

# Prairie Wind

VOLUME 13 - NUMBER 2

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SUMMER 2006

## Governor's Volunteer Award

*By Al Murray, Park Ranger*

On Monday, June 12, the annual Governor's Volunteer Awards Ceremony was held at Southeast Polk High School. One volunteer from Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge was given state recognition for her efforts. Governor Tom Vilsack presented the award to Mary Moore, an active volunteer at the Refuge for the past four years. In that time she has taken on a number of responsibilities including smoke spotter, special events attendant, bookstore cashier and currently is the manager of the Prairie Point Bookstore and a Friends'

Board member. Through her creativity and commitment, Mary has significantly increased sales at the bookstore. Congratulations, Mary!



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## Volunteer Beat

*By Al Murray, Park Ranger*

The summer season is well underway at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. On Saturday, June 10, a crew of volunteers participating in Second Saturday Stewardship activities harvested the first seed of the 2006 season. The seven member crew harvested a yield of over 50 grams of blue-eyed grass from a site on the eastern end of the Tallgrass Trail. For those who are interested in joining us, Second Saturday Stewardship days will continue throughout the summer. We will meet the second Saturday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at the Prairie Learning Center. There will be many more opportunities to harvest seed as well as assist in developing the Butterfly Garden.

On Saturday, August 26, refuge volunteers will have the opportunity to join us for our annual volunteer bus trip. This year we will travel to Coralville in eastern Iowa to visit the Devonian Fossil Gorge at Coralville Lake. We will explore Iowa's unique geological history in the exposed bedrock below the dam's spillway. We will be traveling by coach and anticipate having seats for about 45 participants. Please contact Volunteer Coordinator Al Murray for details.

## What's Going On Around Here?

Enjoy these highlights about work being done by the Biology, Public Use and Operations programs. We hope this sample gives you a taste of “what’s going on around here”.

### NOTES FROM THE FIELD – BIOLOGY

- Pauline Drobney coordinated a Thistle Suppression research team to determine uniform management actions in 2006 and to coordinate meetings and research activities for the season
- Drobney completed work for challenge cost-share agreements involving research, management, and conservation of the white fringed prairie orchid
- Two “Prairie Builder” interns were hired. Rebecca Mills, began May 22 and Hanni Muerdter, began on June 12
- Refuge Biologist Karen Viste-Sparkman made substantial progress toward completing the Habitat Management Plan

### EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS – PUBLIC USE

- Scott Ford completed a grant proposal for \$2.77 million to build a 4.5 mile multi-purpose trail to coincide with the main refuge entry road
- The Master Naturalist program, “4.5 Billion Years of Change” created by Sara Hollerich, wrapped up its first session in April
- April 22 was Earth Day 2006 at the refuge. More than 200 participants attended and completed a variety of stewardship projects
- International Migratory Bird Day was observed on Saturday, May 13. The event was a hit, with over 350 people visiting the Learning Center
- May 13 also served as the date for the Iowa Junior Duck Stamp award ceremony. The Iowa entry, by Brian Murillo, won third place in the nation!

### MAKING THINGS WORK – OPERATIONS

- Rick Hager is working with STEP student, Rebecca Nott, in updating the refuge’s GIS files
- Nancy Gilbertson attended the annual FWS bison meeting in Denver, CO with bison managers from Regions 2 and 6.
- Gilbertson also attended the Trilateral Monarch Butterfly Sister Protected Areas Workshop, held in Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico
- Total acres of prescribed fire for the 2005-2006 burn season: 2,738 acres on the refuge and 269 acres in other areas
- Prescribed Fire Specialist, Terry Severson accepted a Fire Management Officer position at Voyageurs National Park in northern Minnesota. His last day at Neal Smith was June 9

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## Upcoming Programs

*By Sara Hollerich, Park Ranger*

### Master Naturalist - Insect Ecology

Dates: July 19, 2006 (9:00am - 2:30pm)  
August 13, 2006 (Noon - 5:00)  
September 17, 2006 (9:00am - 2:30pm)

