

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 9, Number 4

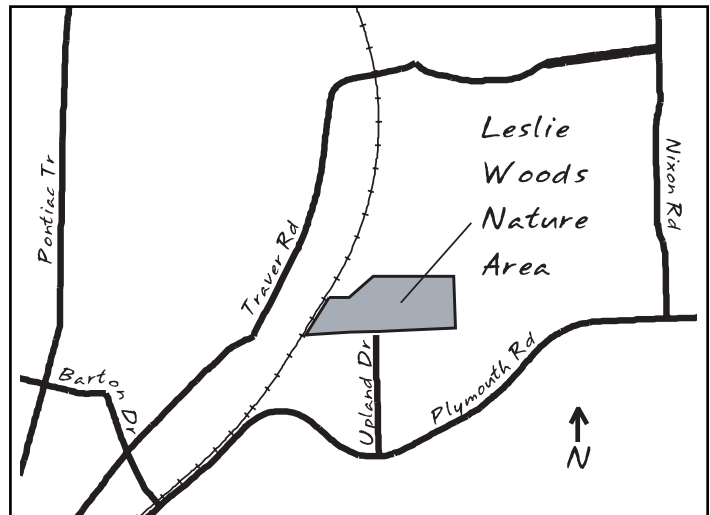
Winter 2004

Park Focus: Leslie Woods Nature Area *by Jason Tallant*

As one of Ann Arbor's more mature woodlands, Leslie Woods has some of the largest oaks and hickories in the Ann Arbor park system. This nature area comprises twenty-three acres of mixed hardwoods and shrubland habitat. The majority is an oak/hickory forest crossed by a seasonal creek. In comparison with other ecosystems of its type, Leslie Woods not only engulfs you in its canopy of towering oaks, but also ranks high in "floristic quality" (a qualitative measure of habitat value). A number of locally rare plant species occur here, including Culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*), Kentucky coffee tree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*), maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), richweed (*Collinsonia canadensis*), and a rare sedge (*Carex sprengelii*). This indicates that Leslie Woods is a historically intact woodland that remains as a well-functioning ecosystem.

Many would suggest that a piece of land this size is insufficient for preserving species diversity, conservation's ultimate goal. However, small nature reserves can have great botanical conservation capacity. In the context of plant diversity, some have shown that multiple small nature reserves, within the same habitat type, can support a greater diversity of plants than a single large reserve (Godefroid & Koedam, Higgs & Usher, et al.). This is not to say that smaller reserves are better for plants. Conservation efforts should continue to focus on preserving large, connected tracts of natural area, but the benefit of including smaller reserves in conservation priorities is well substantiated. It remains to be seen whether smaller, isolated reserves can support plant populations over time. Empirically, field botanists are hopeful that diverse plant populations can survive and even thrive in small or isolated reserves, as they continue to discover

relict populations as small as a few hundred square meters in size (Reznicek, 1987).



Leslie Woods' biggest threat to overall ecosystem health is invasion by non-native species. Since 1998, NAP volunteers and staff have dedicated over 500 hours of time in Leslie Woods. Most were spent removing invasive species including woody species like European buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.). Additionally, herbaceous invaders like garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) and dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) have given many volunteers a sore back and good night's sleep after a workday spent pulling these early spring risers. Trail creation and maintenance have also been a top priority for NAP at Leslie Woods. A trail loop, approximately 1000 meters in length, was installed in the fall of 2003 and plans are in the works to make a connector trail to Stapp Nature Area, a recent park acquisition northeast of Leslie Woods.

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Coordinator's Corner

For most of the past twelve years, I've been attending the annual conference of the Natural Areas Association (NAA), the professional organization for natural land managers where I turn for inspiration, feedback, and camaraderie. Historically this organization has its roots in natural areas programs at the state and federal level, although larger non-profits such as The Nature Conservancy have also been well represented at our meetings. So when I started attending these meetings as a representative of the City of Ann Arbor eleven years ago, I found few other municipal employees there. And as I told others about the work I was involved in here, they would often give me a surprised look and ask, "You're doing all this in city parks?"

