



The Savanna Sentinel

Photo by: Laura Mousseau

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Prescribed Burn Update

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UPCOMING EVENTS

JUNIOR TEACHERS PRAIRIE EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Date: MON. MAY 9 Come spend a day with us and get a jump start on this exciting environmental education opportunity! Teachers must register in advance.
Location: Alderville Black Oak Savanna

BUTTERFLIES OF THE RICE LAKE PLAINS

Date: TUES. MAY 31 Jerry Ball of the Peterborough Field Naturalists will share his vast knowledge of many species of one of the regions most beautiful critters.
Location: Gore's Landing Library

LONE PINE MARSH RESTORATION DAY

Date: SUN. MAY 29 Bring your pruners, gloves, shovels, and water bottles, and join other volunteers for a guided walking tour, hands-on restoration work and planting and a BBQ lunch! Contact Brooke Stevens at 905-352-1184 or via email at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca to register.
Location: Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary

RLPJI PARTNERS WITH POLLINATION CANADA AND NNAPC

In Spring 2011, the RLPJI joined forces with two umbrella organizations, focused on the preservation, education, and sustainable ecology of pollinating insects. The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC) is a growing, collaborative body of more than 120 diverse partners. Respected scientists, researchers, conservationists, government officials and dedicated volunteers are succeeding with major programs to protect pollinators, to raise pollinator-related issues, and to benefit the health of all species – particularly those most threatened. Pollination Canada is a volunteer organization that conserves the biodiversity and traditional knowledge of insects. RLPJI is currently working to increase our awareness and knowledge of the critters of the Rice Lake Plains through large-scale insect surveys with the help of leading local entomologists. Our new partnerships have ensured that we are prepared with the necessary information and framework in order to collect and present data as accurately and succinctly as possible.



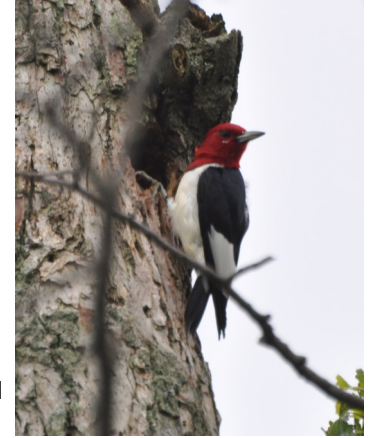
Insects are often ignored when examining the biology and ecology of a place. However, insects play a vital role in all habitats by ensuring the vitality of plant life through pollination. Insects are also a very important food source for many of the larger species living in any given ecosystem, create valuable substances, and recycle nutrients.

THE DISAPPEARING WOODPECKER

I have a confession to make. Prior to embarking on my doctoral research last year, I had never actually *seen* a Red-headed Woodpecker! Likely, I'm not the only one. Red-headed Woodpeckers are no longer found in Quebec (where I hail from), except the rare sighting, and are swiftly declining in Ontario, with > 60% population loss over the last 20 years. Red-headed Woodpeckers were once considered quite common in central and southern Ontario. In 1837, naturalist Charles Fothergill reported that Red-headed Woodpeckers were one of the most common birds in the Rice Lake area and similar reports described the species being more plentiful than the Northern Flicker! Anecdotal evidence suggests the species began declining throughout most of their range by late 1800s and decline that has worsened over time.

Historically, the Red-headed Woodpecker occupied savannas and open deciduous forests. Long ago, the settlement of Europeans in North America led to massive losses of these habitats, causing difficulties for many species that called these habitats home. Yet a certain crimson-headed bird found that settlement towns and the resulting countryside to its liking, especially the new sources of food settlers brought, in the guise of planted fruit and nut trees. This trend of flexibility seems to continue today as Red-heads may be found nesting in a variety of areas with large dead and dying deciduous trees such as town centers, golf courses, animal pastures, cemeteries and woodlots.

So here comes the tricky question: Why is a species, such as the Red-headed Woodpecker, that seemingly can make its home in many places, from a leafy downtown suburb, to deciduous woodlots, to cow pastures, undergoing such declines? Factors suggested for Red-headed Woodpecker declines include: loss of overall habitat and, within habitats, standing dead wood required for nest sites, limitations of food supply, and possible nest-site competition with other cavity nesters such as European Starlings or Red-bellied Woodpeckers. As few, if any, of these factors have been substantiated, and no research has occurred on the species' ecology in Ontario, we have undertaken the challenge.



Enjoying the view!



