Two early Griffith Prairie forbs we collect for greenhouse growing are prairie violet (*Viola pedatifida*), left, and American vetch (*Vicia americana*), right. Prairie violet is becoming more widespread and abundant on Griffith Prairie. A key tallgrass prairie species only found on more diverse native prairie remnants, the prairie violet produces scant quantities of seed which burst from a seed capsule after it cures and splits open. The showy, violet flowers in the spring are actually sterile; the seeds develop from tiny, inconspicuous fertile flowers after the showy ones appear. Violets are a key food source plant for regal fritillary butterfly larvae, a species once widespread in North America, now restricted to the central states grasslands where in some areas it is quite abundant. Year two of greenhouse work has produced hundreds of prairie violet seedlings to plant in restorations.

American vetch is a native legume found in tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies. It has a tough root system of rhizomes supporting a colony of above-ground individual plants. The plant can be difficult to see because it is close to the ground and vines around taller plans. Also, the flowers, though showy, bluish and sweet pea-like, are few in number and fairly small. It is tough and well adapted to hard soils, Great Plains droughts and grazing. Most often grazers leave it alone. Rarely when we see it do we find seed pods like the colony near our Education Center, which seems to be a reliable seed producer. Sarah Bailey has been able to successfully grow American vetch in the greenhouse.

Griffith Prairie grazing: This year three burn units (~60 acres each) were delineated on the large bluff prairie to establish a patch burn grazing system. One of the three units, the north area along the Platte River, was burned. Cows and calves belonging to neighbors Jim and Liz Senn will graze the entire pasture through the growing season. The principle behind patch burning grazing is that grazers are drawn to the freshly burned areas, generally grazing the thatchy unburned areas very lightly if at all. In a three-unit pasture, it means one area gets grazed intensely an entire year and the other two areas get two years of rest, allowing grasses to recover. Under this system, livestock select mostly grass – big bluestem is their favorite – and wildflowers increase, benefiting a variety of wildlife which require a diversity of structure and food plants. There may be some adjustments needed as we test this grazing system. It is basically a variation on a general theme of moderate grazing to reduce grass canopy, thus allowing more species to thrive within the grass-dominated system in what is a perpetual struggle for sunlight and root space. We have found that livestock production and biodiversity are complementary outcomes on native grasslands.

BADER PARK WALKING TOUR
Saturday, June 16th
9:00 a.m.

SOAR 2012

Things are hoppin' here at SOAR Central, where we're gearing up for Flight 21 - July 9-13 & July 16-20 (Flight 16 for Big Bend - June 18-21 and June 25-28).

Thanks to everyone who has already donated to SOAR, and for all other members, please consider sending in a contribution today! Thank you.

May 31st: Collecting sedges in a beautiful wet meadow near St. Paul.

THANKS to Kent Pfeiffer for all the help with the Beatrice planting, and to Deryl & Delores Danielson for donating an EZ-Flow planter.

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK
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MISSION:
Maintaining and restoring Nebraska ecosystems - Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and community development.

Link Editor & Layout
Jan Whitney

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Watch for the summer issue of *Prairie Plains Link* in late August!

Memorial Day was a beautiful day for hiking Griffith Prairie. Especially picturesque - the northeast area that was burned about four weeks earlier.

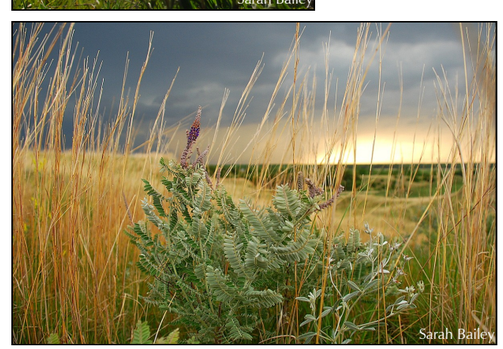
Prairie Plains
RESOURCE INSTITUTE
NEWSLETTER
May, 2012

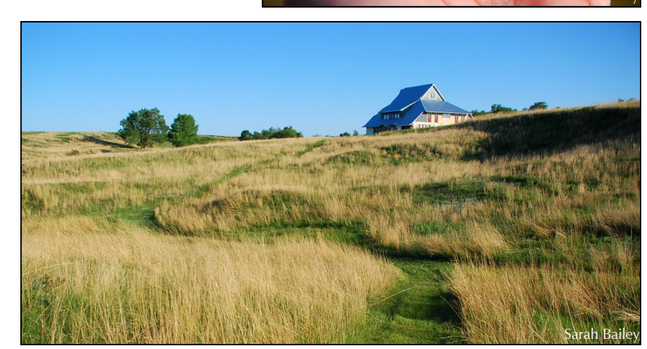
It's Bloomin' Early!

