

FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY

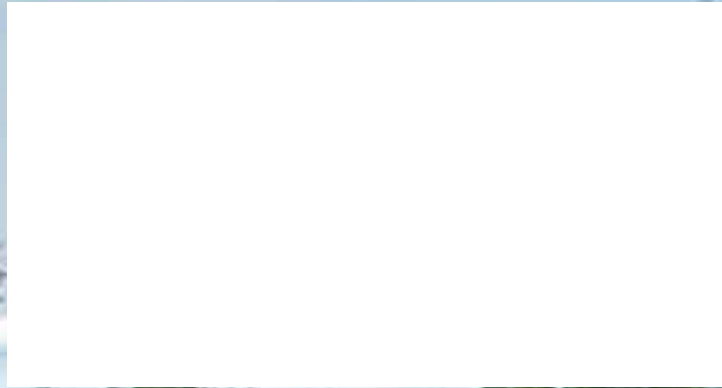


Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy
10333 Blackhawk Road
Middleton, WI 53562

NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY

Volume 5, Issue 1

PRESERVING THE LAND AND ITS STORIES



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It seems like a lifetime ago...

BY MEL POPE



It seems like a lifetime ago since our last news magazine in January. Certainly, our plans (along with almost everyone's in the country) have changed. As we look around, we see so many of our fellow citizens falling ill to this virus, and we are forced to mourn the loss of life from an awkward distance that leaves us wanting. Others are hurting economically, and have concerns about their financial future. Yet, at the very same time, we see great generosity of spirit, the pursuit of scientific innovation at breakneck speed, and selfless acts of courage everywhere. Hard times remind us what we stand for, what's truly important in our lives and that we cannot whether a storm like this alone. It's not a cliché; we really are all in this together, and doing what we can to make a difference, for our collective future as well as with each other.

The Friends are a volunteer organization and we seek enjoyment in what we do. During this pandemic we obviously have had to modify our plans and change the way we operate. At the same time, this crisis has provided space and opportunity for other good things to happen that spell forward progress for the Conservancy. Case in point, we are learning to use Zoom to conduct our Board meetings for the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy. Some of us have had to step up and learn about video technology. It works well and is necessary, although, in truth it's still not quite like being there! As it turns out, pandemics are full of lessons including never being too old to learn something new.

Here's another good thing; being homebound has provided an opening to work on some important longer-term projects that are more behind the scenes. For example, we're;

- Researching potential ideas to share with the staff at the new Pope Farm Elementary School.
- Using our genealogy skills to help research the historical owners of the three farms that originally comprised what we know as Pope Farm Conservancy today.
- Exploring the history of agriculture on these farms so that information can be used to teach the public how agriculture has evolved since the 1800's.
- Evaluating the terrain to better understand how difficult it was for the settlers to clear the land back in the mid 1850's, including having a geologist create a picture of what the land would have looked like to them.
- Curt Caslavka has begun working on the Blue Bird trail including the addition of more boxes.

Unfortunately, though, in other areas, it can't be business as usual. As we indicated in our April newsletter, it's been necessary to cancel our May calendar events. We'll be monitoring conditions surrounding the talks scheduled for later in the year. Please check our website or our Facebook page for current information in regards to their status.

As spring unfolds and the days get brighter, the Conservancy serves as a respite for those who want to get out and enjoy the great outdoors. It's wonderful to see families and people of all ages walking the trails, social distancing, and learning about the stories of the land. It's a great place to regroup and recharge.

In closing, please be assured that the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy are 'keep on keeping on,' doing whatever we can during our very own version of Groundhog Day. It goes without saying, we so look forward to the day when this giant pause will end!

Thanks to all of you for your membership, and your generosity. Hope to see you on the other side soon!