Searching for nests

The trickiest aspect of studying a species-at-risk is finding individuals to study in the first place! This past summer, I began my research in the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland County. Thanks to dedicated field assistants, invaluable tips from local naturalists, and friendly landowners, I was able to locate breeding pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers. I will return to Northumberland this summer to continue to collect more information on where Red-headed Woodpeckers like to nest, how much competition pressure they are facing from other species, and what their main diet is.

Woodpecker sightings. If you too want to help in the conservation and research of the species, please visit our website at www.redheadedwoodpecker.ca. If you know of a past or present breeding location of Red-headed Woodpeckers in our study areas, I would love to hear from you! If you are a landowner (or have a friend that is!) with a mature deciduous woodlot or a pasture with old trees and would like to have your area surveyed for Red-headed Woodpeckers in the summer of 2011, contact us at info@redheadedwoodpecker.ca. Lastly if neither of those options applies to you but you want to help our Red-headed friends, please become a champion of conserving dead wood in your neighborhood. Dead branches and trees are often removed for aesthetic reasons, but think of how pretty it would be to have a Red-headed Woodpecker nesting in your neighborhood.

Barbara Frei

PRAIRIE DAY 2011: A LOVELY WEEKEND IN NORTHUMBERLAND

As the new green growth emerges from the cooler winter soil, our thoughts turn to the warmer days of festivals and sunshine, glorious days spent enjoying nature, music, yoga, and food. Here on the black oak savanna, we are gearing up for our annual eco festival, Prairie Day. Prairie Day is a one-day festival taking place on Saturday September 10th 2011.

The RLPJI is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a grant from Celebrate Ontario, a sector of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture, to support our Prairie Day festival 2011. Celebrate Ontario is an annual program that helps new and existing Ontario festivals and events enhance their programs and activities.

PRAIRIE DAY 2011 *continued from page 2*

In 2011, we are aiming to attract a larger and more diverse crowd than ever before to enjoy the bounty of Northumberland County on this beautiful September weekend. The Northumberland Hills Studio Tour is occurring simultaneously and will include a stop at the Alderville Black Oak Savanna to showcase the works of local artist and biologist, Rick Beaver. Prairie Day will also be offering a free bus tour to a local Nature Conservancy prairie property and the studio of another local artist, Barry King, at Gallery by the Grove.

Other happenings at Prairie Day 2011 include a sunrise ceremony, early morning Yoga session and bird walk, wild edible and medicinal plants presentation, bird banding, fire restoration presentation, kids' entertainment (including a special presentation by the Paddling Puppeteers, a bouncy castle, face painting, and crafts), a nature photography workshop, traditional teachings, food, vendors, and more. We also have a very exciting music lineup, headlined by Juno award-winning Aboriginal blues/ rock/ soul/ reggae band, Digging Roots. Opening for Digging Roots will be local artists, the Tallgrass Band.

If you are interested in volunteering at Prairie Day or would like to have a vendors' table, please contact Brooke Stevens at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca.

Brooke Stevens

PARTNER PROFILE: LONE PINE MARSH SANCTUARY

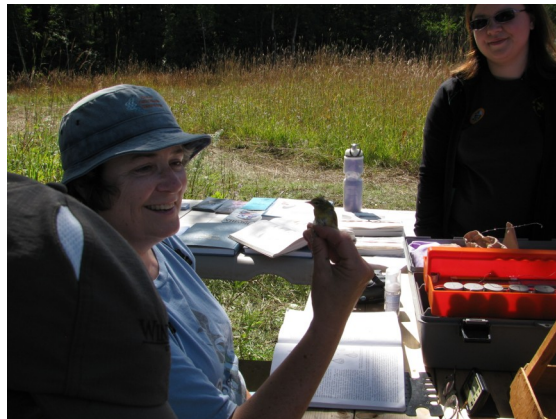
The LONE PINE MARSH SANCTUARY land trust (LPMS) may be the newest member of the RLPJI partnership, but it boasts a long history of grassroots conservation. Celebrating its 20th anniversary, the LPMS story began in 1991 with the vision of Murial Braham, whose love of a beautiful wetland located in Cramahe Township led her to purchase the original eighty-six acres. With a view to protecting the marshland in perpetuity, and with the help of the Ontario Heritage Foundation, the Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary land trust was born. Through fundraising and amazing community support, the Marsh was expanded to include an additional forty-nine acre buffer zone. Volunteers have donated countless hours over the years to restore this buffer zone to a grassland habitat, and our community has now been rewarded with the return of Bobolinks and other grassland birds.



