

Hickory Hills Highlights
News from the Hickory Hills Chapter of Illinois Audubon Society
Stewards of Bremer Sanctuary



Bye-Bye Juncos!



Hello Hummers!

Come celebrate spring – join Sanctuary field trip leaders for two April nature walks. (See the full calendar on page 4.)

***Saturday April 5, 7 a.m. Spring Bird Walk.* Gather at the Bremer Barn for coffee and comments. Easy 2-hour walk on Sanctuary trails searching for spring migrants; dress for weather.**

***Saturday April 19, 1 p.m. Woodland Spring Wildflower Walk.* Bremer’s woodland wildflowers have just this one opportunity to bloom and attract pollinators. Come celebrate their beauty and identify which ones are in bloom. Easy trail walking through the sanctuary’s woods.**

CRP Renewal Project
by Ken Schaal, Restoration
Chairman

2013 was an important year at Bremer Sanctuary. On September 30 our major CRP contract expired. Since our budget depends upon the CRP income, it was most important for the contract to be renewed. Getting the contract renewed

turned out to be a daunting task. It had been ten years since that contract was signed, and the program had changed significantly since then. After several meetings with NRCS reps (Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture) and several phone calls to the IAS (Illinois Audubon Society) office in

Springfield, we agreed on the details of a contract. Now the work could begin.

The contract called for completely replanting 33.5 acres of wildflowers and prairie grasses and interplanting wildflower (forb) seeds on the remaining 29.9 acres. The entire 63.4 acres is now in US Department of Agriculture's "Pollinator Program" for the next ten years.

Instead of going with the minimum requirements of the program, which would have included using only 9 forb species—three blooming in the spring, three in the summer, and three in the fall—we created a mix that would develop into a complete prairie. The pollinator seed mix that we devised included more than 40 species of prairie wildflowers. Once established we can expect continual flowering in our CRP fields from April into November. Will the results show up next year? No. Some of these species take their time to germinate and will take several years before they mature enough to develop flowers. Many are long-lived perennials.

We bought seeds of local ecotypes. That is, we tried to get seeds whose origins were close to home and avoided seed that came from states too far away. Most of our seeds came from a wildflower nursery in northern Illinois with additional seeds coming from one in southern Missouri. In addition the Bremer volunteers in 2013 collected hundreds of thousands (no, maybe millions) of seeds from established prairies on sanctuary property. Seeds were also donated by several members who collected from their own prairie gardens. In total more than 110 million seeds were planted on the Bremer CRP site last fall.

But, let's not get ahead of the story. Before any of the seeds could be scattered, the seedbed had to be prepared—especially on the 33.5 acreage. Seedbed preparation took place in several phases during the fall of 2013. Most of the site was mowed in mid-September to control the weedy goldenrod. The area with invasive, exotic grasses was treated with a grass herbicide in mid-October. After several hard freezes the entire area was burned in late November. Thanks to the ten

volunteers who helped with the 63.4 acre controlled burn.



Jim Hefley helping with prairie burn.

The large quantity of seed that had been purchased, collected, and donated was then scattered over the entire area in mid-December. We used an air flow system with the help of M&M Farm Service equipment and personnel. The seed was literally blown onto the field. A few hours after the seeding was finished, it started to snow. Perfect timing!

Most wildflower seeds must go through winter conditions in order to germinate in the spring. This process is called stratification, and most seeds need two months exposure to cold and moist treatment—but some need more and some less.

Although the seeds have been scattered, the project is not completed. Mowing the site



Using an airflow system to spread seed.

several times and spraying the exotic, invasive grasses will continue through the 2014 growing season and possibly beyond. We also plan to conduct controlled burns on the newly seeded area every fall for the next several years.

Why go to all this trouble? Insects, especially butterflies, moths, and many bee species—the major pollinators in our area—and our native birds are having trouble finding habitat for rearing of young, feeding and over-wintering. Using a variety of native plants not only helps our native wildlife but also creates a beautiful landscape that we can all enjoy and share with others. We hope Illinois

Audubon Society members, Bremer Sanctuary members and our visitors will not only enjoy this newly planted area but will also watch it evolve over the years.