But much has changed in city park systems across the nation in the past decade. More and more cities are embarking on the type of ecological restoration work that NAP started doing in 1993. In fact, when I was asked to join the NAA Board in 2002, I was told it was because NAA wanted to reach out more to city restoration staff, such as myself. That prompted the idea, a year ago, that I should organize an all-day symposium at this year's conference highlighting urban natural area programs across the country.

Toward that end, NAP staff developed and distributed a survey to 45 urban natural area programs we had heard of in the U.S. and Canada. Another 21 were sent via email to cities involved with the "Chicago Wilderness" initiative that we suspected might have NAP-like programs. Thirty-three cities responded, and the results were interesting. Almost all the cities were trying to control invasive species, maintain trails, and control erosion. Many were also doing native seed collection and dispersal, and trying to control nuisance wildlife. Twenty cities also had prescribed burn programs, as we, of course, do. All but one city had a volunteer program.

With those survey results in hand, we started inviting staff from key cities to present a more detailed account of their program at the NAA conference this past October. We heard about programs in Chicago, Madison, Boulder, San Francisco, Indianapolis, Eugene, Miami, Bellevue, Toronto, Cincinnati, and Ann Arbor. It was great to see all the outstanding work being done by city staff and volunteers across the U.S. and Canada, and it was amazing how much our programs have in common. This group will hopefully become the core of a growing network of municipal natural area managers.

So, if you're vacationing in one of these cities, stop in and visit some of their urban natural areas. See how they compare to ours. Look for some of the familiar invasives all-too-common in our own city parks. Then look to see if they're being controlled. And if you get any good ideas while you're out there, come back and tell us about it! We're always open to innovations.

- David Borneman, *NAP Manager*

Natural Area Preservation

is a Division of the City of Ann Arbor
Public Services Area

The mission of the Natural Area Preservation Division is to protect and restore Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster an environmental ethic among its citizens.

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For up-to-date information on stewardship activities, call the "hotline" at 734.996.3266.

If you would prefer to receive your next newsletter via e-mail please call NAP.

Trekking through Town

I had no plans for New Year's Eve, so when my friend Heather suggested walking to Ypsilanti for the New Years Jubilee from our Old West Side homes in Ann Arbor, I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate the passage of the year.

At five thirty p.m., seven hardy women set out from her house under a cloudless blue sky, crisp, but unseasonably warm for December 31. Our backpacks were loaded with extra warm clothing, gourmet snacks, flashlights and beverages. We posed for photos to document the event, and thus began our journey.

I love to walk. In fact, my daily commute is my favorite part of the day. I live almost exactly one mile from City Hall, and for 11 years my walking has worn a groove on Washington Street. I know every uneven crack in the sidewalk, I slog through the rain and snow, and I greet the same people nearly every day. It gets my blood flowing, provides time to daydream, soak in the weather, listen to birds, and then decide at which cafe to stop once I reach downtown. Spending the evening walking to the party in Ypsilanti seemed like one of the most compelling ways to celebrate the New Year.

Our New Year's Eve journey was circuitous; in fact instead of heading east towards our destination, we went west so we could hit some of the City's most alluring attractions: the natural areas, the river parks, and vantage points from which to admire the view. By the time we reached Bird Hills Park, the sun was setting and we pulled out our flashlights to avoid tripping over roots and uneven ground.

One of the best parts of my job as a Park Planner is laying out trails and working to connect pedestrian paths along the Huron River. Sometimes these projects take years to put in place, but when they are finally built, there is nothing more gratifying than having people enjoy them and appreciate our fabulous river without worrying about dodging motor vehicles. During this trek, we walked on many of the trails I had helped put in place, and it was wonderful to be able to traverse them all the way through town, from my house to the city border.

Our first stop was the small wooden dock at Barton Pond. By this time it was dark and the moon was rising in the sky. We talked about the stars, looked for constellations, nibbled some snacks from our well-stocked packs. And before we got too cold, we packed up and continued along the river, the moon now bright enough

so that we no longer needed our flashlights. We traversed the woodchip path on the Barton Oxbow, crossed through Bandemer Park, and along the asphalt path that I had spent the summer working on, over the Argo Dam, through to Riverside Park, and arrived at our official dinner stop, Island Park.

