

Promoting Native Plants for Natural Landscapes.

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All articles for the November 2018 newsletter, must be submitted to: Constance@wildonesrrvc.org by November 23, 2018.

*Member Potluck and Seed Exchange
Thursday, November 15, 2018*

NOTE: Different location Unitarian Universalist Church of Rockford
4848 Turner Street, Rockford, 61107
NOTE: Different time 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

November has always been the time for our chapter's annual potluck (members only, i.e. member plus partner, significant other, child, friend, etc.), annual report from the board, and seed exchange. Our president will present the annual report. This will be a wonderful celebration of the various ways we have positively impacted our community and our environment throughout the year. The potluck is also a great time to reconnect with longer-standing members, as well as to get to know our newer members. Even if you haven't attended any meetings or events this year, you are warmly invited to join us at the potluck.

Please note the **different location**. The UU Church is near the intersection of Alpine Road and East State Street in Rockford. Also note the **different time!** Come at 6:00 p.m. (or as close to that for working folks as you can) so we'll have time to eat, listen to the board report, and enjoy the program. *Bring your own table service (eating utensils, silverware, cups, and napkins) and a dish to pass (salad, vegetable, or dessert).* If you are concerned about being environmentally friendly, consider bringing table service items that are reusable, rather than disposable items that will go to the landfill. Lasagna (both meat and meatless) and drinks will be provided.

Bring seeds that you have collected from natives in your yard or landscape project to share during the exchange. Please put them in envelopes or baggies labeled with common name, scientific name (if you know it), and place of origin (e.g., Winnebago County, Wild Ones plant sale, or other source), and your name, in case anyone has questions (such as "how does the plant grow?"). Seeds do not need to be cleaned and ready for planting. For newer members: We always have lots of seeds, and even if you are new to this and don't have any seeds to share, you are still welcome to go home with some seeds. We want to share, as this increases the chances of more and more native plants growing in our communities. **Anyone may take seeds, and you do not have to bring seeds in order to take seeds!**

If you are not a member yet, this is a great time to join and participate in one of the fun member benefits. Come help us celebrate another successful year of introducing the community to the benefits and joys of native landscaping!

This program is for Wild Ones members only.
Call (779) 537.8939 for more information..

Message from the President Constance McCarthy



Constance McCarthy
photo by Tim Lewis

I can't believe that another year has flown by so quickly! A few thoughts to share here in my last column of the year (both our newsletter and our monthly educational programs take the month off every December).

I sincerely hope that you will consider joining us at the annual potluck and seed exchange later this month. Taking the place of an educational program

at Rock Valley College and starting an hour earlier than our usual monthly meetings, this will surely be a great evening. Let me put to rest a few things that might be pulling you towards not attending.

Some folks think that this won't be an event for them if they haven't attended any of our monthly programs at Rock Valley College in 2018. That really makes not one bit of difference. We are always happy to see our members at events, whether they attend every month or hardly ever. And if you are a newer member and hesitate about coming to a social event where you don't know anyone, we are a friendly and welcoming bunch! This is a perfect chance to get to know other chapter members, and neither the event nor the chapter in general, is at all clique-ish.

And please don't be deterred from attending just because you have no seeds to share in the exchange. Every year we have so much seed that there is always some left over at the end of the evening. Some of our members have expansive

natural landscapes on their property, or work on large restoration projects, so there is no shortage of seed. If you haven't attended the potluck before, be prepared to see several tables piled high with seeds, waiting to find a new home in your home garden or restoration project. Experienced members will be hanging around, ready to offer planting advice.

I truly look forward to seeing many familiar faces, along with plenty of newer members, at the potluck and seed exchange. And if you have a friend who would like to join the chapter that evening, our membership coordinator will be present and happy to assist.



New member Sue Hulten, at Midway Village with the mountain of Canada thistle that she removed from the native prairie on a work day.

Photo by Sallie Krebs

Board of Directors in Action Cathy Johnson, Secretary

Highlights of activities of the Wild Ones Rock River Valley Chapter Board of Directors, as discussed at the October 11, 2018 meeting, include the following.

