



NEWSLETTER

Volunteering with MDC's CWD Sampling



Dan, Kim and Bob with MDC Staff at Lake Paho

A Chance to Really Help

by Kim Lajolette

photo by Sara Parker Pauley

The first couple of years the Loess Hills Master Naturalists were invited to help Missouri Conservation Department collect samples for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) from deer I was intrigued but did not sign up. The travel time was at least a couple of hours and there was a good possibility that the long hours spent outside for two days would be in very cold weather. hmmm... no thanks.

But this year I realized that MDC really needed us to help with this project. Typically I volunteer for MMN projects that I want to do. After all, I'm volunteering for my enjoyment, right? But after listening to Syd Hime and TJ Peacher both stress to our MMN group how critical CWD monitoring in Missouri is, I realized this was an opportunity for me to help where the help was really needed. So, along with Dan McCann and Bob Spurgat, I signed up to volunteer Nov 16 and 17 at the Lake Paho sampling site in Mercer County which borders Iowa in North-central Missouri. As it turns out, our Chapter really stepped up, providing 11 of the 20 statewide MMN volunteers.

I learned that monitoring CWD in deer is critical to estimating the current prevalence of this disease in Missouri and to understanding whether the disease is spreading. This information is used to identify what regulations are needed to help control the disease. For instance there are laws that regulate by county where harvested deer can be butchered and how to dispose of the carcass. There are even county specific regulations that dictate whether the head of the deer can be transported across county lines! These regulations are applied to counties based on CWD testing results from prior years. Without the testing results the restrictions would have to be applied state wide or not at all.

Why not just apply tight regulations across the state? Missouri gets a lot of revenue from the sport of deer hunting that could not be easily replaced for both MDC and small private businesses like rural motels, gas stations, restaurants, grocery stores and hunting leasers. It also provides meat for the hunters' families and over 250,000 pounds of meat annually to help others through Share The Harvest. Keeping hunters happily hunting is a priority for MDC and burdening hunters with unnecessary regulations is the last thing MDC wants to do.

Requiring hunters to bring their deer to limited sites for sampling miles away from where they hunted is a big ask just in itself so we did not want to keep them waiting in line. The lines at the testing stations have to move quickly, especially when a lot of hunters show up just after dawn or dusk. During high traffic times MDC employees alone would have a difficult time keeping up so I felt our volunteer hours were very appreciated. We had to be pleasant and clear in our communication and accurate and quick in what we were doing and I believe Dan, Bob and I contributed greatly. Did I get cold and tired? Yep, sure did. But the MDC employees at the Lake Paho site did everything they could to give us warm up time and rest time. We got all the pizza we could eat for lunch and fried chicken and pulled pork with all the fixings for dinners. We were allowed to learn all the required tasks but not pushed to do anything we weren't comfortable with. It was tiring and tough but a very rewarding experience.

Monarch Tagging at Loess Bluffs NWR

by Bruce Windsor



David and helpers tag Monarch butterflies

It was such a fun experience watching/assisting David Laderoute on Saturday, September 14 2019 at the Loess Bluffs NWR. A large number of attendees enjoyed the beautiful weather. David and Lindsey Landowski presented an overview of the program in the auditorium, and then everyone went to field where they picked out a net and got to work. The weather was nice, however the wind posed a few challenges! We tagged a total of 66 beautiful monarchs and sent them on their way. Hopefully we will be able to tag even more on the following weekend, September 21. The tagging process itself is amazing. After the butterflies are netted, they are placed in a holding container. They are retrieved by reaching in and grasping them gently by applying slight pressure on their wings. The person retrieving the butterfly then hands it to Dave. He sexes the monarch and a recorder sitting next to him writes down the information, along with the tag number. The tag is placed on the outside right wing using a toothpick and slight pressure, to make sure it sticks. The tag number on the butterfly provides a way to trace the butterfly to the tagging event. After tagging, the monarch is released to return on its journey to Mexico.

I would strongly encourage any who have not had a chance to participate in this event to do so. David is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to monarchs, and it is so refreshing to watch the families/children out in the field doing their best to catch one. It is not easy!

A Prairie Walk at Emerald Acres

by Mary Jo Ostenberg



On a bright, sunny and simmering July morning Loess Hills MMN chapter members Dan McCann, Larry Bunse, Mort Nelson, Walt and Ruth Hibarger, Brent Galliard and myself led by Tom Nagel, retired MDC and Dr. John Rushin, retired MWSU met for a slow hike on Emerald Acres owned and loving restored by fellow chapter member Ross Shuman and his wife Mary. Some of you may remember Ross helping out with the new member classes where he shared his humorous and touching account of this project which is still ongoing today. We even got to see the walnut tree that he quite inadvertently tried to climb with his tractor.

Yes, it was hot but a nice breeze and a wonderful panorama of blooming native grasses and wildflowers made for a wonderful outing. Dr. Rushin added to the experience with his excellent identification and some interesting tidbits about these beauties. We spied Blue False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and Wild Quinine (*Parthenium integrifolium*). Parthenium, Greek from Parthenos 'virgin' for the unusual fact that the disk flowers are sterile (ref. Missouri Wildflowers by Edgar Denison). We found Shrubby St. John's Wort (*Hypericum prolificum*) and Compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*). Dr. Rushin pointed out the lower leaves of the compass plant turn their edges toward north and south in full sun. Also the upper stems contain a gummy substance used by Native Americans as chewing gum. We also found Gray-headed, Purple, and Pale Purple Coneflowers (*Ratibida pinnata*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Echinacea pallida*). Pale Purple Coneflower is a personal favorite. The lovely strap like ray flowers remind me of a ballerina tutu dancing in the wind.