Be Safe,
Mel Pope

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Administrative Team

Michelle Bartman—Administration Advisor
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Jerry McAdow—Counsel Advisor

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

Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy
10333 Blackhawk Road
Middleton, WI 53562

Purposes

In recognition that Pope Farm Conservancy is an educational and community asset, the Corporation shall have the following Purposes:

- Through volunteer participation and support, create, advance and facilitate the development and implementation of educational opportunities and programming in, on and around the Pope Farm Conservancy for students of all ages from public and private schools and the general public. Without limitation because of enumeration, this shall include but not be limited to assisting and working with the Pope Farm Elementary School and the Pope Farm Middle School (when constructed) from the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, the Blackhawk Ski Club, the Aldo Leopold Nature Center and similar organizations.
- To assist in the preservation of the balance of wildlife habitat, and historic, geologic, agricultural, environmental and scenic features of the Pope Farm Conservancy.
- To assist in the protection of natural landscapes and grass trails, wildlife and their habitat and the general public's tranquil enjoyment of the Pope Farm Conservancy as a passive conservancy free from commercial activity, motorized vehicles and bicycles, dogs and organized sports that require athletic fields or open space.
- To assist the Town of Middleton with the maintenance, improvement and general enrichment of the Pope Farm Conservancy as an educational and community asset.
- In accord with Article Four of these Bylaws, the Board of Directors shall have the specific authority and discretion to interpret, apply and implement these purposes, provided that at all times, it complies with rules and regulations of the IRS regarding the fulfillment and preservation of the requirements of the Corporation's 501(c)(3) status.

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EVENTS CALENDAR 2020

All FOPFC tours are free and open to the public. No registration is necessary. More info: www.popefarmconservancy.org Contact: info@popefarmconservancy.org

AND JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING...

If you're not familiar with this publication, please accept with our compliments the spring edition of the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy news magazine. We publish the magazine twice a year (Spring and early Winter) for the members of the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy. We also have a monthly newsletter that provides updates and newsy tidbits on what is happening within the property. We wanted to introduce you to the Pope Farm Conservancy and let you



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WE WELCOME YOU TO JOIN US!

Make the most of your visit to Pope Farm Conservancy.



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THE INDIGO BUNTINGS

The all-blue male Indigo Bunting is one of the most dramatic songbirds that nests at Pope Farm Conservancy.

KEEP CALM AND GARDEN ON: THE FORWARD GARDEN

AT THE POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY JULIE GRAZIANO

*I'd like to be under the sea
In an octopus's garden in the shade
He'd let us in, knows where we've been
In his octopus's garden in the shade*

From the song The Octopus's Garden by Ringo Starr



Photo by Photos by Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens



If there's a bright side to the current COVID-19 pandemic it's that it has spurred many of us to get into the great outdoors. Whether it's walking our dogs, getting on the bike paths, enjoying the birds, or exploring our favorite green spaces, being in nature can be just what the doctor ordered. And just as Ringo's whimsical song suggests, getting out into the garden is another way to help restore our souls. May we suggest Forward Garden at Pope Farm Homestead?

Drawing its name from our Wisconsin state motto, Forward Garden is now underway. The Pope Farm Homestead's 12-acre parcel of land is being leased to the Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens (MAFPG), the organizers

of Forward Garden, in 2020. The Madison Area Food Pantry Garden is a thriving nonprofit organization that grows high quality fresh food to help feed the economically challenged within Dane County, or roughly 12% of its residents. Two decades after its first growing season, MAFPG grows 100,000 pounds of fresh vegetables while continuing the gleaning practice that collects an additional 50,000 pounds of food each year. Forward Garden is the tenth and largest garden in their 10-garden network.

MAFPG is leasing the Pope Farm Homestead on a year-to-year basis and includes the use of the barn. Six acres will be devoted to growing culturally relevant vegetables. Possible options include beets, collards, okra,

turnips, broccoli, cucumber, onion, squash, cabbage, eggplant, pepper tomato, cauliflower, melon, pumpkin and zucchini. Vegetables will be planted on the east side of the property near the native gardens. Six acres will be used for wheat production.

You might recall that about a year ago, MAFPG began a dialogue with the Pope-Zoerb family about the possibility of purchasing the Pope Farm Homestead. They had been in search of a property that would allow them to establish a 'central' garden with permanent staff. (In fact, they recently hired a farm manager which will be their first paid position starting this summer.) A central garden will allow for storage for equipment,

running water, a place to handle food, etc., all things they don't currently have.