- The chapter's annual tree and shrub went well. Thanks to all volunteers who helped coordinate and carry out that event.
- Most board and coordinator positions have been filled and annual board election forms will be distributed soon. Positions still to be filled are: volunteer coordinator, mentor coordinator, and booth coordinator (to share the task with Tim Lewis, the current coordinator).
- Another excellent year of Wild Ones programs concluded this month with a presentation on the tall grass prairie. In November, the members-only potluck and seed exchange will bring to a close gatherings of our chapter for 2018.

October Meeting Recap Ellen Rathbone

The Tallgrass Prairie: An Introduction



Cindy Crosby

Photo by Tim Lewis

Cindy Crosby, the speaker at October's Wild Ones meeting, began her talk with a statement that no one could refute: she is passionate about prairies.

Having grown up in Tennessee, Cindy didn't come to Illinois until she was an adult. She and her husband moved to the greater Chicago area, and at first, it was not

appealing. So she set out to see what she could learn about her new home. Her background was as an independent book seller, but she found a new passion when she discovered the Schulenburg Prairie at the Morton Arboretum. The rest, as they say, is history.

Cindy's presentation was exactly as advertised on the tin: an introduction to the tallgrass prairie, the one-time dominant ecosystem of this region. When the first European settlers started moving westward, they were less than pleased by what they saw here, in what became known as the Midwest. These were people used to the forests of western Europe and the eastern United States. What they saw before them was acres and acres and acres of grasslands. Some areas were savannas, which had a few trees, and in the northern part of the state there were stands of forest, but for the most part, the land was flat and open...and - as far as they were concerned - not of much use.

Cindy had everyone stand up. "If you were the state of Illinois," she said, "from your head to your knees you were prairie. That's 65-66% of the state. How much do you think still exists today - of high quality prairie that was never plowed or developed?" Members of the audience called out numbers and body parts. "Ten percent." "Head." "Finger." "Finger-nail." "One percent."

Her answer: the lint in your bellybutton.

Today it is estimated that of all the thousands of acres that once existed, there remain a mere 2,300 acres of tallgrass prairie in their original state. What happened?

Perhaps most of you already know the story. To those early settlers, trees meant good soil. Good soil was necessary for farming - and farming was necessary for survival. The deep, tough roots of these prairie plants made tilling nearly impossible. It wasn't until John Deere came along in 1838 with his new fangled steel plow blade that the prairies could finally be tamed.

But at what cost?

We returned once again to the basics: what is a prairie. The word prairie comes to us from the French, and it means meadow. Today a prairie is described as a community of specific plants, animals, insects, soils that all work together. Prairies are formed by fire, are kept healthy by fire, and are totally adapted to fire. The deep roots of the prairie plants are not only an adaptation to fire (the whole plant above may be burned up by a passing blaze, but the roots below keep the plant alive and ready to resprout the next season), but also give the plants an advantage during times of drought.

The tallgrass prairie is also a product of the region's climate. With an average rainfall of approximately 40 inches per year, combined with the very rich soil (made from centuries of decomposing roots, stems, and leaves), the plants are able to grow to great heights. As you move further westward, the rainfall decreases, the tallgrass becomes medium grass, and eventually you have shortgrass prairie over in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains (where it is very, very dry).

The original soils were both rich and sticky - and full of dense roots. This is why the settlers had so much difficulty transforming the land into rows of corn, wheat, and other crops. Their existing tools couldn't cut through the dense sod, and when they were successful, the soil clung to the plows like a tick on a dog. But once John Deere's new plow was in play, the settlers made short of work of conquering the land; in a mere 70 years, they had almost completely eliminated the tallgrass prairie.

Cindy's animated talk was dotted with quotes read by members of the audience, each representing

August Meeting Recap (cont'd)



Ellen Rathbone introducing Cindy

photo by Sallie Krebs

Potawatomie. For them the prairie was not only home, but also the grocery store and the pharmacy.

To drive this point home, Cindy's highlighted some of the grasses and forbs that many of us in Wild Ones know quite well: prairie dock, compass plant and cup plant (the Silph Sisters); gray-headed coneflower (wonderful fodder for livestock); prairie smoke (if you want to convert your neighbors into prairie plant lovers, put this in your yard, Cindy suggested); big bluestem; common milkweed and butterfly weed; white wild indigo; bee balm; pale purple coneflower; rattlesnake master (which has nothing to do with snakes of any sort); switch grass; and cardinal flower.