We also saw Brown Eyed Susan, Partridge Pea, Ox-eye, Yellow Sweet Clover, Butterfly Weed, Wing Stem, Cup Plant Wild Sienna, Blazing Star, Beggar's Lice, and Illinois Bundle. WOW! After around two hours we were starting to feel the heat and made out way back to the 'farm house'. In addition to the restoration of the land to pollinator heaven, Ross and Mary have restored the original farm house to a beautiful, inviting relic of another time worthy of their feature in the publication, American Home. Mary was ready for us with delicious cold salads, beverages, her homemade molasses cookies and her unforgettable cheese pie. That and the conversation was a fitting end to a wonder morning.

Thanks to Ross and Mary and we hope you'll welcome us once again to your beautiful Emerald Acres next July.

Field Trip to Peck Ranch (bloopers included)

by Suzanne Rush

On Friday, September 20, 2019, twelve members of Loess Hills Missouri Master Naturalist group and spouses drove to Eminence, Mo in the heart of the Ozarks. The next morning we met at Peck Ranch Conservation Area where MDC's Skyler Bockman and Colton Zirkle led us on an extensive tour of MDC's efforts at re-establishing elk populations in Missouri.



Loess Hills Chapter Members at Peck Ranch

Peck Ranch's history began prior to WWI when an investor, George Peck, purchased 19,000 acres where the Mid-Continent Iron Company was established for the extracting and smelting of iron ore. Peck's plan was to clear-cut the land to provide 100 cords of timber per day to fire the smelter's blast furnaces. When WWI came along, their work force was depleted and much of the remaining population of the area was wiped out by the flu epidemic. The land was of little use in its degraded state. In 1945 MDC began purchasing land to establish Peck Ranch Conservation Area and focused on wild turkey and white tail deer re-establishment. This was possible through funds provided in part by the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. The habitat has been restored through years of diverse management techniques.

There is little written or physical evidence of early presence of elk in Missouri except through the writings in the 1800s of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and an elk antler found in a gravel bar that had survived from the late 1800s.

By 2010 MDC had Peck Ranch CA ready for elk reintroduction. The Eastern Elk, a smaller species than the Rocky Mountain Elk were brought from the Appalachia area of Kentucky. That first year 30 elk were brought. When they arrived, they were quarantined in a coral for a period of time. They received shots, ear tags, and some were collared. Not all survived that first year. For the next two years about the same number were brought from Kentucky, totaling 108. Of the 108, only 81 survived. One of those years we had a bad drought, and although there were ponds on site, these displaced elk were not yet orientated to their new environment. Unable to find water, some did not survive. The current population is 165: 45 bulls and 120 cows and calves. Their goal was to reach 200 by 2020. They also wanted to show at least a 10% growth rate, which they have achieved. The final goal is to reach a herd of 500 and encourage visitors to the area. MDC has announced the first hunting season for elk will be in 2020. Ten permits will be given out in a draw system.

MDC continually monitors their elk to provide them the best care possible. One interesting device they use is a vaginal implant that sends a signal when and where a calf is dropped. They carefully monitor the calving rate. The ideal herd should have a 1 bull to 4 cow ratio. The elk have 25,000 acres to roam including private lands through a cost/share cooperation between MDC and surrounding land owners. As with Tumbling Creek Cave, we were made aware public cooperation plays an important part in the success of the MDC's work. Besides their elk efforts, Peck Ranch also has in place a system for trapping and eliminating feral hogs on the property. Their control is a challenge in the area. Hogs are such prolific reproducers that eliminating 70% of them is required to achieve a stable population.

Skyler and Colton went above and beyond to share so much information with us, even took us on gravel roads behind locked gates to see areas that are not open to the public, including the historic coral area. Instead of a 2 hour tour as scheduled, we had 4 hours in the morning. Because we saw only a few cows, Skyler wanted to meet with us

again at 6:30 for another hour and a half to drive the back roads again in search of a bull. We saw only a spike elk some more cows, and lots of deer, but no one was disappointed, as we had learned so much and been treated with such care.



Holding pens used in initial elk introduction

In spite of all the planning, we had our share of bloopers. First, on Friday, I was the navigator for our small caravan. Seems like I missed our turn onto Hwy 60 and didn't realize it until we were almost to Branson. A 6 hour trip turned into 8 hours. On Saturday, after our morning tour of Peck Ranch 12 of us decided to grab a quick hamburger at the local café before heading out to Alley Spring and other sites. Our quick lunch took 2 hours! The mileage to Blue Spring was off by 2 miles, causing several unsuccessful attempts to get there. I should have warned everyone that my motto is "I'm not lost. I'm just exploring." At Alley Spring the sun was shining brightly when we began our hike around the spring. Half way around the sky opened up and soaked us sufficiently. And on Saturday evening, we unwittingly headed out on our elk tour before Larry and Kathy arrived, leaving them behind. Surely Sunday morning we could get up and head out without incident. That was not to be. When we stopped to buy ice for our cooler about an hour away, we realized none of the leftover food was in it. So, as you can see, we had a great trip to Peck Ranch and much of the rest was a "comedy of errors".