Volunteers remove invasive species

The Lone Pine Marsh is a feel-good community project with tangible results. **Join LPMS on Sunday May 29th, from 10am-3pm at the Lone Pine Marsh (County Rd. 21 and Maplegrove) for a Restoration Day!** Bring your pruners, gloves and water bottles, and join other volunteers for a guided walking tour of the Marsh, some hands-on restoration work, and a BBQ lunch (veggie options available). This International Biodiversity Day event has the scope for many talents! For more details Contact Brooke at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca.

Heather-Lynne Meacock



Bird Banding at Prairie Day 2010

Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary continues to be a local success story, with a volunteer board of directors, members, sponsors and land donors who have come together to do something of enduring value toward the preservation of land, water and diverse life in our area. The vision now extends to preserving as much as possible of the natural heritage of the Cold Creek watershed and its surrounding lands and forests. LPMS now holds a cross-section of several significant properties including marsh, swamp, grassland, developing oak forest, and mixed woods. Some of the rare or at-risk species identified on these tracts include: Arrow Arum, Least Bittern, Blue Spotted Salamander, Northern Harrier, Green Heron, Swamp Sparrow, Bobolink, and Osprey.



Lone Pine Trail

PRESCRIBED BURN UPDATE— SPRING 2011

Prescribed burns are a method of restoring habitat through the use of controlled fire in a specific habitat to release nutrients into the soil, prepare the ground for the germination of seeds and to reduce non native species. While fire may seem like a risky restoration method, it is in fact part of the historical and natural life cycle for the tall grass prairie and black oak savannas found in Northumberland County.

A step back into the time of early European settlers arriving in Southern Ontario provides a recorded history of the landscape; famously quoted by early botanical writer Catherine Parr Traill, *"We now ascended the plains, a fine elevation of land for many miles, scantily clad in oaks, here and there bushy pines"* and *"A number of exquisite flowers and shrubs adorn these plains, which rival any garden in beauty."* Since then, land development and habitat fragmentation has caused great change in the landscape and the species relying on the grassy meadows and solitary oaks faced challenges as their environment diminished.

Today, with scientific studies and research completed on the natural history of this area we know that what once made up 10-20% of habitat on the eastern end Oak Ridges Moraine is now less than 1% remaining, in fact true across all of North America making it even more globally rare than rainforests. This is why local land owning agencies, like the partners of the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative, have combined resources and coordinated their efforts to work together across the greater landscape in restoring these habitats.



The use of fire as a prescribed burn is a highly controlled process in which fire safety is always the first and foremost consideration. A team of trained professionals begin monitoring conditions for a burn weeks ahead by collecting weather data such as humidity, wind speed, temperature and many others. A detailed burn plan is then developed which iden-

The benefits of the prescribed burns are countless, ecological benefits include soil stabilization, nutrient retention, species diversity, reducing non native species , drought resistance, nitrogen release to soil and the provision and maintenance of food and medicine. There are also social and economic benefits such as a reduced fire load, eco tourism attractions, nature appreciation, protecting rare habitats and the burns are in fact a most economically efficient method of restoration (versus laborious plantings or hand removal of non native species).

Ignition Team hard at work

Prescribed burns are only done on sites which have the right combination of characteristics to begin with and are only required every 5-10 years depending on the quality and condition of the site initially. Species monitoring following the burn helps identify the success of the effort and provides more information from which to base ongoing management. Generally speaking, following a burn the site becomes self sustaining and very little active management is needed beyond monitoring.

Prescribed burns have been utilized across North America for over 25 years and are making a huge impact on the restoration and enhancement of tall grass prairies and black oak savannas. We are lucky to be a part of this in Northumberland County.

Mia Frankl



INTERNATIONAL YEAR
OF FORESTS · 2011



FLEMING STUDENTS WORK WITH RLPJI ON PROJECT PRAIRIE

Each year, Sir Sandford Fleming College matches teams of students from the Ecosystem Management Technologist program with environmental organizations to complete a predetermined set of deliverables as a requirement for their Credit for Product course. Karen Buchanan, Anita LeBaron, Natalie Peon and Matthew Plouffe were matched up with mentor Brooke Stevens from the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative to work on a prairie-specific Biodiversity Education Program as part of a larger curriculum-linked Environmental Education Package based on prairies.

The program completed by the students was composed of background information on biodiversity in the prairies, three experiential activities for grades 4-6, and links to the Ontario curriculum. The final document includes information on the history of the plains in Ontario, the cultural significance of prairie biodiversity, species diversity in the prairies, the role of biodiversity, and implications for restoration and conservation. A pilot day was held on Monday, March 7th to test the activities which included a survival tag game, prairie observations and Biodiversity Bingo. A group of students from Roseneath Centennial Public School attended the pilot day which turned out to be extremely successful and fun for everyone involved.