But, as stated previously, prairies are more than just their plants, just their soils. This complex ecosystem includes many animals, including bison, which have fairly recently been proven to be vital to a healthy, balanced prairie. Cindy spends much of her time as a steward at Nachusa Grasslands, and has seen firsthand how the bison have helped restore the ecosystem there. In fact, the bison have proven to be so successful that the managers there are dividing the herd and sending them to other grassland preserves...kind of like how we divide our plants and share them with friends and neighbors. And the herd at Nachusa is highly desirable because the animals are genetically pure (i.e., not interbred with cattle), which is not common for most bison today.

a person from history. One was John Deere extolling the virtues of his plow, and another was Dancing Moon, who represented the views of the indigenous peoples who once called these lands home: the Fox, the Sauk, and the

Cindy stressed to the audience that we need people to maintain, burn, and collect/plant seeds in order to keep our prairies moving forward. "Remnants are not replaceable," she said. No matter how much we do, we can never recreate those original ecosystems. We can establish new grasslands/prairies, but they will never be what once was, simply because those historic landscapes were formed over centuries and had developed in situ with the soils, insects, and plants that survived from year to year. We can convert agricultural land back to grassland, and we can burn and monitor, and even bring back bison, but our best efforts today still cannot 100% replicate Mother Nature.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Cindy encouraged members to get involved - help at local prairie restoration projects, or add native plants to our gardens/yards at home.

Cindy concluded with a Barry Lopez quote, from his book *Arctic Dreams*: "What every culture must eventually decide, actively debate and decide, is what of all that surrounds it, tangible and intangible, it will dismantle and turn into material wealth. And what of its cultural wealth, from the tradition of finding peace in the vision of an undisturbed hillside to a knowledge of how to finance a corporate merger, it will fight to preserve."

The take-home message of this presentation: our prairie ecosystems are valuable - beyond tourism, beyond agriculture. Without them, we stand to lose an incredible amount of diversity, from flowers like the rough white lettuce and the prairie fringed orchid, to bees like the rusty-patched bumblebee, and birds, so many birds - the meadowlarks, bobolinks, dickcissels, and more. Prairies are important. Build your passion for them and help protect them!



Cindy Crosby with Anita Johnson

photo by Tim Lewis

Membership Update Sallie Krebs, Membership Coordinator

A membership e-form and our membership brochure describing the benefits of membership are both available on the chapter website (www.wildonesrrvc.org). Click on Join/Renew under the Membership tab. You can renew (or join) with any major credit card through PayPal (no PayPal account required) by using our website. We appreciate your support!!

219 memberships as of October 23, 2018

Special thanks to our members who made contributions above the basic \$40 dues!

Joe Hemlock, Rockford
Kent & Kathy Lawrence, Oregon

Welcome to our returning member!

Sue Hulten, Rockford
Eve Kirk, Rockford

New members are identified with a green ribbon on their meeting name badges. Please introduce yourself to them and help us welcome all new members to our great chapter!

72 attended the October meeting, including at least 6 guests

A big thank you to our October meeting volunteers!

Greeters: Cecilia Coles, Kay Blair

Refreshments: Anita Johnson, Kim Lowman
Vollmer, Constance McCarthy

AV/Sound Equipment: Bob Arevalo

Meeting Recap: Ellen Rathbone

Photographer: Sallie Krebs, Tim Lewis

Library Assistants: Cathy Johnson

Merchandise: Cynthia Chmell

It is preferred that membership renewals be sent directly to the chapter for quicker processing and to avoid delays in receiving your chapter newsletter. Remember that your dues include membership in both National Wild Ones and our chapter. Please use the address below:

Sallie Krebs
Wild Ones Rock River Valley
7492 Renfro Rd., Cherry Valley, IL 61016

Your expiration date is on your chapter newsletter above your name on the label. You will be mailed a renewal reminder from the chapter two months prior to your expiration date with a completed membership form and return envelope for your convenience.

