



Photo by: Laura Mousseau

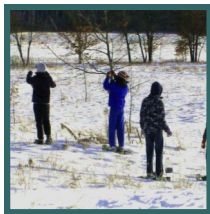
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**Trillium Grant
for RLPJI
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School at the
Black Oak
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UPCOMING EVENTS

EPHEMERAL CREATIONS

Date: SAT. MAR. 5 Join us for this interactive, co-creative exploration into nature, art, and self. For more information, please contact Brooke Stevens at 905-352-1184 or via email at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca.
Location: Alderville
Black Oak Savanna

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 with Brooke Stevens at 905-352-1184 or via email at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca
Location: Alderville
Black Oak Savanna

PRAIRIE DAY

Date: SAT. SEPT. 10 Enjoy the warm September sun while participating in nature workshops, and so much more. Stay tuned for details.
Location: Alderville
Black Oak Savanna

RLPJI ON THE WEB

Our website has the latest news and background information, as well as details on upcoming workshops, meetings, education programs, and volunteer days. Visit www.ricelakeplains.ca. And check us out on facebook under "Rice Lake Plains."

TRILLIUM GRANT AWARDED TO RLPJI

This past fall, the Nature Conservancy of Canada was awarded a two-year grant from the Trillium foundation to promote increased awareness of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna habitats around the Rice Lake Plains. Some of this money was used to hire a new Outreach Coordinator for the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative (RLPJI). Brooke Stevens comes to the RLPJI from a background of Environmental Education and Community Outreach and currently resides in Roseneath, ON. As well as publishing the newsletter, Brooke will be creating an integrated environmental studies program unique to Ontario's tallgrass and savanna ecosystems to be distributed to every teacher in the area, kindergarten to grade 12.

Brooke is in direct contact with landowners, facilitating workshops, presentations and displays addressing a variety of prairie and savanna issues. There is an extremely wide breadth of knowledge amongst the partners of the initiative. If you would like to learn more about our work, contact Brooke Stevens at 905.352.1184 or via email, outreach@ricelakeplains.ca.

Brooke Stevens

NEW JERSEY TEA, A FLOWER OF VARIED USES

In the tall grass prairie on the Oak Ridges Moraine in Southern Ontario, there are many wonderful plants, insects and wild life that exist in balance with each other. Many of these plants and animals are dependent on others for their very survival. Though this delicate landscape has shrunk in its size over the last few centuries because of large scale human interference, there are still places where tall-grass prairie exists as it did centuries ago. Of the many plants which reside in tallgrass prairie of the Rice Lake Plains, there is a small and important flower which has been vital to certain butterflies and as a tea for the indigenous peoples of this area. That flower is *Ceanothus americanus*, or New Jersey Tea.

New Jersey Tea is an attractive small rounded woody shrub with small plumes of fluffy white flowers that bloom in early to mid-summer. Its versatile showy flowers are attractive in the prairie, savanna, and woodland, which are its home. This plant has a unique leaf-vein structure and the leaves are opposite or alternate, small (typically 1–5 cm long), simple, and mostly with serrated margins. The leaves have three very prominent parallel veins extending from the leaf base to the outer margins of the leaf tips and the leaves are ovate in shape. The leaves also have a shiny upper surface that feels "gummy" when pinched between the thumb and forefinger. The flowers are white, greenish-white, blue, pale purple or pink, maturing into a dry, three-lobed seed capsule. The flowers are tiny and produced in large, dense clusters that are reported to be intensely fragrant, and are said to resemble the odor of "boiling honey in an enclosed area. The seeds of this plant can lie dormant for hundreds of years, and *Ceanothus* species are typically dependent on forest fires to trigger germination of its seeds.



New Jersey Tea in bloom

Kipper Christopher Martin



Learning about stones and bones!

PRAIRIE DAY— A CELEBRATION OF NATURE ON THE RICE LAKE PLAINS

Prairie Day 2010, the third annual event, was a huge success. Over 250 people enjoyed entertainment provided by Washboard Hank, The Sweetgrass Band and the Sugar Island Singers. Every partner in the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative had a display and there were educational demonstrations by the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre and The Monarch Butterfly Teachers Network. Kids enjoyed making unique buttons, face-painting and participating in an interactive puppet show with Rabbit and Bear Paws. A Tee Pee was set up with lots of artifacts to see and learn about the traditional way native people harvested wild rice and game. Guided tours were given of the RLPJI restoration projects on the Barr property and the Alderville Black Oak Savanna. The weather was sunny and very warm!

A big thank you goes to the Trillium Foundation for funding this festival. We are looking forward to next year's Prairie Day, a larger and more exciting lineup than ever before at the Alderville Black Oak Savanna. A few highlights include Yoga on the Plains, guest appearances by historical icons, horse-drawn wagon rides and 2 brand new bands. The date for Prairie Day 2011 is set for September 10. We are currently looking for volunteers to help with a variety of tasks. Our next Prairie Day planning meeting is set for Thursday April 14 at 1pm at the Black Oak Savanna. Contact Brooke at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca if you would like to get involved.

Watch our website for details www.ricelakeplains.ca and a specific workshop schedule.