Further, MAFPG plans to establish an interactive food and agriculture educational center designed to help people learn where their food comes from. They envision creating an eye-opening destination showplace where adult and youth grown-ups, students, and volunteers alike can experience, learn and enjoy the process of growing fresh, high quality food while managing the soil in an environmentally friendly way. When MAFPG became aware of the Pope Farm Homestead, they quickly recognized it as being the type of property they were looking for and became interested in purchasing the property.



At the time this article was written, the State of Wisconsin is under a mandated "Safer at Home" order due to COVID 19 in effect from March 25 to May 25, 2020. The MAFPG is considered an essential service and is following safety protocols to ensure the highest level of public safety.



Photo by Photos by Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens

This is no Spring Fling!

MAFPG's potential ownership of the Homestead is significant to the FOPFC in a few important ways. Not only is it a complimentary fit to the Conservancy's mission but it could also benefit the new Pope Farm Elementary and Middle School's educational curriculum. Imagine the possibilities that might be created among the FOPFC, MAFPG, and the Middleton Cross Plains Area School District? MAFPG's potential ownership aligns with the Conservancy's Master Plan as well as

having the potential of offering hands-on learning for students of all ages. Certainly not least of all, having MAFPG as the Conservancy's neighbor lessens the likelihood of development that would radically alter the look and feel of the Conservancy forever.

Success of Forward Garden's inaugural year is a big deal! It will impact the future wellbeing of the Conservancy, FOPFC and the general public. MAFPG is very excited to be a neighbor of the Conservancy this coming year. Won't you help to make the first year

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Volunteering is a great way to contribute to Pope Farm Conservancy, get out in nature, meet new people, build your resume, share your skills, and have fun with family and friends!

Photo by Kim Upton

WE WELCOME YOU TO
JOIN US!
MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VISIT TO
POPE FARM CONSERVANCY



of Forward Garden as successful as possible? MAFPG would love to have you and volunteering is easy.

How to Volunteer

Volunteering at Forward Garden—and any of the gardens in the network—is done on a ‘come as you are able’ basis. They have posted a calendar on their website (www.foodpantrygardens.org/calendar) that highlights the opportunities at all the gardens. Each garden also has its own newsletter. ‘Come as you are able’ means you do not need to make a formal commitment or come regularly. It’s up to you. Please be assured that MAFPG will be following the appropriate safety protocols to ensure maximum public health.

Activities include planting, weeding, soil preparation,

washing vegetables. Green thumbs are not required and no garden tools needed! The peak demand for volunteers at Forward Garden is anticipated to be late July through September. MAFPG especially loves to host groups so feel free to bring your friends and other FOPFC members. Forward Garden’s schedule is Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. and Wednesday mornings from 9-11 a.m. Visit MAFPG’s website, Facebook Page, and Instagram to stay up on what’s happening with the gardens at www.foodpantrygardens.org or contact Forward Garden’s volunteer lead, Katie Schmitt at Katie@foodpantrygardens.org or call 320-292-4791.

In a world that seems full of ‘no’ right now, Forward Garden is a big YES! Let’s work together to help make it a high visibility success. A victory garden!

We would be warm below the storm, In our little hideaway beneath the waves, Resting our head on the sea bed, In an octopus’s garden near a cave

Plan Your Visit

• **Trails & Maps**—Hike seven miles of trails through crops, prairie, and woodlands. A detailed trail map is available on the FOPFC website under “Plan Your Visit > Trails & Maps”



• **Self-Guided Tours**—Now Available Online! These tours are a great way to learn about the different features of the conservancy. Check them out our website under “Plan Your Visit > Self-Guided Tours”

• **Interpretive Signs**—Over 30 different interpretive signs will guide you through Pope Farm Conservancy to enhance your visit. These signs are also available for viewing on our website under “Plan Your Visit > Interpretive Signs”

• **Interactive Tours / Videos**—Step back in time with an interactive video tour of PFC. Watch our 8-part video series about the life of pioneers in the mid-19th century. You can view these short (2-3 minute) videos on our website under “Plan Your Visit > Interactive Tours—Videos”

• **Prairies in Bloom**—From spring through fall, you’ll be enchanted by beautiful displays of color in the Pope Farm prairies and restored Oak Savanna. In May and June, look for purple lupine, violet-blue spiderwort, red and yellow columbines, creamy white beardtongue, and pretty pink shooting stars.

