

NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF
**POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY**

Volume 1, Issue 3

PROTECTING THE LAND AND IT'S STORIES

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy 2014

BY MEL POPE

What a year! 2014 was filled with excitement, growth, and achievement for FOPFC. Your board of directors worked very hard along with many volunteers to make 2014 a success.

Last winter was spent planning and organizing. After looking at our mission, the board assigned committees, set goals and began the planning process. Flow charts were made, time lines installed, volunteer help descriptions were defined, and policies and procedures were put in place. The Software package was modified, and all of the information was put into an organization manual. It was a long tedious process, and it kept us very busy during the long winter months.

A membership drive got underway in April and was very successful. We have doubled our membership over last year to 210 households that comprise 370 members over the age of 18. This demonstrates a remarkable interest from the public in Pope Farm Conservancy.

The Public Relations Committee sent out flyers and contacted the media about events. We added a Friends Facebook page, and a Flickr group to share beautiful PFC photos on our website.

The Education Committee added two new lectures to our already growing adult education series, and worked on two new lesson plans to be available for the public school system.

The Events Committee had its hands full planning and hosting two membership picnics, Sunflower Days (8 days), Heritage Day, and hosted the adult education lecture series. They were aided by many volunteers and these events were very successful. The only bump in the road was that the sunflower crop this year was not very good. The sunflowers need to be rotated to different fields every year, and this year the soil and weather combined to disappoint all of us. That is the nature of farming. The result was that we had about half the foot traffic during this year's Sunflower Days than we had the prior year. We sold t-shirts and broke even—however we have a good deal of inventory for next year.

The Prairie Restoration Committee did a great job this year. They started the year off by receiving a grant from the Dane County Environmental Council for approximately \$700 for a brush cutter. It was our first grant, and now that we know the template we can work on additional grants in the future. The team had over 20 seed collection sessions, and collected over 115 species of prairie seeds for the new Paddock Oak Savannah that is being sponsored by FOPFC.

Wildlife is becoming more diverse. This year the rare rusty-patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) was discovered at the conservancy. Later in the summer a Badger made Pope Farm Conservancy its home.

As this diversity continues to grow, I am grateful that uses that would have a negative impact on wildlife are prohibited by the Town of Middleton.

Volunteers made everything possible in 2014. Over 70 Goodwill Ambassadors signed up to help with Sunflower Days, Heritage Day, and other events. Friends helped with Graphic Arts, administration, flyer distribution, and much more. Thanks to all of you who offered your time.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for being a part of FOPFC. Your membership is critical to our success, and because of you, we are able to continue to offer the ongoing dynamic of FOPFC.



Mel Pope, Chairman
Friends of Pope Farm Park Conservancy

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FOPFC Mission

Our mission is to contribute to the enrichment of Pope Farm Conservancy as a community and educational asset. We strive to protect and preserve the balance of the conservancy's unique natural, agricultural and historical features and volunteer as stewards to promote our passive conservancy.

Contact Us

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WET WEATHER DOESN'T DAMPEN 4TH GRADER'S SPIRITS AT THE

FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY



ARTICLE AND PHOTO BY AMY ROSEBROUGH

Over the course of three days this October approximately 350 4th graders, teachers, and chaperones attended this year's Fall Harvest festival, despite wet and chilly weather. The students, representing Elm Lawn, Sauk Trail, West Middleton, Park, and Sunset Ridge, came to learn how ancient Native Americans prepared for Wisconsin's harsh winters. Students rotated through a series of four teaching stations before 'traveling through time' to 1000 AD to put their skills to the test by collecting crucial resources around the Conservancy. Naturalists and archaeologists from the Wisconsin Historical Society were on hand to provide demonstrations and helpful survival tips.

In the present day, students got a first-hand look at this year's harvest from the Native American garden. Squash were hung on the drying rack, corn was pounded, and storage strategies were discussed.

Naturalists presented an array of wild foods, and encouraged students to come up with their own recipes. At the technology station, students were shown raw materials that tools and clothing could be made from, and examples of real tools found in Wisconsin— some thousands of years old! Students explored how we know about ancient life at the archaeology station, where they examined more artifacts and archaeologist's excavation tools.

After traveling through time, students transformed into the Shell Bead, Acorn, Corn, and Turkey Feather bands and set out on a journey to gather what they needed before winter arrived. Different signposts marked different environments where particular resources could be found. At each sign, groups voted what to gather. From time to time, different bands met on the trails to trade or negotiate alliances.