Ever wondered about the wonderful world of insects? The Master Naturalist - Insect Ecology course will focus on monarch butterflies, ants and other insects. Naturalists Chris Adkins and Laura Zaugg will be on hand July 19th to help us kick off the course and learn all about monarch caterpillars and how to monitor their numbers. The August class will focus on the ants of the Refuge. We will be discussing how to collect ants for scientific research. In September, we will be learning about monarch migration. Join the class and learn how to capture and tag butterflies. We will turn in our data and hopefully, a researcher in Mexico will find our butterflies, and reply by sending a post card. You must sign up with Sara Hollerich by calling 515/994-3400 or emailing [Sara\\_Hollerich@fws.gov](mailto:Sara_Hollerich@fws.gov).

[Continued on page 3](#)

## Public Use Spring Intern

By Jacob Simmen



Hello! My name is Jacob Simmen and I am the Visitor Services intern at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge for the spring. Since my arrival I have learned and accomplished much, but before I get into my work, I would like to tell you a little about myself. I am 22 years old and I am from a small eastern Iowa town called Central

City. I attended Central City High School and am a sophomore at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids. My major is in Parks and Natural Resources. At the end of the spring semester, I will be transferring to Upper Iowa University in Fayette. At Upper Iowa, I will be double majoring in Conservation Management and Biology. Though my current major is Parks and Natural Resources, my first attempt at college was in education, so this internship was just right, a mix of both areas I truly enjoy. When we Kirkwood had a job fair for student interns, I really liked what Mr. Scott Ford had to say, so I took the opportunity to come to a national wildlife refuge.

My experience has been really worthwhile. I have learned and accomplished a multitude of tasks and procedures. Since I arrived at the peak of the school season, I had to hit the ground running in the sense of having to learn activities and be ready to jump in and help out. I began my internship with a visit with Sara Hollerich to an elementary school in Des Moines, which was my

first and only school visit outside of the Learning Center. After that, we began having school groups every day at the refuge, so this didn't leave much time to get prepared for new activities. I learned by watching as other employees and volunteers ran the programs. The first week, I sat in with volunteer Dave Wharff as he led the animal tracks program. I really liked the way he got the kids' attention and then told them stories. I picked up a lot from him on that activity and now when I do it, I would have to say it is my best activity. I also learned many other activities from Sara, Al, Scott, Kerald, and Anna. All of them were really helpful in teaching me the activities for the school groups. As time went on, I became more comfortable with the students. My knowledge of the prairie has also grown by leaps and bounds. In fact, the knowledge I learned during my internship has really put me ahead in my futures endeavors. From my internship at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, I will take with me a deeper knowledge of prairie, experience in interpretive work with children, work experience in a national system, contacts in the parks system, friends, and a lot of good times. I know my experience here will help me to my ultimate goal of working in the national park system in Yellowstone National Park.

I would like to close by saying thank you to everyone who made this internship as pleasant and enjoyable as it has been. I will not forget my time at the Refuge, nor the people I shared it with.

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### Upcoming Programs, continued

#### Project Bluestem Workshops

Project Bluestem workshops will be held at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge July 10th (9:00 - 3:00) and September 10th (noon - 5). You must sign up with Sara Hollerich by calling 515/994-3400 or emailing Sara\_Hollerich@fws.gov.