• **Heritage Gardens**—This pair of gardens, located near the lower parking area, engages visitors of all ages. Here, you will see a replica of a 1,000-year-old Native American garden alongside a rotating theme garden. The theme changes from year to year and celebrates the diversity of Wisconsin’s farming traditions.

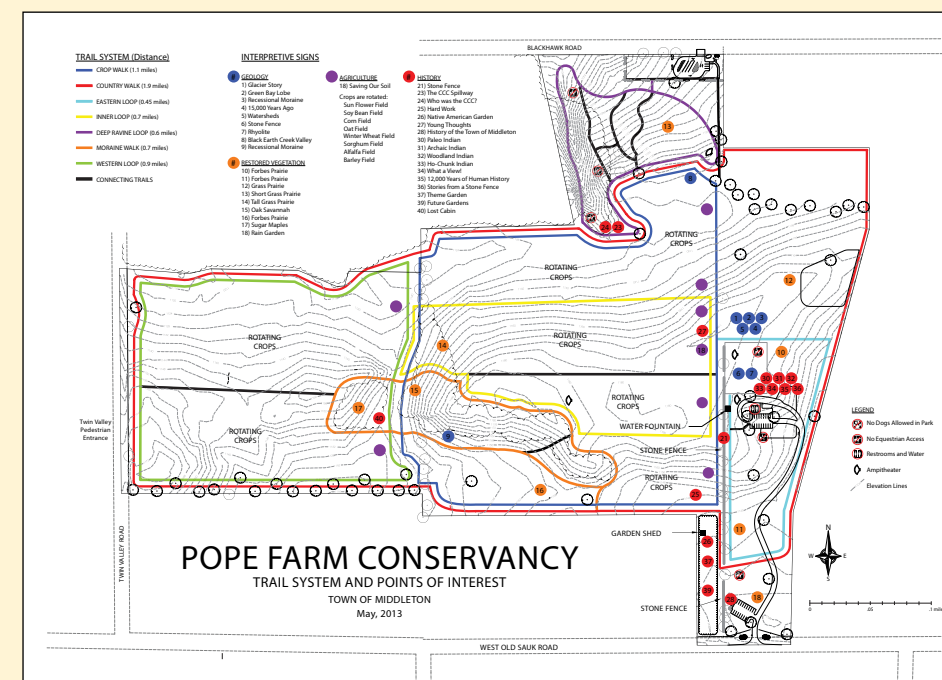


• **Photography**—From stunning blooms to breathtaking views, there is no shortage of subjects to photograph. So bring your camera and make some beautiful images. We welcome you to share your photos with us at info@popefarmconservancy.org or post them on our Facebook page.

• **Bird Watching**—Pope Farm Conservancy offers excellent opportunities to see and learn more about the birds of Wisconsin. Be sure to pack your binoculars and a field guide on birds, and set out to see how many bird species you can find!

• **Dine with a View**—Pack a picnic and enjoy a meal with a remarkable 360-degree panoramic view of the area including Lake Mendota, the Capitol, and Black Earth Creek Valley.

Please Note: Dogs are not allowed on the property; Biking is prohibited on the trails; Conservancy hours are sunrise to sunset. More information is available on the FOPFC website www.popefarmconservancy.org/plan-your-visit



JUMPING WORMS:



Photos courtesy of UW-Madison Arboretum

ARE THEY “JUMPING” INTO A GARDEN NEAR YOU?

The importance of earthworms to garden soil health has been touted for generations. Earthworms can increase soil nutrients, increase infiltration, and reduce soil compaction; all important to vegetable and flower gardens. However, many people do not realize that all earthworms in Wisconsin are non-native and many are considered invasive. The last glaciation, approximately 10,000 years ago, was thought to have wiped out or pushed any native earthworms to southern latitudes. The earthworms that we commonly see now are primarily from Europe, brought over in the last few hundred years. However more recently a new suite of earthworms from Asia have been popping up in Wisconsin and so far they do not seem to offer any benefits to our gardens.