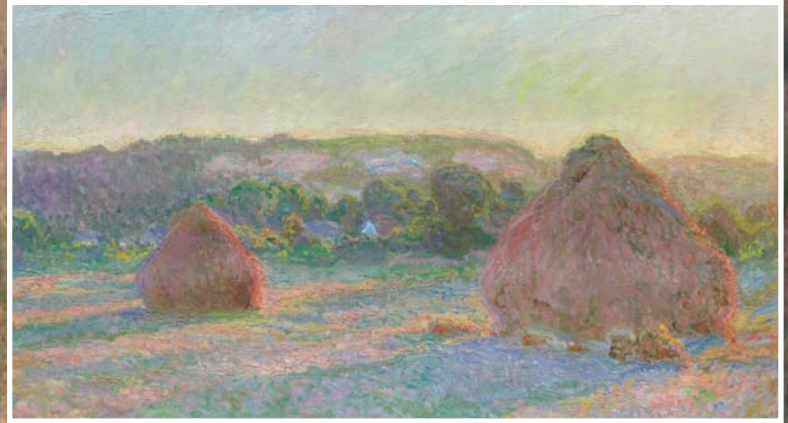
I am happy to report that everyone made it safely through the winter and returned home happy.

Despite a light drizzle and mist on the first two days, only one school canceled. The two schools that arrived on the third day were greeted with better weather and even some sunshine! We thank the teachers, administrators, and parents that braved the weather and hundreds of excited children to make this year's Fall Harvest Fest a grand success.

Special thanks to John Broihahn and Leah Rausch of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and naturalists Stephanie Williams, Trel Gimber, Miguela Fry, Deb Weitzel, Pat Giesfeldt, Colleen Feist, and Nancy Gunder.

Fourth-grade students from the Cross Plains-Middleton school district examine the harvested Native American garden during the 2013 Fall Fest.

The “beauty” is what Monet captured on his blank canvas. [Claude Monet: Stacks of Wheat, End of Summer. Chicago Art Institute] Monet used paint for his landscape. Nature painted the Blackhawk prairie landscape with these grasses.



THE GRASSES

POPE FARM CONSERVANCY WORKS OF ART

ARTICLE AND PHOTO BY DENNIS SCHENBORN

Conservationist Aldo Leopold once wrote, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends other wise.” It’s a good quote to remember as we think about restoring prairies and oak savannas at the Pope Farm Conservancy.

Although I am a biologist, I’m a novice when it comes to knowing my prairie plants. I spend a lot of time examining blossoms, stems, and leaves to identify the species, but I still welcome all the help I can get from other Friends of Pope Farm. It’s a daunting task because the list of what’s

growing in each prairie is long. Biologists call that species diversity, and a diverse prairie would have 80 or more native species.

The biologist in me thinks about species succession, micro-habitats, soil types, nutrient cycling, and hydrology. Those are “integrity and stability” pieces of Leopold’s quote.

The “beauty” comes by looking at a prairie and seeing the interplay of light and color on the canvas of the landscape. You don’t have to know the species names to enjoy the thousand subtle hues of color as they change from moment to moment.



AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY MIKE MCDOWELL, AUTHOR OF THE DIGISCOPE BLOG

Just because the wintery weather has moved into southern Wisconsin doesn't mean all the interesting songbirds are gone. There is a durable migratory sparrow from the northernmost regions of Canada that will spend the winter months at our fields, prairies, and also backyard feeders.

Around late October, as most migratory songbirds near the end of their southward journey, the first American Tree Sparrows begin to arrive at Pope Farm Conservancy. Their wintering range extends as far south as north Texas, but can also be found in northern California and all the way east to North Carolina.

The American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) can be distinguished from other sparrows by their rusty cap and eyeline against an overall gray head. They have a bi-colored bill that has a yellow lower mandible and gray upper mandible. They also have a matching rusty colored shoulder marking, a white wing bar, and brown streaked back. The tree sparrow's grayish-white breast often has a dark central spot.

During winter, American Tree Sparrows can be found in medium-sized to large flocks feeding on the weeds and prairie plant seeds, especially goldenrod. They eat snow to obtain water. Though small in size (18 g), they can endure our coldest winters, even

when it's twenty below zero! About the only thing they have to be concerned about is being captured and eaten by small hawks like Sharp-shinned and Cooper's, or Northern Shrikes.

As spring nears in March, male American Tree Sparrows begin to sing their melodious songs, especially on sunny days as warmer temperatures weaken winter's chill. They sing a sequence of clear notes and sweet whistles often falling in pitch. To me their songs are a harbinger of spring and a reminder that their migratory journey back to northern Canada is just about to get underway.

American Tree Sparrows are an abundant species, but they're easily missed unless you spend time outdoors during winter or have bird feeders in your backyard. Pope Farm Conservancy's prairies offer these sparrows exactly the type of habitat they need in order to survive our harsh winters. If you snowshoe or hike the conservancy's trails this winter, pay note to a „teedle-eet teedle-eet” bird call. They're most vocal and active in the morning because they need to eat to keep warm!

