



Dear Michael and Laurence,

Last weekend, we organized a Vicki Penziner-Matson Natural History Expedition to Illinois. The trip was a complete success. We had a total of 20 participants (Faculty, students and friends of the college) who enjoyed this great opportunity to be outside, and to learn about nature.



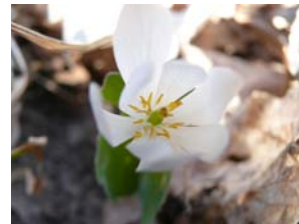
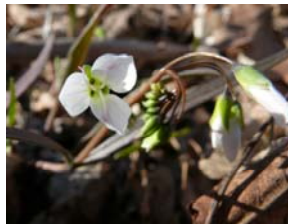
The Vicki Penziner-Matson fund supports natural history field trips to go out and enjoy nature. And that is exactly what we did. Our trip started on Friday at 4:00pm (1st April), when we headed toward Prairie Ridge State Natural Area in Illinois. We briefly stopped in Terre Haute to have dinner and we arrived to our lodging facilities at about 9:00pm. After settling in our “camp” we did a night hike in search of amphibians (where we had a close encounter with many Honey Locust trees), we did some stargazing, and we gathered around a bonfire to talk about prairie conservation, and many of the organisms that depend on this fragile and threatened ecosystem.



On Saturday morning we woke up at 5:30 am and went to the Prairie Ridge State Natural Area to visit a displaying ground of Greater Prairie Chickens. Watching them dance is a unique and unforgettable experience! We were lucky to observe 8 males booming, raising their pinnae feathers, inflating their orange air sacs, snapping their tails, and stamping their feet to try to impress the visiting females. Dances looked really energy-demanding and elaborate, but the only female that visited the lek while we were there did not seem impressed and left the lek without mating. We hope they have better luck next time!



At about 8:00am, we went back to the “camp” and prepared breakfast. After that, we hiked an Audubon Nature trail and visited some ponds and streams around the area. We found many interesting species such as Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers, Ring-necked Ducks, American Coots, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson Snipes (dozens), American Golden-plovers (hundreds), Pectoral Sandpipers, Cricket Frogs (hundreds), Chimney Crayfish, Garter Snakes, Painted





Turtles, Snapping Turtles, Red-ear Sliders, White-tailed Deer and a wide variety of bones that challenged our identification skills.

At about 1:00pm we came back to our camp and had lunch. Some participants went out to continue exploring the surroundings (they found brown snakes, 5-lined skinks and many interesting insects), others played cards or Frisbee, and some of us just took a nap to recover for our next adventure!



At about 4:00pm he headed out again and visited the Newton Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area. Here we spent some time walking in the forest and we had the opportunity to see a few spring ephemerals (spring is late this year) such as Spring Beauties, May-apples, Hepatica, Trout Lily, Sessile-leaved Trilium, many interesting trees such as Shagbark Hickory, Shingle Oak, some amphibians such as Small-mouth Salamanders, Slimy Salamanders, Spring Peepers and birds such as White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Northern Flickers, among many others.

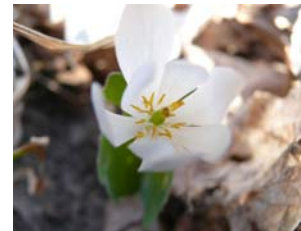


At about 7:00pm we headed toward a field where Short-eared Owls had been spotted in the past weeks. We were not able to find the Owls, but we saw a group of 25 Northern Bobwhites and observed a beautiful sunset on the prairie with a lot of pink and purple tones.

At the end of the evening we cooked some pasta and we finished our day sharing stories and singing around a bonfire under the light of the stars.



The next morning (Sunday) a few people did an early bird walk. Some of the highlights were Greater Prairie Chickens, Smiths Longspurs, American Bitterns and Northern Harriers. After this we had breakfast, packed our stuff, and headed back toward Richmond with a short stop in western Indiana for lunch at Lieber State Recreation Area.



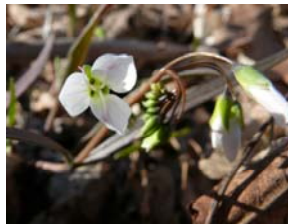


We will always remember this natural history expedition as a time of friendship and a great opportunity to enjoy and learn about nature. Opportunities like this are priceless! We would like to thank you for making this trip possible!

Best,

Wendy and John

Participants





Vertebrate species list

Birds

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Canada Goose | 19. American Coot | 37. Tufted Titmouse |
| 2. Wood Duck | 20. American Golden-Plover | 38. White-breasted Nuthatch |
| 3. Mallard | 21. Killdeer | 39. Carolina Wren |
| 4. Blue-winged Teal | 22. Lesser Yellowlegs | 40. Eastern Bluebird |
| 5. Northern Shoveler | 23. Pectoral Sandpiper | 41. American Robin |
| 6. Green-winged Teal | 24. Wilson's Snipe | 42. Northern Mockingbird |
| 7. Ring-necked Duck | 25. Rock Pigeon | 43. Brown Thrasher |
| 8. Northern Bobwhite | 26. Mourning Dove | 44. European Starling |
| 9. Greater Prairie-Chicken | 27. Red-headed Woodpecker | 45. Smith's Longspur |
| 10. Wild Turkey | 28. Red-bellied Woodpecker | 46. Eastern Towhee |
| 11. Pied-billed Grebe | 29. Downy Woodpecker | 47. Field Sparrow |
| 12. Double-crested
Cormorant | 30. Hairy Woodpecker | 48. Vesper Sparrow |
| 13. American White Pelican | 31. Northern Flicker | 49. Song Sparrow |
| 14. American Bittern | 32. Blue Jay | 50. Northern Cardinal |
| 15. Great Blue Heron | 33. American Crow | 51. Red-winged Blackbird |
| 16. Turkey Vulture | 34. Horned Lark | 52. Eastern Meadowlark |
| 17. Northern Harrier | 35. Northern Rough-winged
Swallow | 53. Common Grackle |
| 18. American Kestrel | 36. Tree Swallow | 54. House Sparrow |

Reptiles

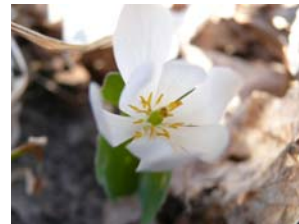
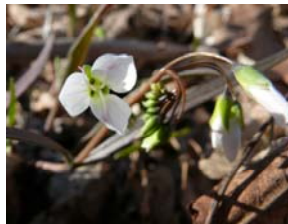
1. Brown Snake
2. Garter Snake
3. Five-lined Skink
4. Painted Turtle
5. Snapping Turtle
6. Red-eared Turtle

Amphibians

1. Northern Cricket Frog
2. Spring Peeper
3. Green Frog
4. Slimy Salamander
5. Small-mouth Salamander

Mammals

1. White-tailed Deer
2. Meadow Vole
3. Eastern Cottontail
4. Coyote
5. Striped Skunk
6. Muskrat





Plant species list

Trees

White Ash
Sugar Maple
Shagbark Hickory
Bitternut Hickory
Honey Locust
Tulip Tree
Sassafras
Eastern Red Oak
White Oak
Shingle Oak
Sycamore
Black Cherry
Hackberry
Slippery Elm
American Elm
American Beech
Big-toothed Aspen
Cottonwood

Spring Ephemerals

Spring Beauty
Trout Lily
Toothwort
Mayapple
Sessile-leaved Trilium
Wild chives
Bloodroot
Hepatica

Other plants

Daylily
Cattail
Wild raspberry
Poison ivy
Horsetail