Jumping worms (*Amyntas* spp.) were first confirmed at the UW-Madison Arboretum in 2013, but have since been found throughout Madison and in most Wisconsin counties. These earthworms are native to the Korean peninsula, Japan, China, and other parts of Asia. Although it's unknown

when or how they were brought to the North America, they appear to spread via human activity especially the movement of landscape materials such as mulch, compost, and potted plants. Gardeners, land managers, and ecologists are concerned about the spread of this new invasive species because they are voracious consumers of organic matter, change the physical and chemical properties of soil, and can negatively impact plants.

What Makes Them Different

Jumping worms differ in several ways from the ubiquitous European species such as the common night crawler. First, they are annual species meaning that they hatch from cocoons in the spring, grow and reproduce during the summer and fall before dying off soon after the first hard freeze. Cocoons that are produced during the growing season over winter in the soil until spring warm-up, when new worms once again begin to hatch. Second, they live

within the organic matter or top few centimeters of soil; they do not burrow deep into the soil. Finally, they are parthenogenic meaning that they can reproduce without a mate. So, in theory, one mature adult jumping worm can start a new population!

Unlike some of the benefits that European earthworms bring to our gardens, jumping worms because they only live and feed in the topsoil or leaf litter, are not good at mixing or aerating soil or transporting nutrients to the root zone. Through their casting behavior they create very loose topsoil that is dry and easily erodible, thus nutrients held in these casts can be lost resulting in a loss of soil nutrients.

Best Management Practices

The Arboretum, along with the WI DNR, Dept. of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, and the green industry created the following Best Management Practices (BMP's) to help the public minimize the spread of jumping worms:

- Educate yourself and others to recognize jumping worms
- Watch for jumping worms and signs of their presence
- Arrive clean, leave clean. Clean soil and debris from vehicles, equipment and personal gear before moving to and from a work or recreational area—they might contain jumping worms or their cocoons
- Use, sell, plant, purchase or trade only landscape and gardening materials and plants that appear to be free of jumping worms
- Sell, purchase or trade only compost and mulch that was heated to appropriate temperatures and duration following protocols that reduce pathogen

More information can be found here: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/invasives/fact/jumpingworm/index.html>

Mitigating Jumping Worms

Research at the UW-Madison Arboretum is addressing basic questions about the biology of jumping worms as well as potential control options. We've recently published results



Jumping worm cocoons are smaller than a mustard seed and can be transported in soil and mulch.



on the thermal tolerance of cocoons. We found that in the laboratory, cocoons become nonviable when subjected to temperatures at or above 104°F for at least three days. If heat can be applied to gardening materials such as compost for this period of time, or hotter temperatures for a likely less period of time it is possible that the population can be set back. We are also testing the efficacy of using a saponin-based organic fertilizer to control worms and potentially their cocoons. Preliminary results suggest that jumping worms will succumb to the treatment if they come in direct contact, however thus far it has shown no impact on cocoons. Finally, we are investigating how different litter types (sugar maple, white oak, white pine, C4 grasses) may affect survivability and reproduction of the jumping worms *Amyntas agrestis* and *Amyntas tokioensis*. Results of this research could help us predict the likelihood of invasion and persistence into areas with these litter types.

Brad Herrick holds a B.A. in Biology from Luther College and an M.S. in Ecosystems Studies from UW-Green Bay. He is the ecologist and research program manager at the UW-Madison Arboretum. His research interests include plant community ecology, invasion biology, and environmental monitoring. He also assists in developing long-term restoration plans for Arboretum lands. Recently he has been investigating the biology, ecology, and control mechanisms of the non-native, invasive jumping worm.

2020 EVENTS POPE FARM CONSERVANCY CALENDAR

The FOPFC Events Team has put a lot of time and effort into planning this year's line-up of public talks and tours. Unfortunately, given the concerns with COVID-19 and the need for social distancing, we decided to cancel our spring & early summer events, to be on the safe side. For the most up-to-date event information, please visit our website www.popefarmconservancy.org or follow us on Facebook. We look forward to the day when we can come together again to learn and explore the wonders the conservancy.