Photos by Mike McDowell





FROM BUCKETS TO MORE BUCKETS

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY CURT CASLAVKA

Last August, the Prairie committee selected over a hundred species of grasses, sedges, and other flowering plants to be included as the under-story in a savana (burr oak) restoration project located in the middle of the Pope Farm Conservancy. By any measure, this was an ambitious wish list. The real challenge was to locate and harvest seed from uncommon/rare species that are not found at PFC.

We could have gone to a commercial nursery—and spent thousands of dollars, but some of the rare species we intended to include in this restoration are not available commercially. Instead, we relied on the willingness of more than 40 Friends to help collect seeds at the PFC,

from other conservancies in Dane county, and from remnant savanna and prairie habitats around the area.

With buckets and clippers, sometimes in good weather, sometimes not, the PFC volunteers collected an astounding 103 different prairie, woodland and savana species! These include species of grasses and sedges; and over 80 different kinds of other flowering plants.

After collection, the seeds were dumped into plastic swimming pools to dry. Next, was the more difficult task of separating the seeds from the stems and chaff. This process was started by using a hammer mill to break the seed heads apart; next, screens were used to scalp off the large unwanted debris and filter through the fine dusty material; and finally the seeds were run through a fanning mill that sorts the seeds by size and density. This may sound like a lot of work and actually, it is! Seed collection began in June and five months later the results are a few partially filled buckets of seed mix worth about \$3500. The creative and fun part of this process is designing seed mixes that you hope will

yield a quality, diverse and beautiful restoration. Presently, the mixes are made and we are waiting for the right weather conditions to hand broadcast the seed onto the bare soil of our restoration site. After that it's up to Mother Nature to provide the right amount of rainfall to keep the young seedlings that will germinate next year alive.

The success of this restoration is due to many. We would like to thank all the Friends volunteers who participated in this year's seed collection. Your time given to the Friends makes doing this project possible.

Also, we would like to thank Tom and Kathie Brock who generously allowed us to collect seed at their Pleasant Valley Conservancy. Their advice on how to proceed with this restoration was extremely helpful. And thank you Jerry Goth for the opportunity to collect seed at Swamplovers conservancy. We were also very fortunate to have Mike Anderson (restoration ecologist) work with us on this project. And lastly to thank Ron Endres for providing us seed from species we would not have been to gather elsewhere.



BUMBLE BEES

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

ARTICLE AND PHOTO BY SUSAN CARPENTER

At Pope Farm Conservancy, visitors see: a vantage point over 3 watersheds, a glimpse into cultural history, sunflowers and other crops, a sinuous stone wall, different prairie restorations, trails to hike or ski, a place to meet friends or enjoy quiet reflection, and more. PFC also provides varied quality habitat for other members of the land community—birds, animals, plants, and pollinators.

To add to our knowledge of PFC fauna, here are some observations from bumble bee surveys in July and August 2013 and 2014. With a diverse planting and many species in bloom during the surveys, the “Forbs” prairie was the richest site for bumble bees. Eight *Bombus* species were present, gathering pollen and/or nectaring: the Common Eastern bumble bee (*B. impatiens*), Brown belted bumble bee (*B. griseocollis*), Red belted bumble bee (*B. rufocinctus*), Yellow bumble bee (*B. fervidus*), Half-black bumble bee (*B. vagans*), Gold-and-black bumble bee (*B. auricomus*), Two-spotted bumble bee (*B. bimaculatus*) and the rare Rusty-patched bumble bee (*B. affinis*)!

Flower visits differed between species. For example *B. rufocinctus* visited yellow coneflower almost exclusively while other species did not. I found *B. affinis* nectaring on bee balm, puncturing the long flower tubes, instead of nectaring through the tube as the other bumble bee species do. Other nectar and/or pollen sources were: mountain mint, red clover, purple prairie clover, Culver’s root, hoary vervain, lavender hyssop, pale Indian plantain, rattlesnake master, prairie cinquefoil, and prairie blazing star.

Bumble bees have an annual life cycle. In late July and August, colonies begin to produce the “future” queens and males. I found these for several species, including males perched on tall stalks of coneflower, white sage, and bush clover, then flying out, looking for mates.

Bumble bees must have suitable nesting sites near the flowers they visit (within a mile or less). At PFC, the rock wall, cavities in trees, logs or surface roots, bunch grasses, cracks in building foundations, etc. are likely nesting spots.

To photograph and document bumble bees, here are some tips. Photograph the bees from several angles: top view, side view and face view. For bumble bees, this will usually show features needed for a positive ID. After taking pictures of one bee, take a photo of the ground or another object (a spacer photo). Submit your photos to Bumblebeewatch.org or BugGuide.net for ID. Check the Xerces Society website www.xerces.org for more information about bumble bee conservation and how you can participate!

Bumble bees must have suitable nesting sites near the flowers they visit.



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