Beyond the Greek Revival Temple, we sat at a picnic table and truly had a feast. Baked Brie, smoked salmon, chips and salsa, hummus and vegetables. It was chilly, but we had all packed thermoses full of hot beverages to keep us warm.

This was a group of kindred souls. Some of us were good friends, others met for the first time that evening. We ranged in age from 30 to 56, but all were equally enthusiastic and bursting with energy. We had all done some traveling at home and abroad, and saw this journey as an appropriate way to experience the place in which we live.

Most of the traveling I do involves the process of going from one place to another by my own steam. I hike or bike, canoe or kayak. I prefer to experience the places in between, meet the people along the way. I like to feel the ground under my feet, smell the earth, the wind, the sun. And I prefer a pace where I can pause, observe and take in the scene around me. I find no joy in traveling by car, where the landscape passes by behind a windshield at speeds I cannot comprehend. And so I travel slowly, deliberately.

We walked for six hours that evening, through Gallup Park, the Washtenaw Community College Campus, and through the City of Ypsilanti until Depot Town was in sight. We had walked over 15 miles. Heather had meticulously planned every inch of the route, and with only a couple of small diversions, we arrived safely, full of good food, and in excellent spirits.

It was 11:30 p.m. when we headed towards vestiges of the New Year's Eve Jubilee. I was both elated and sad that the journey was over. My tired, aching feet had certainly had enough for one day, and I was ready to sit down and toast in the midnight hour. As we hugged each other and took more photos to document our arrival, we marveled at our new community of friends and our accomplishment. It was a New Year's party to remember, and we all agreed that it was one of the best we had ever celebrated.

Amy Kuras

January, 2004

Volunteer Year in Review *by Jason Frenzel*

In the past couple years I have gone through great pains to pore over volunteer related data and I have communed with The Great Volunteer Database – all in an attempt to dazzle and amaze you with the ever-increasing throng of NAP volunteers. Well, I'm done with it – that circus ring-leader position isn't for me!



Workday volunteers hauling trash from newly acquired Dicken Woods.

So I've a little story for you. In the fall of 1999, a close friend of mine, Chris Cookingham became a Conservation Worker at NAP. He called me up one night and said, "do you know that NAP lights fires in the woods?" This brought back some fond memories of Chris and me growing up, but I thought he was joking. He went on to tell me about the Burn Crew, and I knew it was for me! So I attended the training (see page 5) and promptly started helping out at NAP's prescribed burns. At the time, I was working for the Conservation District and found burning a great way to get away from my routine, get out into nature, and visit with some fantastic people. So I came to more burns over the next two years. It never seemed like much of a time commitment – it was just something fun to do, with positive results – kind of like going bowling with a long-term, ecological impact. When I sat down to write this article, I summoned the Volunteer Database to inquire about MY volunteer data. All in all, I put in 43 hours those two years. This isn't much in the grand scheme of my life, or those two years, but for NAP it was a notable contribution. Each volunteer who helps NAP makes a huge difference in Ann Arbor's Natural Areas, including each three-hour workday. Whatever amount of time one donates to NAP, our collective efforts produce grand accomplishments. As the saying goes, many hands make light work.

OK, I can't stop myself. I know, I know...I have a problem...in fiscal year 2004 NAP had a total of **5450 volunteer hours** devoted to monitoring and improving our Nature Areas! That's an average of over 6 hours per volunteer. The 60 inventory volunteers racked up almost 600 hours – great job all! The 33 **Park Stewards** dedicated **1200 hours**. 27 Burn Crew members put in 200 hours (while charring 90 acres). **663** people donated **2073 hours** at **66 workdays**. Our 9 **Photomonitors** put in 37 hours. As usual, the greatest hours per person(s) goes to 3 Eagle Scouts who together contributed nearly 1000 hours to their projects! Lastly, we had some marvelous UM students help out with brochure development and newsletter articles. I would like to say THANK YOU to all 869 wonderful people who helped NAP accomplish its goals this year.

The numbers in **bold** are all records for NAP. Remember, if we all put in a few hours in the coming months, we'll surpass these numbers too. Then next year, The Great Volunteer Database will stay happy and no more sacrifices will have to be made.