Managing Invasive Species and Jumping Worms

Wednesday, March 4, 2020 at 6:30pm, Common Ground – Middleton
Speaker: Frank Hassler, Ecologist and CEO, Good Oak Ecological Services
 Learn how to live with and manage the latest invasive species that are plaguing Wisconsin's landscapes.

Monarch Butterfly Presentation

CANCELLED
Monday, May 18, 2020 at 6:30pm, Common Ground – Middleton
Speaker: Karen Oberhauser, Director of the UW-Madison's Arboretum
 Learn about the incredible life cycle and migratory habits of the monarch butterfly, and find out how you can support the continuing conservation efforts of this iconic insect.

Blue Bird Trail Walk

CANCELLED
Saturday, May 23, 2020 at 1-2pm
Speaker: Patrick Ready, Director of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin
 Come along on a tour of the bluebird nesting areas in Pope Farm Conservancy, and get tips on how to attract bluebirds to your own yard.

Hike the Trails at the Conservancy

CANCELLED
Saturday, June 6, 2020 at 1-2pm
 Join us for a fascinating exploration of the conservancy. Learn about its unique history, geology, prairies, soils, glacial features and 20 different vegetative plots. We'll hike the trails and hear the stories of the history of the land.



Prairie Plants in the Conservancy

Saturday, August 22, 2020 at 10-11am
Speaker: Jeff Steele, Wild Ones Madison
 From the common coneflower to the rare and breathtaking yellow gentian, wildflowers of many types fill the conservancy in late summer. Jeff Steele of Wild Ones Madison will guide us on a tour of Pope Farm Conservancy's flower-filled prairies. Discover new plants and learn new things about familiar ones. Leave knowing how to identify Wisconsin's diverse array of wildflowers based on color, size, flower style, and leaf shape. Bring your cameras and wear comfortable walking shoes.

Prairie Seed Collection at Pope Farm Conservancy

Late August to Early October 2020, Dates/Times – TBD
 Every summer and fall, the FOPFC Prairie Team hosts a series of Prairie Work Days. Volunteers are needed to help collect prairie seed and/or remove invasive species (weeds). This can be a great project for individuals or groups! Volunteers enjoy getting off the trails and wading into the prairies and they always learn something about wildflowers and native prairie plants. Each session lasts about 2 hours. No previous experience



is necessary. Bring gloves, wear long pants and footwear that cover your feet entirely. We'll provide tools, or you can bring your own. Exact dates/times will be posted on our website.



Monarch Butterfly Tagging at Pope Farm Conservancy

September 2020, Exact Dates – TBD
 In early September, visitors to Pope Farm Conservancy can often see hundreds of migrating monarch butterflies in the prairies and oak savanna. This year, the Friends hope to continue their Monarch Butterfly Tagging Project with the intention of capturing, tagging and releasing monarch butterflies at Pope Farm Conservancy as the insects migrate southward. This is all part of a nationwide effort to better understand these incredible butterflies and perhaps give us clues as to why their populations are in decline. Be sure to check our monthly e-news updates and our website for exact dates/times and registration details. Contact Curt Caslavka at curt@popefarmconservancy.org for more information.



Plein Air Painting: Capturing the Art and Beauty of the Conservancy

Saturday, September 19, 2020 - Time TBD
 Artists associated with the Dane County Plein Air Painter's Association will be on location at Pope Farm Conservancy. The term "plain air" derives from the French for open-air and refers to painting outdoors on location. The Association is an informal, non-competitive group that welcomes painters from beginners to professionals. Visit the conservancy to view the painters at work and/or bring an easel and paints and try painting in the open air.

Maybe painting isn't your thing, but you love taking photos. On the same day, Photo-Midwest will be at the conservancy to provide tips and ideas for taking great nature photographs. Learn how to capture the beauty of early fall in the prairies and the oak savanna. The prairies will be at their peak and we'll encounter birds and butterflies along the way.



Photo by Michael P. Anderson

Forest Bathing

Sunday, September 20, 2020 at 10am
Speakers: Kate Bast, Certified Forest and Nature Guide and Owner of Shinrin Yoku Madison and Moira Farrell, owner of Hike and Heal Wellness
 Immerse yourself into the natural world with the practice of forest bathing. Also known as "Shinrin-yoku," forest bathing refers to the practice of spending time in forested areas for the purpose of enhancing health, wellness, and happiness.