A portion of all dues paid is returned to the chapter by National Wild Ones to support our chapter activities. National Wild Ones provides liability insurance for our meetings and events. All dues and donations are fully tax deductible.

Please send address and email address changes to the Membership Coordinator: Sallie Krebs Email: membership@wildonesrrvc.org or call (815) 540-4730 if you have any questions about membership.

Wild Ones Annual Memberships:
Household \$40, Limited Income/Full-Time Student \$25, Affiliate Non-Profit Organization \$90, Business \$250.

Thank you for your continuing support!



2018 Chapter Programs and Events

November 15 Member Pot Luck, Seed Exchange
6:00 p.m. & Annual Meeting Members only
Church of Rockford

Unitarian Universalist
4848 Turner Street
Rockford, IL 61107

December No Meeting-Happy Holidays!

Unless noted, programs are free and open to the public. Programs are subject to change.
For more information, contact Lisa Johnson at (779) 537.8939



NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES

ROCK RIVER VALLEY

ROCK RIVER VALLEY CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

c/o Pambi Camacho
1643 N. Alpine Rd., Suite 104
PMB 233
Rockford, IL 61107

Don't become extinct!

If the expiration date on the mailing label is 11/1/2018, this is your last chapter newsletter and you have received your last *Wild Ones Journal* until you renew your membership. National Wild Ones drops expired memberships the first week of the expiration month, so please don't be late! See the *Membership Update* for renewal information.

Mail your renewal to:

Sallie Krebs
Wild Ones Rock River Valley
7492 Renfro Rd.
Cherry Valley, IL 61016

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Wild Ones Mission

Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

Rock River Valley Chapter Meetings

Regular meetings are held the third Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at Rock Valley College, Physical Education Center PEC0110 (lower level), 3301 North Mulford Road, Rockford, 61114.

Special meetings, outings, and events are scheduled periodically and sometimes replace the regular meeting. Contact any officer to confirm information about our next meeting.

Rock River Valley Chapter Board and Coordinators

Board

President: Constance McCarthy
(815) 282.0316 constance@wildonesrrvc.org

Vice President: Jerry Paulson
(815) 222.4414 jerry@wildonesrrvc.org

Secretary: Cathy Johnson (815) 978.0865
cathy@wildonesrrvc.org

Treasurer: Deb Rogers (815) 624.1036

At-Large: Doreen O'Brien (815) 985.4064
doreen@wildonesrrvc.org

At-Large: Kim Lowman Vollmer
(815) 397.6044 kim@wildonesrrvc.org

Coordinators

Membership: Sallie Krebs (815) 627.0343
membership@wildonesrrvc.org

Newsletter-Production: Pambi Camacho
(815) 332.7637 pambi@wildonesrrvc.org

Newsletter-Editorial: Constance McCarthy
(as to the left)

Volunteers: Don Heneghan, (815) 389.7869,
daheneghan@gmail.com

Woodland Plant Sale: Jane Evans
(815) 399.3787 rrvc.woodland@gmail.com

Prairie Plant Sale: Cynthia Chmell & Bobbie Lambiotte, (815) 969.7435 & (815) 398.6257

Tree & Shrub Sale: Brian Hale, (815) 289.2384,
moyogi2@gmail.com; Jerry Paulson (as to the left)

Plant Rescues & Seed Collection:
Mary Anne Mathwich (815) 721.5187
maryanne@wildonesrrvc.org

Programs: Lisa Johnson, (815) 965.3433,
lisa.johnson@burpee.org

Youth Education & Grants:
Kim Lowman Vollmer (as to the left)

Booth, FREC rep., website: Tim Lewis
(815) 874.3468 tim@wildonesrrvc.org

Facebook: Marilyn Heneghan
(815) 389.7869 marilyn@wildonesrrvc.org

Library: Ginnie Watson (815) 398.0138
library.rrvc@gmail.com

Mentors: Mary Christian (815) 218.3746,
gal4sail@aol.com

Merchandise: Cynthia Chmell
(815) 969.7435 chmell@wildonesrrvc.org

Publicity: Fiona Fordyce, (815) 397.6032,
fiona.fordyce@sbcglobal.net

Show Me/Help Me: Linda Ricker, (217)
649.3966, greencreations.lejoi@gmail.com