Viceroy butterfly. Be sure to visit Bremer Sanctuary.

Calendar:

Saturday April 5, 7 a.m. Spring Birdwalk, meet at Bremer barn.

Saturday April 19, 1 p.m. Woodland Wildflower Walk, meet at Bremer barn.

Saturday June 7, 7 a.m. Early Summer Birdwalk followed by biscuit & gravy breakfast.

Saturday July 19, 4 p.m. Prairie Wildflower Walk & wiener roast.

Thursday October 9, 5:30 p.m. wiener roast and Owl Prowl.

Annual Meeting – TBA

January 1, 2015 – New Year’s Day walk, soup and chili lunch

Illinois Audubon Society 2014 Field Trips and Activities:

**- IAS Spring Gathering: April 25-27, Will County. Info & Registration:
www.illinoisaudubon.org**

- Other IAS 2014 Field Trips – everything from Prairie Chickens to Dragonflies, Grasshoppers, and the Botany of Amboy Marsh. Visit www.illinoisaudubon.org for information.



Restoring, preserving, and maintaining native habitats requires constant effort. Fire helps natural habitats to remain clear of exotics and invasive species in both woods and prairies. A woodland burn was conducted in early March allowing the woodland to retain its open understory, so important for our early spring-blooming wildflowers. As you walk through sanctuary trails this spring, contrast the open-understory woodland with sections that are not as open.

Maintaining Sanctuary trails also requires some effort. This past winter's weather resulted in many fallen tree limbs and trees across the trails and the Sanctuary crew removed those. If you have some time to spare and would like to help out, the crew is at the barn every Tuesday and Thursday morning. Just show up for coffee, cookies, and comraderie and then head out with the crew to burn off those cookie calories!

The Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society is governed by a Board of Directors. The following are members of this Board:

Henry Eilers - Restoration
Vicki Hedrick - Bluebird Trail, Newsletter
Jim Hefley - Bluebird Trail, Building, Restoration
Gale Johnson - Building
Geri Kinnaman - Education Chairperson, Secretary
Don Krefft - Treasurer & Restoration
Sonya Lockett - Bulletin Board
Jerry Prater - IAS Chapter Representative, Building
Dick Rompasky - Building
Carl Savage - Membership Chairperson
Ken Schaal - Restoration Chairperson

Join us at Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society! We are the stewards of IAS' Helen and Betty Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary. Your membership includes the Hickory Hills newsletter, chapter email updates, voting privileges, the opportunity to head a committee or hold an office, Cardinal News, Illinois Audubon Magazine, admission to IAS sanctuaries, and the opportunity to attend chapter and state-wide events.

IAS/HICKORY HILLS CHAPTER NEW MEMBERS FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____ St. _____ Zip _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES (all categories include chapter dues):

Friend \$ 35 _____ Steward \$ 60+ _____ Advocate \$510+ _____

Friend Plus \$ 40 _____ Guardian \$110+ _____ Benefactor \$1,010+ _____

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Make check payable to: Illinois Audubon Society, PO Box 2547, Springfield, IL 62708-2457

Or by Credit Card by providing the following information:

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Please do not use this form to renew your membership. Annual renewals will be sent out by the IAS office approximately one month prior to due date.

You may also join online: <http://www.illinoisaudubon.org/JOIN/Join.html>

OR

You may join Friends of Bremer Sanctuary: yearly membership is \$10 payable directly to membership chair Carl Savage or mailed to Hickory Hills Chapter, PO Box 395 Hillsboro, IL 62049. Membership is due each January 1. A Friend receives the chapter newsletter, email updates (if email address is provided), has sanctuary privileges, is invited to all chapter activities and events and may volunteer for the Sanctuary. A Friend does not have voting rights in chapter business nor can a Friend hold office or chair a committee.