In addition to the educational package, the Fleming students were also required to create an evaluation of the pilot day activities for the teachers to fill out, and to create a database of all elementary and secondary schools in the Rice Lake Plains which was to include the name and contact information for a teacher involved in environmental initiatives at each school. The evaluations have been completed and the pilot day received great feedback. The database has also been created and is in the process of being populated. All deliverables will be turned over to the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative upon completion of the final product.

Anita LeBaron

PETERS WOODS AND BURNLEY-CARMEL

Just over 10 years ago, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) made a commitment to protect key natural areas on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Backed by field studies and conservation partners, NCC took its first important steps to help protect and restore the historical tallgrass prairie communities of the Rice Lake Plains, at the east end of the moraine.

It started when a large tract of land known as the Oak Valley Tree Farm came up for sale. With support from the provincial government and private donors, NCC acquired two diverse blocks of habitat, totaling 317 hectares (784 acres) and named them after local hamlets: Burnley to the north and Carmel to the south.

Ontario Parks now leases the Burnley-Carmel lands (for a nominal fee) from NCC and manages the properties as provincial nature reserves. NCC and Ontario Parks have teamed up like this before - it brings staff, resources and funds of two partners to bear on the long-term stewardship of a property. The combined effort at Burnley-Carmel is helping to ensure the globally-significant, although degraded, black oak savanna and other habitats are cared for and restored.



This partnership is paying off. The park management plan (which also takes in the old-growth forests of Peter's Woods) was completed in 2007 with input from NCC. Management activity has now ramped up considerably. To date we have collaborated on 6 prescribed burns, covering 50 ha (123 acres) in the north block and on Scotch pine removal projects covering 101 ha (250 acres) in the south block. The results are noticeable in the south block, where a variety of techniques and technology are removing non-native Scotch pine trees - allowing the natural oak woodland to begin to flourish once again.

The park management plan will guide restoration activities and uses for the next 20 years. For example, under the plan the partners have given approval for the Oak Ridges Trail to cross portions of the properties, allowing hikers to experience this restoration "works in progress" first-hand. By the time the plan is up for review, the partners hope

that natural habitats will once again cover all of these lands, and the species that depend on them will be in a better position to sustain themselves into the future.

Mark Stabb



An exciting discovery during Prairie Observations!

RETURN ADDRESS:

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The **Savanna Sentinel** is a publication of the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative—dedicated to the identification, protection and stewardship of the best remaining tallgrass prairie and black oak savanna within the Rice Lake Plains.

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BLUE BUTTERFLY LOVE

The small blue, pea-like flowers of the Wild Lupine may appear insignificant, but where this flower grows a certain blue butterfly flourishes. The Karner Blue (*Lycaeides Melissa samuelis*) is endangered in both Canada and the United States and is listed as extirpated by the Canadian federal Species at Risk Act (SARA). This means the species no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but can be found elsewhere. The wild lupine population has steadily declined, and because of their complex relationship, the butterfly is also vanishing into the blue.



Male Karner Blue

This small butterfly, with a wingspan of only 18 to 28 mm, was traditionally found in New Hampshire, New York, southern Ontario, northern Indiana, Michigan, and southern Wisconsin. However it was most com

monly found in southern Ontario, in areas such as Toronto, London and Sarnia. The species started to decline around the 1970's with the dying off of Wild Lupines. The disappearance has moved research and protection efforts into action, focusing primarily on the restoration of the Karner Blue habitat. The lupine tends to grow in sandy soils, sandy pine barrens, beach dunes, and oak savanna habitat.

The Ontario Karner Blue Recovery Team was formed in 1993. The recovery goals and objectives are aimed at recreating suitable habitats for the butterfly in three areas of Ontario including Northumberland County. The RLPJI is investigating the Karner Blue and Lupine populations and working on insect outreach, surveys, and education programs. If you are interested in learning more about the butterflies of the Rice Lake Plains, you are welcome to attend a presentation with butterfly expert, Jerry Ball (Peterborough Field Naturalist) at the Gore's Landing Public Library on Tuesday May 31st at 7pm. The RLPJI is also facilitating a Kids' Butterfly Bonanza on July 9th and 10th.

Brooke Stevens

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING SPONSERS



RICE LAKE PLAINS JOINT INITIATIVE PARTNERS