Manfred Schmidt helping burn at Scarlett Mitchell

"For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Prescribed Ecological Burn Public Meeting and Prescribed Ecological Burn Crew Training



Public Meeting

Tuesday, March 1, 2005

from 7:30 - 9:00 pm

Fire is used as a restoration tool in some of Ann Arbor's Natural Areas. This meeting will provide information and an opportunity for discussion about the Prescribed Ecological Burn Program conducted by Natural Area Preservation. Burns will be conducted in City Parks throughout the spring and fall.

**Please call the NAP office at
734.996.3266 for more information.**

**Leslie Science Center
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor**

Burn Crew Training

Wednesday, March 2, 2005

12:00 noon - 5:00 pm

Pre-registration is required by February 18.

This is the required training session for all volunteers interested in assisting with the prescribed burns to be held this spring and fall. Burns typically take place Monday through Friday between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM.

Please call the NAP office at 734.996.3266 to register or for more information.



*****Persons with disabilities are encouraged to participate. Accommodations, including sign language interpreters, may be arranged by contacting the City Clerk's Office at 994-2700 (VITDD) at least 24 hours in advance.*****

SALAMANDER SURVEY KICKOFF

Sunday, March 6, 2005 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Leslie Science Center Nature House, 1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor

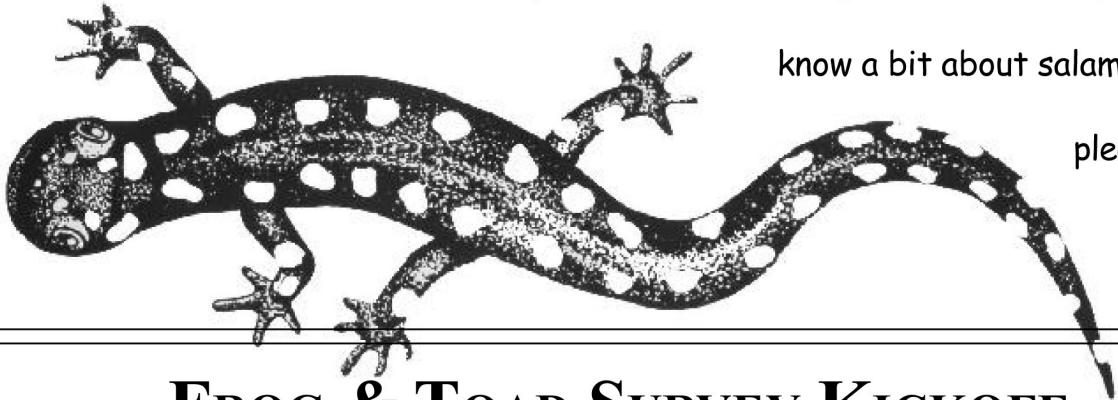
Join us for the second year of Michigan's first Salamander Survey! If

you're not afraid to get a little muddy and you

know a bit about salamanders,

please join

us!



FROG & TOAD SURVEY KICKOFF

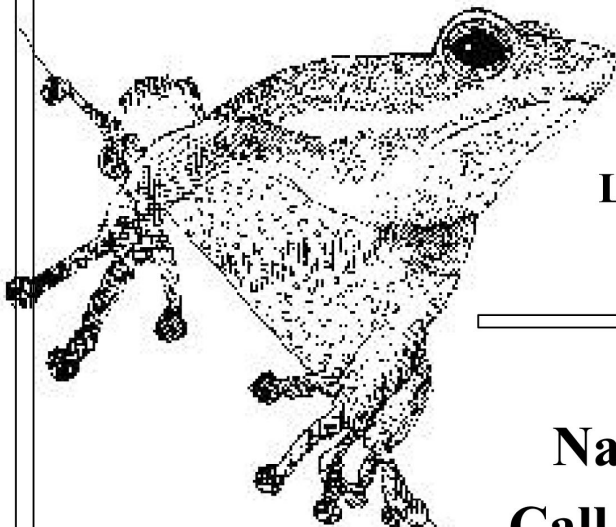
This is our 11th Annual Frog & Toad Survey!

