



Loess Hills Chapter Missouri Master Naturalist™

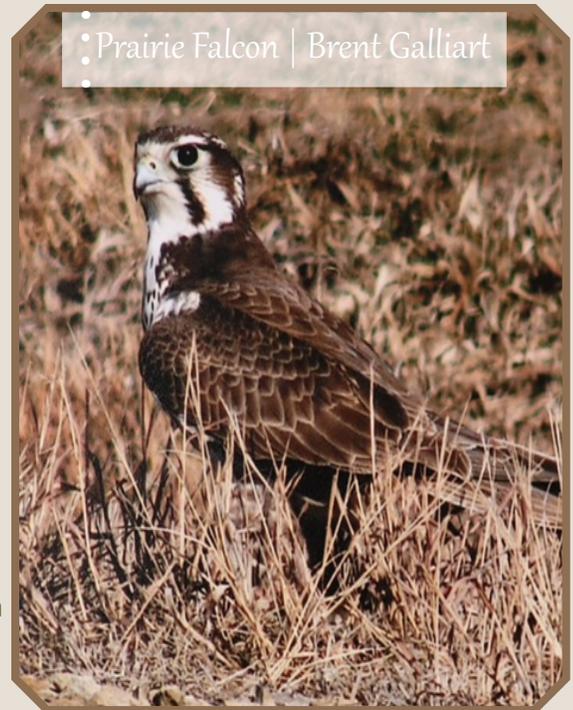


Birds Abound at Midland Empire Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count

By: Brent Gallart

On December 18th, Midland Empire Audubon Society of Saint Joseph, MO held its annual Christmas Bird Count (since 1963). The thirteen-mile diameter count circle is centered on the Krug Park flagpole and covers all of Saint Joseph and the outlying area. Several groups are responsible for counting their assigned area within the circle. We also have people within the circle who count birds at their feeders. Three members of our MMN Chapter participated. Myself, Larry Bunse and Catherine Whitney-Vuchetich.

The count started at daybreak with a temperature of 26 degrees. The norm for most counts, but much cooler than what we had been experiencing. Catherine birded Mark Youngdahl Conservation Area. She encountered a Red-shouldered Hawk that frequents the area. I partnered with Larry Bunse and Jay McGhee to count birds within the confines of the Rosecrans Airport area. I started out on my own while Jay and Larry covered the area west of the airport. I started my day by locating the waterfowl on the oxbow lake with my spotting scope-- mostly Canada and Cackling Geese. Did get Golden Eyes and a female Bufflehead Duck. Later after the sun came out, I went to an area on the south end that once was a sanitary landfill. This brushy area proved to be excellent habitat for native sparrows.



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Traveling from Wetlands to Wildland Fires

**Missouri Master Naturalist Partner Profile:
Nicole Horne, Visitor Services Specialist, LBNWR**

By: Kathy Bunse



Summer is vacation season. But in the drought-stricken western United States, it's also fire season. Firefighters travel from all over the country to help battle wildfires. Park Ranger Nicole Horne made the trip during the summers of 2020 and 2021.

Ms. Horne is stationed at Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge in Holt County, Missouri. She is one of seven U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees who maintain the refuge's 7,400 acres of wetland, grassland and forest. As Visitor Services Specialist, or "Park Ranger," her

responsibilities include planning public events, recruiting and coordinating volunteers and providing environmental education. During 2020 and 2021, due to COVID-19, public events and outreach activities were canceled, leaving her more available for other jobs.

When an opportunity to use her fire training arose, she was given permission by her supervisor to go. "The supervisors I have worked with want their employees to be well rounded," Horne stated.

She joined an engine crew of other Midwesterners assigned to Elko, Nevada during 2020. They were deployed for 18 days,

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cont'd.....bird count

I spotted dozens of Tree and Song Sparrows. Also managed to get white-crowned, white-throated and swamp Sparrows.

On the way back to the SUV, I took a different path to check an isolated area on the old river channel (sandy beach) and found two Killdeer. Got them there a couple years ago, so I knew they could be there again. Later in the morning I joined up with Larry because Jay had to leave early and went to his area to help him finish counting. On the way we saw a large flock of Meadowlarks. Because the clouds had rolled in and the wind picked up, we were not able to hear their call to separate the two species (Eastern and Western look nearly identical). So, it is recorded as a Meadowlark species.

