

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



It's always delightful to discover cowboy's delight, also known as scarlet globemallow (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*), blooming in the prairie. This particular beauty was spotted at Sherman Ranch. Enjoy more florals on page 3.



The 24th annual Summer Enrichment Program at Olson Nature Preserve, held May 29-31, got 31 of this fall's 7th & 8th graders from Boone Central and St. Michael's outside to learn and have a blast!

As always, the ONP Enrichment was a model of interdisciplinary study. The exploratory hike through ONP's seven ecosystems emphasized the natural history of the area, as did the session on Nebraska snakes. Insects were netted, studied and poetically written about; other aquatic creatures were collected and examined using digital and stereo scopes. And there were lessons about local history and outdoor/pioneer skills including camp cookery and ice cream churning, corn shelling, rope-making and archery - along with a creative activity involving homesteading and a visit to the nearby Orford Cemetery. Still other sessions' focus was primarily FUN, including kite-flying, scavenger hunts (using GPS), pioneer games and swimming in Beaver Creek.

The ONP Enrichment Program is taught by a team of Boone County area educators (Cassie Olson, Cheri Blocher, Mitch Osborn, Mark Seier, Michael Volker, Dan Zoucha, Trevor Vandewalle and Lonnie and Ruth Zrust) and is made possible by Boone Central Schools and the Albion Education Foundation. THANKS to Cassie Olson and Cheri Blocher for photos and information.

From left: Natural history hike through ONP, guided by Mitch Osborn; Admiring a fox snake in Mark Seier's session; Yum! Outdoor cookery with Trevor Vandewalle.



NEWSLETTER
May, 2018

Reclaiming the prairie after cedar attack - Sherman Ranch:

Much has been written in this publication over the years about the challenges of red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) invasion of Nebraska rangelands, including our own prairie preserves. A native species, red cedar has increased greatly over the last 50 years due to the absence of natural or human-induced fire, as well as aggressive tree planting programs for rural windbreaks and wildlife habitat. Red cedar has been good for windbreaks due to its heartiness and rapid growth, but its wildlife value has been overstated, especially considering all the prairie habitat that is being lost with its spread. Over time and with widespread distribution of seeds by birds, the patches of trees grow and become dense, excluding all other species. On rangeland all grasses, sedges and forbs are displaced over time.

We have found that formerly cedar-infested slopes of our loess bluff prairies do well with re-establishing prairie species from resident seed stock. The native sedges drop lots of seeds, the grasses and many forbs return and the short-term weedy species gradually disappear, although musk thistles are more challenging and require years of monitoring - and digging. The restoration process is accelerated with prescribed fire, and we can also overseed these recovering areas with our local ecotype native seeds mixes, and transplant native species seedlings. In May we did just that - planted seedlings - on the slopes cleared of 60+ year-old cedar stands by Anderson Habitat Solutions last year.



May 1: The Nebraska Christian School greenhouse class transplanted seedlings they had grown (along with some of ours) on cedar-cleared slopes at Sherman Ranch, adding diversity to the plant community early in the healing/restoration process. The students' work is part of our ongoing partnership with the class taught by Dee Flynn, where teens learn about prairie restoration and management, harvest some seed and grow seedlings using their harvested seed plus seed harvested by Prairie Plains.



May 12: The transplanting project begun by the Nebraska Christian School students at Sherman Ranch was continued by staff and volunteers. From top left are volunteers Britt and Barb Bailey, Terry King (working with Bill) and Ernie & Lynda Ochsner. A big thanks to these hard workers; the slopes were steep and the weather was cold and windy!



Lincoln Creek Prairie: Red cedars aren't the only invasive trees we have to contend with! Jeff Gustafson is working to thin out Siberian elm and mulberry trees along the banks of the creek. The clearing was followed by planting, using our high diversity local ecotype prairie seed mix.

May 3: More students learning about prairie restoration! The McCool Junction High School FFA class visited the greenhouse to pick up some plants for their native pollinator garden they are creating just outside of their school greenhouse. They were also able to spend some time with Greenhouse Manager Sarah Bailey, touring the greenhouse and seed barn.





May 15: Among the last of the prescribed burns for spring, 2018 - the north prairie at Bader Park. Volunteer Cliff Dill is in the background; Sarah Bailey is the torch bearer. Uncooperative weather has made it a frustrating season so far, but we are still planning for a summer burn (June) on one of the restored sites at Gjerloff Prairie.

December-May Planting Season

According to Mike Bullerman, Prairie Plains Restoration Director, total restoration acres this year (local ecotype prairies/wetlands) was 523, and included 45 project sites in 30 counties.



One of our prairie restoration sites was a small pollinator planting on a farm near Deweese that was Jan (Hubbell) Whitney's home place. She enjoyed hand-planting the milkweed-rich mix at the site, as well as the irony of it all: Fifty years ago she would have been digging milkweeds out of an irrigation ditch just down the road!

**A selection of May florals
in the Lone Tree Corridor of the Platte River**
Photography by Sarah Bailey



Showy vetchling
(*Lathyrus polymorphus*)
Gjerloff Prairie



Prairie ragwort
(*Packera plattensis*)
Gjerloff Prairie



Prairie turnip or Indian breadroot
(*Pediomelum esculentum*)
Gjerloff Prairie



Blue-eyed grass
(*Sisyrinchium campestre*)
Sherman Ranch



Shell-leaf penstemon
(*Penstemon grandiflorus*)
Gjerloff Prairie



Serrate-leaf evening primrose
(*Oenothera serrulata*)
Gjerloff Prairie



Prairie violet
(*Viola pedatifida*)
Sherman Ranch



Back at our January Fundraiser in Lincoln, ReeAnn Regier (center) and Terry King (to ReeAnn's left) won the bid for a guided tour of Gjerloff Prairie plus dinner at the Prairie Creek Vineyards & Winery in Central City. The event was happily and successfully carried out on May 26. Here, the group is at the northeast corner of the prairie along the Platte. With ReeAnn, to her right, are her daughter and son-in-law, Brittany and Bill Stockstill. Bill Whitney (right) and Jan served as guides.

Approaching Events

Saturday, June 16, 9:00 a.m.
Bader Park hike

June 18-22
Youth Naturalist Program

July 9-12 and July 16-19
SOAR

Saturday, August 11
"Planets, Perseids & Prairie"
Edgerton Explorit Center and
Gjerloff Prairie
Details TBA!

THANKS to our land stewardship volunteers:

For assistance with prescribed burns - Cliff Dill and Mike Stewart;
For seedling transplanters - Terry King, Britt and Barb Bailey and Ernie & Lynda Ochsner, along with the Nebraska Christian High School greenhouse class and teacher Dee Flynn.



As planting time ends, harvesting begins. Pictured here is prairie ragwort, collected on May 31. The June harvest is dominated by a variety of sedges and other wetland species.

An exciting Education Center update
is coming up in the June issue of
Prairie Plains Link!

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**Preserving, restoring and maintaining
Nebraska native prairies -
Creating opportunities for education,
research, stewardship and place-
based community development.**

Prairie Plains Resource Institute is an educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization based in Aurora, Nebraska.

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SOAR 2018: FLIGHT 27

There are still a few vacant seats on board Flight 27 Session One (July 9-12). Please pass the word on to any kids that just completed grades 3-6 and would love to SOAR! Contact:
Jan Whitney
janppri@hamilton.net