Sunday, March 6, 2005

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.

Leslie Science Center Nature House

1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor



Presented by:

Natural Area Preservation

Call 734.996.3266 to Register



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Staff Updates

farewell...

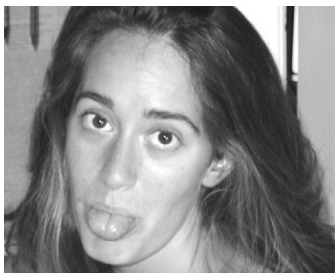
Paul Reger



Well, I've had a fun time here at NAP during my internship, even though I've only been here for half a summer. Everybody here that I got to know has been great. The crew members were a fun and diversified lot who were

very nice in helping me learn how to identify and kill those darn invasive species, while the office crew were very benevolent in helping me with tasks such as database management and even doing a little GIS fieldwork, for which I am very grateful. Thanks for a great time everybody, and I wish you all the best of luck in the future.

Lauren Theodore



After several years working in the field of natural resource management and putting off the inevitable return to graduate school, I have decided to bite the bullet and go get my Master's degree. But don't worry, I

will just be down the road at the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment and am sure that I will see you at many a NAP workday (only now I will be eating the bagels and cream cheese and not bringing them).

Steve Wilson



Well, as I'm in the dusk of my NAP career, I would like to say a sorrowful goodbye. Everyone that I've met associated with NAP from the Conservation Crew, office staff, Stewards, and volunteers have been a great joy to

be associated with. This is less of a "goodbye" and more of a "see you later." Keep fighting the good fight! Rock on, Steve

hello...

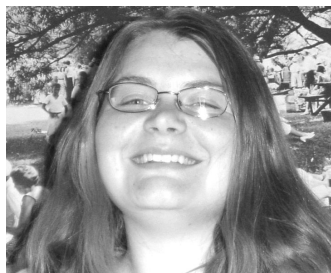
Shelley Gladwin



Hello All! I'm excited to join the NAP Crew for this fall and beyond! Ann Arbor is the best city around, which is why I had to come back after graduating from SNRE in 2003. I've done restoration work in the Great

Smoky Mountains National Park, at Golden Gate National Recreation Area near San Francisco, with The Nature Conservancy in Tecumseh, and now I can see how local government does it. I worked in California last winter, so I'm really looking forward to playing in the snow this year. See you out there!

Sabrina Hepburn



Since coming to work at NAP, I have been amazed by the knowledge and dedication of the staff and volunteers working for Ann Arbor's Natural Areas. Actually, I could say intimidated. A recent transplant to the Midwest, I grew

up near Boston. I just finished an M.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from U of M, where I studied the evolution of cave and camel crickets. Now I am at NAP on work-study while pursuing my other interest in classical music – specifically playing the French horn. When not practicing or catching insects, I am a rather tenacious birder.

Marcia Woodburn



I am a graduate of the University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources and Environment. Since graduating, I have worked in the area of wetlands protection for the United States Environmental Protection Agency and for the National Park Service

in the area of environmental education/restoration. I initially worked with NAP some years ago as a volunteer on the prescribed burn crew and now, since being back in the Ann Arbor area, am glad to be working with them as a Conservation Crew member!

10 Years of the Ann Arbor Frog and Toad Survey *by David Mifsud*

Where were you in 1995? Getting married, graduating, retiring? Well, Ann Arbor was taking the frog by the legs and developing their Frog and Toad Survey. This survey was undertaken to evaluate the quality and diversity of the habitats in Ann Arbor natural areas. These sites were chosen in part to monitor the environmental impact of development and determine the status of frog populations in city parks and important local wetlands.

Early on there were 12 routes with approximately 150 wetlands included in the study. At that time, routes were surveyed only three times per year. Currently over 120 wetlands, broken up into 10 survey routes, are visited at least once a month from March through June. Volunteers set out at night to listen for the spring and summer-time songs of Ann Arbor's frog and toad species. Since its inception 10 years ago, well over 1,000 hours have been spent by volunteers listening to frogs and toads. Many volunteers have come and gone, while some have stayed from the beginning – hopefully all having a sense of fulfillment, community, and frog and toad conservation. Of the 11 species of anurans (frogs and toads) native to

Southeast Michigan, Ann Arbor is home to eight. A ninth species continues to elude us, the Blanchard's Cricket Frog. But with continued restoration of the city's natural areas, hope is present for this species' triumphant return.