Further down the road next to the airport, we saw a male Northern Harrier working the area. Quite a treat because you see the brown females and immatures ninety percent of the time. The male is gray on top and white underneath and is often referred to by birders as the gray ghost because you rarely see them in the field. Spotted an American Kestrel perching on a chain-linked fence post through my scope. The plumage on this bird is quite beautiful and needs to be seen up close to be appreciated. This small falcon often bobs its tail while perched, a dead giveaway to its identity.

On the way back, following the airport fence line on the outer road, we spotted a large flock of birds spiraling up and down. I knew they had to be Horned Lark or Lapland Longspurs (winter visitor). So, we waited till they landed on the turf near the runway, and I located them with my spotting scope. Saw several Lapland Longspurs (estimated 100) with a few Horned Lark. Then lo and behold we see a large bird with pointed wings stalking the birds we just spied upon. Then it quickly disappeared. I looked down the fence line and spotted a bird of prey perched on a fence post some 75 yards away. Reached into my vehicle for the spotting scope and shared a good look with Larry. Saw the head and breast well. The light mustache (much narrower than that of the Peregrine Falcon) with bright white area behind the eye were telltale characteristics of a Prairie Falcon. Nice find for the count!

After a late lunch in Elwood, Kansas at a local Mexican restaurant, we headed out again to cover some ground north of Dupree Conservation Area. The tem-

perature still remained around twenty-six degrees with the cloud cover, but the wind (10-15 mph) had picked up. The wind chill was bitter because we were exposed when we walked on the levy but we knew we would get out of wind soon once we reached our destination. On the way I heard some heavy pecking, followed by the call of a Pileated Woodpecker. Larry got on to them (a pair) with his binoculars and we watched for a minute or two while they jostled and carried on. You forget the cold when nature puts on a show.

Later we would get off the levy and seek out birds in the riparian area where birds sought shelter out of the wind. I shared a Bald Eagle nest with Larry that has been there as long as I have done the area count. An adult Bald Eagle was nearby. We identified a White-crowned Sparrow and a Ruby Crown Kinglet by song by comparing what we heard with the apps on his phone.

On the way back, we found another flock of birds that we checked out and were able to find a Fox Sparrow in the group. Nearing 4 p.m. we headed back to the north end of the runway at the airport for a possible sighting of a Short-eared Owl feeding at dusk. Not this time. We observed two a couple years ago. You do not quit too early because I have gotten several good species in the later hours. Our daylight waned so we headed back to Larry's pick-up truck, and I thanked him for his patience and his help. We updated our mileage and walking time for the event. Then I suggested we could go to midnight if he wanted. Larry says his wife is expecting him home. Go figure! I think he took me seriously! We had enough and were tired.

For me every bird count has been a memorable experience, and I encourage other Master Naturalists to join the count. No experience required. Extra ears and eyes are really helpful. You do not have to stay all day. Several people have smaller areas and are done sooner. This is a great opportunity for you to hang out with experienced birders for a day. The weather can be an issue, but we are experiencing milder weather on many CBCs in recent times. We generally follow the count with supper at a local restaurant followed by a tally of the birds. The tally rally dinner was cancelled this year due to the pandemic. If you're interested in helping out with future counts get with me, and we will include you.

Snowy Owl Spotted in NWMO!



Left: A snowy owl hunts in an ag field near Cosby Right: A snowy owl perches on a utility pole on Jan. 10, 2022 By: Larry Bunse



Chapter Participates in 26th Annual Smithville Eagle Days

By Gerry Crawford

2022 was the 26th year for the Smithville Eagle Days held on January 8 and 9 at the Paradise Point Golf Course Clubhouse, with a live eagle viewing site at W boat ramp.

Attendance at this year's event was about 800 at the club house, which was significantly lower than prior shows, possibly due to Covid concerns. Nevertheless it was a great event with enthusiastic attendees interested to see the live eagle programs and other nature-related exhibits.