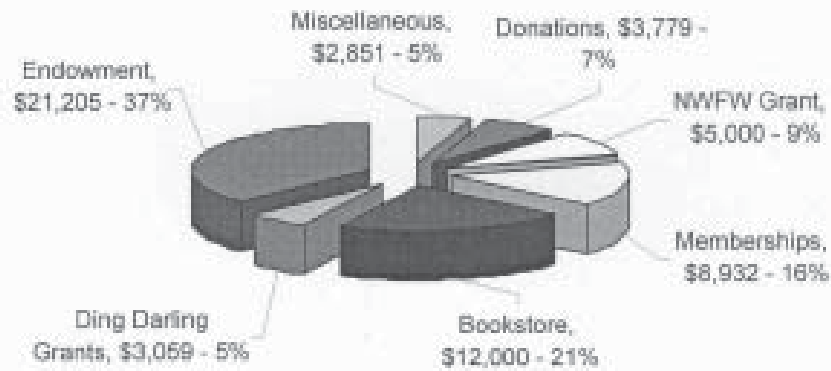
#### Monarch Madness

Celebrate the monarch migration this fall with Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. On September 9 from 9:00 a.m. to noon, help refuge staff and volunteers tag butterflies as they migrate on their way to Mexico. If a researcher in Mexico finds the butterfly you tagged you will receive a post card in the mail! After the butterflies have been tagged, we will have a farewell fiesta with our winged friends to see them off. Please RSVP to Sara Hollerich by September 1st if you're interested in taking part in this special event. Contact Info. Sara\_Hollerich@fws.gov or 515/994-3400.

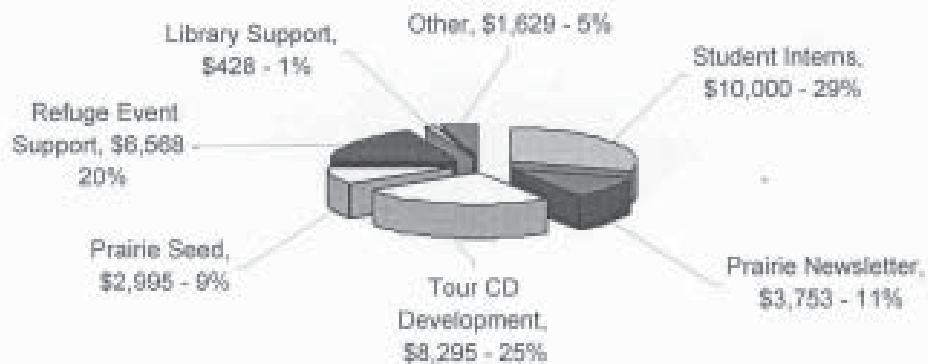


# Friends of the Prairie Learning Center - 2005 Annual Report

## Revenues 2005



## Program Expenditures 2005



## Expenditures 2005



## 2005 Annual Report, cont.

### **Membership:**

The Friends' membership continues to average 250 paid members. Although most of the members are from Iowa, twenty states are represented in the membership.

### **Outreach and Communication:**

We sent representatives to the 2005 Friends Conference in Washington D.C. While there, we visited the offices of Senators Harkin and Grassley and Congressman Boswell. The offices were presented the needs of the refuge along with the requests for the national refuge system.

Two board members were invited as guests of the National Refuge Association, to attend *the Beyond Refuge Boundaries* workshop at the USFW National Conservation Training Center. Thirty Friends groups participated in how to deal with threats outside the refuge's boundary.

We continue to fund the Refuge's major public events:

Earth Day, International Migratory Bird Day, Buffalo Day & "Ding" Darling Day.

### **Projects:**

With a grant of \$20,000 from the "Ding" Darling Foundation and our matching \$20,000, we established the "Ding" Darling Conservation Education Fund (DDCEF). The income from this fund will be used to sponsor interns and provide for environmental education at the refuge. We received an additional grant of \$5,000 from the Foundation in 2006 and are currently raising funds to match this amount.

Matching a \$5,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, we provided funds for development of *Prairie Passage*, a 45 minute CD. The CD correlates with 13 stops along the current Auto Tour Route. The CD was completed in early 2006 with sign post installation scheduled for the summer 2006 season.

We completed the establishment of a multi-media library. The reference library, used by staff and volunteers, has a computerized book card catalog and digital photo catalog with over 6,000 photos.