Fall Migrating Birding Tour

Saturday, September 26, 2020 at 7:30am
Speaker: Mike McDowell, local naturalist, birder and nature photographer
 We invite you along on a leisurely walk through the Conservancy with birding expert Mike McDowell. This is your chance to witness the fall flight behaviors of the bird population at the conservancy. You will learn techniques to help you enjoy identifying and observing birds in their preferred habitats. Please bring binoculars if you have them, wear comfortable walking shoes, and dress for the weather. If you are in need of binoculars, contact Mike at (800) 289-1132 or mmcdowell@eagleoptics.com.



Mike McDowell

Native American Spirituality & Care for the Earth

Sunday, September 27, 2020 at 1pm
Speaker: Katherine Heskin, Theologian and Adjunct Professor, Edgewood College
 Indigenous peoples believed that the earth and all things on it were sacred — living expressions of the Great Spirit, the nourishing Mother we call Earth. Join us as Katherine Heskin, an Edgewood College professor who is part Native American, helps us see the land through the eyes of this area's earliest inhabitants and shares the spiritual wisdom they offer us in this time of environmental challenge.



Steve Mayeshiba



Fungi and Mushroom Logs

Sunday, October 4, 2020 at 10:30am, Pope Farm Elementary School Community Room
Speakers: Dan Lindner, Plant Pathologist, Forest Products, and Lee & John Pray, Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy
 Join us for a fascinating lecture on fungi and discover how to grow your own mushrooms for food, medicine, gardening and so much more. Local mushroom enthusiasts will demonstrate how to inoculate and care for a mushroom log. Attendees will leave with an inoculated mushroom log.

FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
 CONSERVANCY



All tours take place at
 Pope Farm Conservancy
 7440 Old Sauk Rd, Verona, WI 53593

All FOPFC tours are free
 and open to the public.
 No registration is necessary.
 We will meet in the lower
 parking at the conservancy by
 the Old Sauk Road entrance,
 unless otherwise stated.

More info:
www.popefarmconservancy.org
 Contact:
info@popefarmconservancy.org

FEATURE

THE INDIGO BUNTINGS

OF POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY MIKE MCDOWELL



The all-blue male Indigo Bunting is one of the most dramatic songbirds that nests at Pope Farm Conservancy. Their sweet sweeping songs can be heard late spring and throughout the summer months. These sparrow-sized birds will often perch and sing from open branches, treetops, and even on telephone lines along country roads. Males defending territories will sing for hours on end, making them fairly easy to find provided you know their song.

Female and immature Indigo Buntings are brown with variable faint streaking on the breast. Sometimes females will show traces of blue on their wing feathers or rump. As the young males molt, the striking blue colors begin to emerge. Curiously, their feathers actually lack blue

pigment. The color comes from microscopic feather structures that refract and reflect blue light.

Like many other neotropical migratory songbirds, Indigo Buntings migrate during the night by stars for navigation. Using an internal biological clock as a star-compass, the birds adjust their flight angle to particular stars, taking even the Earth's rotation into account in order to find their way. During fall migration, most Indigo Buntings head for countries like Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica in Central America, while others overwinter in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Beginning in early April, they've begun to form large flocks in prepa-

ration for migration. When weather conditions are suitable, the birds will set out on their northward journey to the United States, making a non-stop 24-hour flight across the Gulf of Mexico. An amazing feat for a tiny songbird!

Indigo Buntings can be found throughout Pope Farm Conservancy during late May, June, July, and August. Look for them along the edges of fields, the oak savannah, and especially in the woods by the CCC Spillway. You might also attract Indigo Buntings to your backyard by putting out thistle or nyjer. They're not finicky eaters, however—they'll also eat caterpillars, beetles, moths, flies, grasshoppers, spiders, various seeds, berries, and fruit. Look for Indigo Buntings this spring at PFC!



Female and immature Indigo Buntings are brown with variable faint streaking on the breast. Sometimes females will show traces of blue on their wing feathers or rump.

Photos by Mike McDowell