The annual event is sponsored by the Smithville United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Clay County Parks, and the Missouri Department of Conservation and included several other exhibitors. Derek Dorsey and Jaime Picken, USACE Park Rangers, coordinated the event along with Aaron Kagay and staff of Clay County Parks. Operation Wildlife of Overland Park, KS hosted the live eagle show; CCP provided an exhibit with some nature displays and live mammals and reptiles from the Nature Center; Friends of the Lakeside Nature Center at Swope Park brought live birds; and Wings of Love had a live Eurasian Eagle Owl exhibit.



Multiple live eagle shows were educational and entertaining with a vent to the kids in attendance. Bill Whinery on Saturday, Gary Crain on Sunday and Rick both days, along with Frank a rehabbed adult Bald Eagle and an American Kestrel, delivered programs to present much information about eagles and other raptors such as hawks and falcons. These folks travel many times a year to various locations to educate people about our national symbol and do it totally as volunteers. Most rehab facilities, such as those represented here, rely a great deal on volunteers to maintain their operations, and also on financial donations by the public. Both are open to new volunteers and just those who want to visit and see their good work. They annually take in thousands of nature's injured or sick creatures to treat and hopefully release back into their natural habitats.

There was also a live wild eagle viewing site at W boat ramp on the lake. USACE, MDC, and LHMMN members were there, with spotting scopes, to mentor and talk eagle with the public, as well as other wildlife topics. During the preceding week eagles were near totally absent at the viewing site. Luckily, on Friday, a few birds were sighted, with a reasonable presence of 4 to 6 on Saturday and 18 at times on Sunday. I think those birds held out till they could make a saving appearance on the weekend.

Our LHMMN Chapter had a recruitment table at the clubhouse displaying our banner and picture boards and brochures to promote the MMN program and our chapter. Members' efforts resulted in 8 or 9 prospects for the training program to become new members.



Thanks and kudos to: Larry and Kathy Bunse; Debbie Butterfield; Walt and Ruth Hibarger; Hayley Howard; Janet Mason; Jennifer Morris; Ginger Turner; Lynn Tushaus; and Bruce Windsor for all their good efforts and for excellent presentations to those interested in the MMN program and particularly the LHMMN Chapter.

Loess Hills MMN (L-R): Ginger Turner, Walt and Ruth Hibarger, Bruce Windsor, Larry and Kathy Bunse and Gerry Crawford

Connections

By: Bob Spurgat, Chapter President

For all of us, we have connections to something or someone, whether it's family, work, community or a vast array of things that affect our lives directly or indirectly. For master naturalists we feel connected to "nature". Merriam-Webster defines "nature" as (among other things) "the beauties of natural scenery or environment." We have a desire to understand the connectiveness of the various elements in nature and how they work to support and enrich each other. Plants and animals, insects and birds, land and sea, air and light, and people. All work together in a biological way to sustain life on our planet.

Unfortunately, in our modern, developing world, we tend to use up these natural resources faster than they can be replenished. This takes the form of over-lumbering and loss of habitat, dams on rivers that impede the migration and reproduction of fish, uncontrolled harvest of birds and animals, use of chemicals and antibiotics in agriculture, and a host of other issues that upset the balance of nature.

The concept of "conservation," a relatively recent idea in the grand scheme of things, is an attempt to restore balance among the various elements of nature. As naturalists/conservationists we contribute to this balance by the many projects we do. These include distributing tree saplings on Arbor Day, helping young children build feeders and bird houses at Wings Over Weston, restoring native plants at the John Rushin Prairie, connecting people with migratory birds on Eagle Days at Loess Bluffs NWR and Smithville Lake, citizen science projects like Bumble Bee Watch, and even connecting with our Native American friends who are doing outstanding restoration work on Kansas lands.

At a recent webinar hosted by the

Osage Trails Chapter, Sarah Parker Pauley, Director, MDC, pointed out the importance of connecting people to nature. In order to do this we must take care of nature and, in so doing, we will maintain the public trust. At the state level pollinators are receiving attention with restoration efforts in the lab for the Regal Fritillary. Combined with habitat restoration, transporting Ruffed Grouse from Wisconsin and Brown-headed nuthatch from Arkansas to Missouri has used a direct approach to species restoration. The success stories of elk and black bear re-introduction to the state are almost legendary! Controlling or eliminating invasive plant and animal species from the environment is on-going.