Future goals for the program include making the survey and its results more interactive by providing data entry, general survey information, and survey results on the Internet. Data will also be managed, in part, using Geographic Information System (GIS) to better document and manage the areas these creatures inhabit. This information will help us measure the impacts of fragmented habitat, increased predation within urban areas, road-related mortality, and pollution.

One major component that has not changed in the 10 years of the survey is the lifeblood of this program – the volunteers. It is their dedication and generosity that makes the survey so successful. On behalf of NAP (and all the frogs and toads), I sincerely thank you for all your hard work. I have enjoyed my time working with each of you and I look forward to helping celebrate the next 10 seasons!

Steward's Circle

Join NAP and the **Southeast Michigan Stewardship Network** on the second Tuesday of each month for an informal conversation with volunteer and professional stewards. We meet at Bruegger's Bagels on North University in Ann Arbor.

December 14, Tuesday, 7:30-8:30 am

This month's topic: Growing plants for restoration/re-introduction. Where to start? How to gather seed? Can we do it ourselves? What kind of space/materials do we need? Can we contract this work and with whom? What plants are particularly suited to this? Which aren't?

January 11, Tuesday, 7:30-8:30 am

This month's topic is: Winter restoration. What restoration activities can we be doing during the winter months? How can we keep the herbicide (and our hands for that matter) from freezing? What activities should we avoid?

February 8, Tuesday, 7:30-8:30 am

This month's topic is: What's your favorite bagel flavor? Do you take cream in your coffee? Okay, seriously we've been holding Stewards' Circles for over three years and have never had a gathering without a formal topic. It's time to try one. Bring your self and any questions you have about caring for natural areas. We'll have a fun, productive conversation about topics near and dear to all our hearts.

Park Focus *continued from Page 1*

The biggest threats to invasive species at Leslie Woods, however, are the Park Stewards: Peggy Rabhi and her two sons Nino and Yousef. Peggy and her family, Leslie Woods neighbors, have spent countless hours maintaining the parks trail system and battling invasives. The Rabhi family has also done a great deal of work to beautify the Leslie Woods entrance off Upland Drive,

installing a native planting and keeping the entrance clean and inviting. Empowered and impassioned individuals like Peggy and her family give us hope that Ann Arbor will be able to maintain Leslie Woods, and other nature areas, as healthy ecosystems, retaining species diversity and providing humans a space to commune and study the natural world.

The Start of Something Wonderful! *by David Mifsud*



Spotted Salamander

Now that the leaves are falling and the logs are starting to get frost on them, I have a chance to reflect on the first year of the Salamander Monitoring Program. This program was born out of a concern for the less vocal amphibians of Ann Arbor. Recent studies show how habitat fragmentation can have negative effects on salamander populations. Some of these unassuming creatures migrate seasonally from their terrestrial homes to the vernal ponds of Ann Arbor to mate and lay eggs. They may travel as far as a mile to complete their journeys. In doing so, they are faced with many obstacles. This survey was started to first identify what locations within city parks currently support populations of salamanders. The next step was to determine the approximate number of salamanders in all life stages (from egg to adult) present at these locations. The ultimate goal is to better conserve and manage their habitat for continued success of these species.

Using a variety of survey techniques, both during the day and at night, volunteers scanned the wetlands and surrounding terrestrial habitat in hopes of finding salamanders. Some were fortunate enough to witness the migrations and breeding, while others were lucky enough to see young salamanders emerge from the ponds.

In total, 10 city parks were surveyed. According to these surveys, at least five parks currently support breeding populations of salamanders. Of the eight species that potentially occur within the Ann Arbor area, four were observed – Spotted Salamander, Blue-spotted Salamander, Red-spotted Newt, and Red-backed Salamander, with one park having all four species! Although no salamanders were found in some parks, surveying will continue at those locations to accurately assess species diversity and distribution.