### **Budget:**

Anticipated Income: \$36,000 (from membership fees, grants, donations and the bookstore.)

Expenses: \$36,000 Major expenses are for refuge events and volunteers, interns, (paid from the bookstore sales and DDCEF); seed purchases, networking, printing and publishing (newsletters and internet.)

# The Indiana Bat

By Anna MacDonald, Park Ranger



The Indiana bat is a pretty special critter at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Although several state-endangered species find a home at the refuge, the Indiana bat is the only federally endangered *mammal* in the state of Iowa. The Indiana bats that spend their summer at the refuge live in the oak savanna. Read on to find out what life as an Indiana bat is like. You are a 15 year old female Indiana bat- that's middle age for a bat. You got your common name because that is the state where the first individual of your species was described by science in 1928. Your scientific name is *Myotis sodalis*. *Myotis* is derived from the Greek words for "mouse ear", and *sodalis* comes from the Latin word "companion" because you hibernate with LOTS of other Indiana bats in the winter.

You're about 3 inches long and have dull gray-brown fur. You don't weigh very much- only about 7 grams. Sometimes humans confuse you with a more common species, the little brown bat. One way people can tell you apart is by looking at your toe hair. You have sparse hairs on your toes which don't go past your claws and the little brown bat has toe hairs that go

beyond the claws. Talk about the importance of a little detail!

Indiana bats live in much of the eastern United States, with the largest populations in Indiana, Kentucky and Missouri. However, your summer home at Neal Smith is very close to the edge of your range. Indiana bats in Iowa can only be found in the southeastern third of the state.

In late April you make the journey back to your summer roost. As you fly into the savanna you are searching for trees with loose bark- perhaps a dead tree or a shagbark hickory. When you find the right one, you crawl up under the bark, hang upside down and sleep with the rest of the maternity colony- 25-100 other female bats. At dusk it is time to hunt. You crawl out from under the bark and simply let yourself drop from the tree as you open your wings and fly. Imagine stretching out your arms and fingers that are almost as long as your body! First you fly to a water source to get a drink. You don't have to stop, you just skim the surface and let the water run into your mouth. Then you're ready to get down to business.

Like all of Iowa's bats, you eat flying insects- that makes you a farmer's friend by keeping insect populations in check. Your favorite food is moths, but you will also eat various types of flies and beetles. You have great eyesight, but it's your super hearing abilities that are going to get you fed tonight. You emit an ultrasonic sound (too high for humans to hear) and as you do, a muscle in your ear contracts so you can't hear your own cry. Then the sound bounces off various objects in front of you-

## Come Grow With Us

The power of a Friends' group is its members. We represent a variety of interests, talents and financial support allowing the Friends of the Prairie Learning Center to meet its mission and goals. We encourage you to renew your support or become a new Friend by completing the membership form below. Friends of the Prairie Learning Center is a nonprofit organization and all donations are tax deductible.

- \$25 -- Big Bluestem Friend
- \$50 -- Buffalo Buddy
- \$100 -- Savannah Saver
- \$250 -- Prairie Patron
- Other -- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Be sure to find out if your company will match contributions.*

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the trees, their branches and leaves, and flying insects. When the sound bounces back to your ears, it paints a picture of your surroundings in your mind. In your mind you can see the object's direction, distance, shape, size, and you can tell if it is moving.

There's a caddis fly! You careen sideways, catching it with your wingtip, then throwing it in your tail membrane, and finally bending down to eat it- and keep in mind that you're still in the air while you're doing all this. It's fast food... bat-style.

Think you need a rest? Nope! Seconds later you're going after your next meal. You may even attempt to catch an insect 17 times in a minute. That's once every 3.5 seconds! You've got to be a real air acrobat to be able to do that!