At the Federal level, Senator Blunt is co-sponsoring the Recovering American Wildlife Act (RAW), to the tune of \$1.2 bil. This will have the 3-fold objective of supporting habitat restoration, achieve a higher quality of life and help to meet the economic needs of states.

Although, individually, our part in resource restoration is relatively small, collectively, our contribution is large. We educate others by our actions. We stay connected. Pass it on!

RECOVERING AMERICAN WILDLIFE ACT

- ☼ House Bill (H.R. 2773) for \$1.39 billion in annual funding to recover wildlife species at risk.
- ☼ 15 percent of resources would go toward recovering threatened or endangered species.
- ☼ \$97.5 million annually to Tribal Nations for proactive wildlife conservation efforts on tens of millions of acres of land.

For more info, visit: <https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Wildlife-Conservation/Policy/Recovering-American-Wildlife-Act>

by the numbers

Member News

Changing of the Guard: Loess Hills Votes in New Officers



At the December meeting, new officers were voted in. Former President Bruce Windsor hands the gavel over to incoming President Bob Spurgat during the last meeting of 2021. Janet Mason will remain secretary and Larry Bunse replaces Dennis Rush as vice president. Not pictured: Treasurer Tom Aldrich



Name That Bloom!

Use the following clues to name that bloom!

1. This psychedelic-looking plant growth is actually induced by the secretions of the grubs of a tiny gall wasp.
2. This orchid blooms August–November and has a "lily of the valley" fragrance.



September answers

1. Which of the nine *Rudbeckia* species could this be? black-eyed susan
2. In the bellflower family, these tubular flowers bloom August to October. great blue lobelia
3. This nonwoody plant smells just like maple syrup! rabbit tobacco

cont'd.....wetlands to wildfires

4 days of travel and 14 days of fire duty. During this 2-week period, called a roll, they assisted local units in controlling 4 existing wildland fires and responding to new starts.

In 2021, Park Ranger Horne worked at sites near Miles City, Montana and in Northern California. At Miles City, her engine crew worked on the Richard Springs fire (171,130 acres) and concentrated on new starts. Primary causes of fire in this area are lightning strikes. Horne was a public information officer in Northern California. She provided current information to communities near wildfires, via public meetings, display boards at local businesses and communication with the media, including Facebook.

Since she's a member of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Horne works on land owned by the federal government. Out West, crews she worked with fought fires in areas controlled by the Department of the Interior (BLM land) and the Department of Agriculture (national forest land). However, if fires on public land advance toward private land, these crews don't hesitate to help landowners prepare their property.

When asked to describe a day of firefighting, she responded, "On an engine crew, we meet at 6:30 for the morning briefing. We get a situation report and weather information. Afterward, we do an engine check and inventory our gear. Then, we receive our staging assignment. Since fires usually start in late afternoon or early evening, we might not be needed until later. In that case, we'll do a fitness activity or some training until we get a call. While on a fire, we might be putting out active flame or mopping up all day or night."

Air quality surrounding a fire site is poor. Conditions are hazardous and the work is strenuous. Therefore, protecting the health and safety of firefighters is extremely important. Their PPE includes a helmet, gloves, leather boots, fire resistant shirt and pants, glasses, ear plugs, eye protection and a bandana or gator mask. A fire shelter, carried on a backpack, is essential line gear when confronted with a fast-moving fire. Ms. Horne says, "It's your last resort. We take an annual refresher course and practice using them. The goal is to never have to use them, but we want to be prepared for the worst." A rotation schedule also promotes safety. "We typically work a minimum of 16-hour shifts on a fire. New crews replace those on duty so they can rest," she added.

Crews sometimes do some rough camping while working on a fire. Mopping up involves cutting out tree stumps and putting out smoldering areas near unburned material so the fire doesn't re-ignite and spread. Crews rely on snacks, meals ready to eat and other supplies they can carry in their backpacks or on their equipment. In some circumstances, meals, wa-



ter and supplies will be delivered via helicopter to those remote locations. For long-lasting project fires, a large camp with amenities will be set up in a local area, such as a park. A lot of crews will stay in a spike camp, simply laying their sleeping bag under the stars in a safe area near the fire.

Finding water to refill tanker trucks can be a problem. Firefighters may need to drive around looking for a water source. If a pond or stream is on private property, they must ask the landowner for permission to draw water. Streams in this area are shallow, making it difficult to pump water into the tank.