This was an excellent start to a first-of-its-kind program. We hope to expand the survey to look at additional areas where these species historically occurred, or where suitable habitat is present, including surveying the Huron River for Mudpuppies. Thank you to the 14 volunteers who came out in rainy, and often cold, spring weather to survey. I have enjoyed myself immensely and look forward to next season.

"We can never have enough of nature."

- Henry David Thoreau

NAPpennings

Thank you...

- ★ Bruno and Johanna Giordani for their donation
- ★ Ave Maria School of Law incoming students for helping at our Hansen and Brown workdays
- ★ UM Business School's Significant Others and Spouses Society for their work at Stapp Nature Area
- ★ UM Project Serve for all the shrub clearing around the Furstenberg boardwalk
- ★ EMU Greens for coming to the Sugarbush workday
- ★ Greenhills 7th grade class for wood chipping at Barton

Dolph Addition

Birders are well known for their propensity to keep personal lists of birds they have seen. Some time ago, local birders shared 15 years of their Dolph lists with NAP. Using these lists and the results of NAP's breeding bird surveys since 1996, NAP has determined that 136 species have used Dolph as a breeding ground or migratory stopover site. Because Dolph is such an important area for birds, maintaining its current land area is important. A new City acquisition to the south of Dolph will do just that, adding 18.1 acres to its previous 57.5 acres. Soon we will all have an opportunity to explore whatever exciting birds use this new area as well. (Oops! make that 137 species for Dolph! Eric Huston found a rare migrating Kentucky Warbler there this spring!)

Fleshy Fall Fruits and Feathered Friends *by Dea Armstrong & Bev Walters*

Fall is the time of year when thoughts of harvesting come to mind. People gather the last fruits from their gardens to stow away for the long winter months. Other creatures are busy gathering food too. Migrating birds have to be especially diligent to prepare for the long flight south. Rather than store their collected bounty in the root cellar, they pack it right onto their little bodies. Berries and other fleshy fruits are the perfect nutritional package for them to accomplish this.

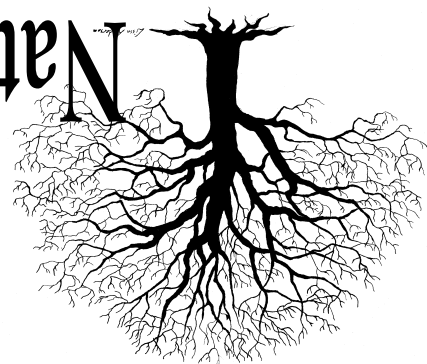
Normally, birds maintain a fat content of 3-5% of their body weight. In the fall, as they prepare for migration, birds must increase body fat by varying amounts, depending on how far they'll need to fly. Short-distance migrants, like common yellowthroats spend winters in southeastern US and will put on an additional 25% body weight of fat. Long distance migrants, like blackpoll warblers who winter in South America after a long flight over the Atlantic, will actually **double** their weight by adding fat! Birds eat a variety of foods in the fall, but research shows that fall migratory songbirds are more often present in shrubland habitat, apparently attracted by the abundant and nutritious fleshy fruits. The berries of native fall-fruiting plants like spicebush, sassafras,


Virginia creeper, dogwoods, and even poison ivy provide substantially more lipid content for the birds than do summer-fruiting plants and insects. These morsels may be the easiest food for young, inexperienced hatch-year birds (born this year) to find. Research at banding labs across North America, including Rouge River Bird Observatory in Dearborn, shows that roughly 80% of the birds captured in fall are hatch-year birds. Insect protein seems to be less important to these hatch-year birds than the fall fruits rich in lipids and carbohydrates.

Of course, wrapping attractive fleshy pulp around seeds is a great evolutionary strategy for the plants too. It increases the chances that their progeny will survive and prosper – elsewhere – so they aren't a continual drain on the parent's available resources. So put some native fall fruiting plants in your yard and give the birds an alternative food source! Try these for starters:

- dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) - trees and shrubs
- spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) - shrub
- sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) - tree
- viburnum (*Viburnum* spp.) - shrubs
- Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) - vine

Natural Area Preservation News



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