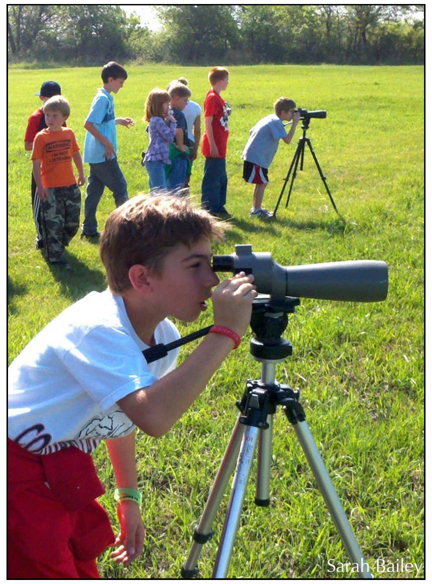
That could be said of summer in general this year, but it's certainly true for native prairie and wetland plants. Many species that normally don't flower until late July are already out. Does this mean they will bloom longer? We shall see! The situation has altered our seed harvesting schedule, since the earlier the bloom, the earlier the seeds develop.

Whatever this all means, we encourage everyone to get out and enjoy these early wildflowers and other beauty on our preserves and other natural areas throughout the summer.

More scenes from Memorial Day at Griffith Prairie (above left, counterclockwise): catclaw sensitive brier (*Mimosa quadrivalvis*); prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*); leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*); looking southwest, a view of the Education Center in progress; painted turtle hatchling.






Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey

For area students, May brought opportunities to get outside.
From above, left: Sandy Creek third graders getting a closer look at bluebirds during their annual field trip to Bader Park - this time led by Bill Whitney and Sarah Bailey;
Prairie 2000 has met its end - but Aurora High School students began planting a new prairie on the school grounds using Prairie Plains seeds and seedlings grown in our greenhouse;
Aurora eighth graders spent a day on cleanup tasks at Lincoln Creek - then gathered along the trail under the Highway 34 bridge for a group shot.


Amy Jones


Amy Jones


Mike Bullerman

More May Plantings

Our high diversity prairie mixes found their way to three projects in three counties for a total of 146 acres in May. Two of the plantings were on Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) sites in Merrick and Jefferson Counties. The third (pictured) was part of a "Keep Beatrice Beautiful" planting including nine acres in three areas along a trail system in Beatrice. Left: Kent Pfeiffer, longtime Prairie Plains member and colleague from the Northern Prairies Land Trust, was on hand to assist; below, Prairie Plains restoration director Mike Bullerman in his element.


Kent Pfeiffer

Many more of the seedlings that Prairie Plains greenhouse manager Sarah Bailey has been tending so carefully were transplanted to a variety of sites in May. From left, seedlings in cone-tainers at one of our Missouri River restoration sites, Gavins Point Dam near Yankton, South Dakota;
Jeff Gustafson and Sarah Bailey planting seedlings at the same site;
Sarah provided seeds and seedlings for a project of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center's Crete Prairie Club. The planted area is just east of the Center, by the pond.


Sarah Bailey


Bill Whitney


Courtesy Ruth Lionberger, Crete Prairie Club


Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey


Sarah Bailey

After the burn, Lincoln Creek Prairie is . . .Wow!

Last month's *Link* included photos of the prescribed burn at Lincoln Creek Prairie, the site of the first Prairie Plains preserve *and* restoration work. The response has been amazing! Definitely worth some time on the trail. Top-down: Early evening shadows on the greening prairie; plains wild indigo (*Baptisia bracteata*); red admiral; blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*) seedling (May 7) and in bloom (May 22); compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*).