While growing up in Wisconsin, Nicole developed an interest in protecting natural resources. Her father, Jim, was a conservation agent. Her mother, Katie, worked in fire suppression. She drove a fire engine part time, while raising Nicole and her brother.

During her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, Horne earned her FFT2 fire certification. Her training qualified her to participate in prescribed burns as well as fire suppression. Prescribed burns are used to meet management objectives in a variety of habitats such as prairie, grassland and forest ecosystems.

She continues to develop her wildland fire skills by completing various task books. To complete a task book, a firefighter gets training and experience in performing specific skills needed on the fire line. After completing the training and experience requirements, a firefighter is qualified to perform this task on the fire line. Nicole is familiar with using chainsaws, operating equipment and portable pumps, working on the fire line and with the public, among many other duties.

Friends and family support Ms. Horne's firefighting endeavors. "Of course, my parents are concerned for my safety. But, because of their background, they understand. My mom says that she lives vicariously through me. I tell them no news is good news if they call and can't reach me. As soon as I get back to cell service I respond. Friends take care of my house and animals when I'm gone."

Park Ranger Horne, who holds a degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management, offers this advice to young women considering a career in environmental science:

"The natural resources field is complex and diverse. The opportunities are endless. Find out how skills that interest you can fit into this field. Volunteer in areas you might be interested in working. Don't be afraid to try new things."

She also suggests reaching out to professionals and researching specific educational requirements. "Don't hesitate to ask for advice. Most people are excited to talk about their job and recruit new people."

Her final piece of advice is, "You are capable of anything you put your mind to. You are strong and can be successful in any career you choose."

Missouri Master Naturalist 2022 Certification Pin

Grass Pink

Calopogon tuberosus

Orchid Family (Orchidaceae)



Description

Grass pink genus name is derived from the Greek word for “beautiful beard,” and the species name is Latin for “tuberous.” The unbranched stem grows to 27 inches tall. A single grass-like leaf occurs near the base of the central stem. There are usually one to two short sheaths just above the corm. The leaf is usually much shorter than the inflorescence. The structure of the flower for this orchid is highly unusual because its lip is located at the top rather than the bottom, causing the flower to appear upside down (even though it is right side up).

Bloom

The blooming period occurs from June to early July, lasting about 3–4 weeks. The slender stem ends in a loose spike-like raceme of 3–10 showy flowers that range from 1–2 1/2 inches across. Flowers are rose-pink to orchid with deeper colored veining in the sepals and petals and gold and white beards on their tips. The sepals and petals spread outward exposing the anther column, which is the same color. The sepals are sharply pointed, the two lateral ones are sickle-shaped and the lower one is lance-shaped. The two lateral petals are also sickle-shaped though not as sharply pointed as the sepals. The flowers bloom sequentially from bottom to top of the floral spike and are sweetly fragrant. They give way to fat, green pods packed with thousands of seeds maturing in late summer.

Habitat and Distribution

This delicate orchid occurs in fens (calcareous wet meadows) and occasionally in moist open woods. Its population is scattered in counties of the Lower Ozark and St. Francois Mountain sections of the Ozark Natural Division in the southeastern portion of Missouri. A similar species, *Calopogon oklahomensis* is found in Tallgrass prairie remnants in the Osage Plains and Springfield Plateau regions at Taberville and Diamond Grove Prairies

Status

Both the grass pink, also commonly called swamp pink, and *C. oklahomensis*, are listed as species of conservation concern.

Faunal Associations

Bumblebees and other large, long-tongued bees are the primary pollinators of the flowers. Halictid bees, flies, butterflies, skippers, and beetles also visit the flowers occasionally, but they are unlikely to be effective at cross-pollination. Neither nectar nor accessible pollen are available to such flower-visiting insects. Instead, they are lured by deception to land on the showy flowers. They are often attracted to the colorful pseudo-stamens on the lips of the flower. If the visiting insect has sufficient weight, the hinged lip of the flower collapses onto its exposed reproductive column, attaching pollinia to the back of the insect. When the same insect visits the next flower, the same process can deposit the pollinia, enabling cross-pollination to occur. *Information provided by MDC*