans for Story County's roadsides. Following is a summary of what it is all about and what we can expect.

Roadside Vegetation Management is more than just a longer name for a county program. When Story County chose to transfer the management of weed control from the highway and roads workers to the conservation board it was much more than a name change. The entire philosophy and goal was changed. Story County was not the first (some say the second) and it will assuredly not be the last, and even the state controlled roadsides are now under protection due to new laws from our legislature.

What follows is partly an abstract of a handout prepared by Bill Haywood of the Black Hawk County Conservation Board and distributed by Steve Lekwa. In the past weed control was essentially a matter of spraying weeds when it was convenient to do so. Blanket spraying and spot spraying was done according to rules-of-thumb or when complaints were received. The effects were always temporary and often counterproductive. Beneficial plants were lost before they could become established and compete with the weeds.

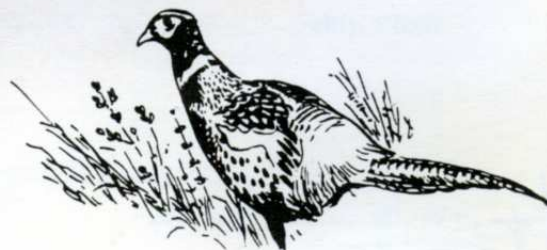
Three principles are followed in an integrated program of weed and other vegetation management. First, bare soil will never be without some form of plant (unless chemically poisoned). Annual weeds are usually the first to arrive because they are very productive of seeds and are not fussy about soil quality.

Second, plant communities succeed one another with time until the best-fitting plants are established on the site. If the soil is undisturbed, perennial and biennial plants will replace the annuals by being more able to tap the nutrients and water through better root systems. The succession produces communities of plants that fit on the site and with each other. Such survivors are almost never a monoculture (a single species).

Third, disturbance of the soil reverses the succession. Excavation for normal road and ditch maintenance, silting from water and wind blown soils, and chemical attacks by herbicides are the trio of disturbance that are most common.

The integrated program of roadside management proceeds from an inventory of the plant communities and conditions that presently exist. Where necessary, seeding and overseeding is designed to place plants deemed to be most likely to be fit for that site. Areas of undesirable plants may be removed by selective herbicides and by programs of well-timed burning. Silting and chemical drift must be managed by buffer strips separating ploughed and treated fields. None of these programs is easy or quick. Results are measured in periods of several years.

There are no quick fixes, but then there are several long-term benefits. Native prairie roadsides are a delight to see at all times of the year. (A half hour drive to the Hubbard roadside Prairie is convincing.) They supply suitable habitat and cover for wildlife. Some well-vegetated areas trap some of the windblown snow that might have drifted on the road. In the long-term, and even presently, costs of weed control are less. And last, in the words of a TV commercial personality, "Its the right thing to do."



CALENDAR FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS

- October 7 BBAS Hawk Watch. Ledges State Park and Luther High Bridge.
October 8 Doolittle Prairie Seed Harvest, 2 p.m.
October 10 BBAS meeting. Peregrine Falcon program update. Iowa DNR Non-Game Biologist. Isle Royale Peregrine Release Project. Steve Fettig, Michigan DNR.
October 14 Sierra Club, Des Moines, special program featuring David Brower of Friends of Earth. Call Sherry Dragula at 292-4014 or 279-8868
October 14 Cedar Rapids AS field trip to the Yellow River. 9:00 a.m. at the campground.
October 20,21 Halloween Hikes at McFarland Park with an environmental educational alternative to the usual seasonal frights. Reservations required and a modest fee is charged. Call McFarland Park office at 232-2516.
November 10-11 BBAS Waterfowl Watch at Squaw Creek, MO or DeSoto Bend NWF
November 14 BBAS meeting. Bolivia: Savannah Geology and Botany. Tim Kileen.
November 18 BBAS and IOU Waterfowl Watch at Saylorville. Meet 7:30 a.m. below the dam.

BIRDERS' HOTLINE

- 319/338-9881 for state-wide sightings.
712/262-5958 for northwest Iowa sightings.

October 1989

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