There's a moth below you- a big, fat one. You dive down and catch it in your mouth. This moth is a little too big to eat on-the-go, so you go to your night roost to chow down. Since you're not flying, you decide to remove the legs and wings because you just want the juicy part. Yum!

In late June you give birth to one pup. He's naked and his eyes are closed. Like all mammals you will feed your pup milk until he's old enough to hunt on his own. You continue to forage at night, but must also return to the roost to nurse your pup. When you crawl up under the bark of your roost, there are dozens of pups clustered together. How can you tell which one is yours? Your excellent hearing comes in handy once again- you recognize your pup by his sound and also by his smell. You take care of your pup for about a month and then he is ready to try flying for the first time with you.

By August it is time for you, your pup and the rest of the bats to migrate to your winter hibernation sites. Many Indiana bats in Iowa will migrate to Missouri where they will hibernate in caves and old mines. You migrate to caves in Dubuque County along the Mississippi River. When you reach the cave you spend the next few months foraging for insects and building up your body's fat stores. This is also the time when you mate with the males who have been hanging out at the cave all summer. Though you mate in the fall, you will not actually become pregnant until the following spring. By the middle of October, you have begun your hibernation along with hundreds or thousands of other Indiana bats, all clustering together. There can be over 300 Indiana bats per square foot!

Hibernation is more than just falling asleep. Your entire body will slow down: your heart rate, breathing and metabolism. Because of this, your body temperature also drops. You will live off your body fat for the entire winter. Hibernation is a method to use as little energy as possible so that you will have enough fat to sustain you through the winter.

This is a critical time for you. One of the main threats you face during hibernation is human disturbance and commercialization of caves. This is the major reason why your population has declined so rapidly since the 1960's. When bats are disturbed it takes a lot of energy to "wake up". This is dangerous because after being disturbed awake, bats may not have enough fat to make it through the rest of the winter, causing many fatalities since so many bats hibernate together in one spot.

Luckily for you, a bat friendly gate has been installed in your cave. This keeps the humans out while allowing you to move in and out, as well as keeping air flow, temperature and humidity more natural so you can hibernate in the right conditions.

Other reasons for your endangered status are your low birthrate. Other possible reasons are habitat loss and degradation, and agricultural chemicals that may kill or contaminate insects.

How can we help our friend the Indiana bat? Realizing their plight and importance is the first step. Protecting their habitat is the best thing anyone can do for the bats. Another way to help all bats is by building a bat house for your backyard. It may not house Indiana Bats, but all of Iowa's 9 bats are neat creatures and beneficial to us as humans.

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## Norwalk Youth Named Iowa Best of Show . . . Again!

Brian Murillo, an 18-year-old from Norwalk, was named Best of Show in the Iowa Junior Duck Stamp Competition for the second year in a row. His entry of a lesser scaup was done in acrylics. His entry was sent to Washington, D.C. to compete in the national contest. Even though the competition there was pretty intense, his entry received third place! He will receive \$2,000 for his efforts. Brian intends to attend DMACC in pursuit of a degree in graphic design. Congratulations, Brian!



## A Message from the Friends' President

By David Penning

Summer has returned to our prairie. Signs of new growth abound. The areas burned last fall and this spring are bright green and the fire adapted prairie plants are thriving. At least six new buffalo calves have joined our herd. The seasonal succession of blooming flowers has begun again as the wheel of life slowly turns. It is a wonderful time to enjoy the fruits of the many years of refuge staff and volunteer labor.

Lurking in our beautiful prairie is the threat of its destruction. Invasive plant species have the potential to overrun the prairie and turn it into an ecological wasteland. This sounds dramatic but it is indeed a possibility. The refuge biology staff is focused on understanding and eliminating these threats. Friends have funded a dedicated internship for this summer to find, map and begin control of invasive plant species. However, this initial effort needs to be sustained by long-term volunteer efforts. If you would like to help with this essential work, please call the refuge at 515-994-3400 to learn about volunteer opportunities.

### *Prairie Wind*

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