Brooke Stevens

BIG BLUESTEM, THE TALL FRIEND TO THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

When people think of the landscape of Southern Ontario prior to its settlement, they may often picture forests. However, historical records show that large areas of Southern Ontario were actually prairie and savanna habitats. This is not very well known due to that fact that so much of these landscapes were used for agriculture, thanks in no small part to the ease at which prairies could be cleared compared to heavily forested areas. The suppression of fire has also caused much of the previously vast tallgrass prairie to become more fragmented.

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BIG BLUESTEM *continued from page 2*

One of the most common and widespread species of tall grass is *Andropogon gerardii*, or big blue-stem. It is also called “Turkey Foot”, because of the similarity that its triple spiked ends have to a turkey’s foot. This tall grass is tolerant of a wide range of soils and moisture which allows it to survive in grass lands throughout North America. Depending on soil and moisture conditions, it grows to a height of 1 – 3m (3 – 10 ft), so be careful not to get lost in it. Big bluestem is a perennial bunch grass and the stem base turns to a blue-purple as it matures. The seed heads have three spike-like projections. The roots are deep, and the plants send out strong, tough rhizomes, so it forms very strong sod. This valuable plant, which has been a part of natural tall grass prairies for as long as the land has been here, still has a necessary role in the habitat and should be known and respected. .

Kipper Christopher Martin



Turkey Foot can reach a height of 10 feet

SEARCHING FOR RARE BIRDS IN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

Have you seen or heard a Red-headed Woodpecker, a Common Nighthawk or a Whip-poor-will on or around your property? These birds are in decline as much of their critical habitat - grassland and prairie - has been lost across central Ontario. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and other conservation groups are gathering sighting and personal accounts of these birds, building on a similar project last year involving two at-risk snake species.

“The Red-headed Woodpecker is a species of special concern provincially while the Common Nighthawk (special concern) and Whip-poor-will (threatened) are now also being added to the list,” reported Kristina Hubert, field coordinator of the 2009-2010 bird data gathering and education project. “These birds can all be found in grassland, prairie and savanna habitats of the Rice Lake Plains where insects - a main part of their diet – are abundant. If people have seen these species, we want to hear from them.”

The Rice Lake Plains is an area of rolling hills that include prairies, savanna and sand barrens, centred in Northumberland County. It is found in a five-county area surrounding Rice Lake, but is best known in Northumberland County. These habitats support grasses and wildflowers, and a wide range of birds, insects, reptiles and mammals. In 2007– 2011, NCC, Ganaraska Conservation and Alderville First Nation led studies of and education on two at-risk snakes - Milksnake and Eastern Hog-nosed, both non-venomous species that prefer to avoid contact with humans.

“We have learned a lot from landowners over the years,” said Hubert, “We were impressed and grateful for the amount of concern that was shown for the snakes. We feel sure that landowners will be equally interested in helping to protect these birds as well.”



Nighthawk in flight

Field staff hired by the Nature Conservancy of Canada have been visiting with interested landowners, providing information to encourage proper habitat management for species at risk, as part of the Rice Lake Plains landowner contact project. Selected landowners in the Rice Lake Plains area received a mailing or on-site visit in the fall regarding these birds and snakes.

Funding for this work has been provided by Environment Canada’s Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, and by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources’ Species at Risk Stewardship Fund. The ultimate goal of the project is to gather information and raise awareness in order to better help the recovery of these species.

Landowners and other individuals who have seen or heard any of these species this year, or who would like more information on how to identify these birds, are encouraged to contact RLPJI staff at 905.352.1184 or outreach@ricelakeplains.ca. To download species information, please visit www.natureconservancy.ca/rlpbirds. Photographs of animals and/or habitat, and habitat details of where an animal of interest was seen are encouraged.

Kristina Hubert

RETURN ADDRESS:

Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative

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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.

CONTACT US

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TRINITY COLLEGE SCHOOL (T.C.S.) AT THE BLACK OAK SAVANNA

This past December, a group of ten committed teenagers joined staff at the Black Oak Savanna for three days of learning and volunteer restoration work. The students were participating as part of a school-wide program to connect youth with hands-on experience in an area of interest in the workplace.

The students first day was spent touring the Black Oak Savanna on snowshoe. Thanks to Ganaraska Forest Centre for the generous snowshoe loan! We moved debris off the trail and collected saplings for the next day's construction project, and learned about fire ecology and tallgrass restoration methods. The second day narrowed the focus to more closely examine grassland bird species on the Rice Lake Plains. The students constructed bird feeders to be placed by the large south-facing windows and along the trails behind the ecology centre. A few of the students were keen to take a mentoring role for students at the TCS Junior School. These students will be educating their younger counterparts on grassland bird ecology. The third day was spent removing dogwood to create habitat for small rodents as well to allow more sun to



T.C.S. hard at work

Some of the words used to describe the students experience with the Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative include innovative, constructive and destructive! If you would like to book a school volunteer work program or educational program, contact Brooke at outreach@ricelakeplains.ca.

Brooke Stevens

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS



RICE LAKE PLAINS JOINT INITIATIVE PARTNERS

