

Litzsinger Road Ecology Center

Community Newsletter

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... And What a Year It Was!

By Bob Coulter

As we look toward the end of 2008, I'm struck by what an unusual year it was, filled with highs and lows. Last December we were preparing to say goodbye to Heather Wells-Sweeney, one of our school partnership coordinators, and ready to cover the vacancy for a month or two. Well, it took quite a bit longer to get the position hired, but in the end we added a gem in Leslie Memula. Fortunately, the heroic efforts of the volunteers and the flexibility and good humor of our teacher partners helped us get through and deliver great programs for the students.

Add to this two maternity leaves, first with Jennifer Brown and then Malinda Slagle making wonderful additions to their families. Again, we all pitched in and carried the Center forward in our vitally important work.

With the summer ending and normalcy on the horizon, Hurricane Ike came to town, causing extensive damage to the barn and education offices (and just a wee bit of a problem at my house!). Yet again, we were able to pull together and keep the Center moving forward through everyone's good will. Each of you has our undying admiration for your commitment to LREC and the kids.

Like everything else ecological, we operate in cycles. We're approaching the holidays now with Jennifer Brown preparing to leave us to be a stay-at-home mom, and Sean Fears preparing for some family leave time as he and his wife expect a baby. I'm sensing a pattern here... ☞



Volunteer Holiday Party

Friday, December 19, 12-2pm at the Glass House.

Spouses and children welcome. RSVP before December 15, 2008 to Martha at (314)442-6717 with number of guests.

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Upcoming LREC Events:

Volunteer Holiday Party

December 19, 12-2pm. At the Glass House. Spouses and children welcome. RSVP to Martha at (314) 442-6717 before December 15 to let her know you are coming and how many you will bring with you.

Volunteer Educator Enrichment: How to Work Effectively with Kindergarteners

January 15, 12:30-2pm. At the Barn.

Upcoming Opportunities:

Winter 2009 TreeKeepers Course

Thursdays, February 12-March 26, 2009 (No class March 19), 1-3pm. At St. Louis Community College, Wildwood Campus. Learn tree identification, tree growth, planting, pruning, and insects and diseases. Free to participants, but graduates asked to provide volunteer service in their community. The class is limited to the first 25 registrants. Registration begins January 5, 2009. Call (314)984-7777 to register. For more information call Forest ReLeaf of Missouri at (314)533-5323

Free Science Lectures

At Living World, Saint Louis Zoo. December 3, 7:30-9pm: *Darwin and DNA: What Genomics Tells Us About Evolution*. More information: (314) 768-5466. December 9, 7-8:30pm: *Gorillas in Her Midst* with Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka. Reservations encouraged; call (314)646-4771.

Second Grade Entomologists

By Eddie Jones

On November 6 and 7 of this year, Carla Ament's second grade class visited Litzsinger Road Ecology Center to investigate insect diversity in the woodland and prairie. These students from Mann Elementary School (St. Louis Public Schools) include a number of English Language Learners, representing families from Europe, Asia, and South America. They discovered a wide array of insects in both habitats using a sampling method that was first tested by middle school students. The second graders managed quite nicely with the procedure. For your enjoyment and edification, some of their follow-up comments are quoted below:

"Today we had some cups and we saw if we could trick some bugs. We put our cups in the prairie. Then we waited until there were some bugs in it. Next we put the bugs in a jar with water in it. Last we dried them. We counted the legs on the insects. We looked at the insects on TV (videocam). Me and Kaylei drew good pictures.

"We had some cups and we put some under the board. We put a cup on the grass. We put a cup in a log. We put a cup inside the spider's nest. We found some bugs. We saw an ant, spider, roly-poly, slugs, snails, bees and a centipede. We used a magnifying glass to look closely at the bugs.

"We found bugs. They look gross. They were very nice, too. My favorite was the slug. It was slimey. But it was nice and friendly. I like slugs. They are good. They like you. Bugs are nice, too. Some are mean. Our group found a lot of bugs.

"I liked the spider because I am a boy.

"I like my captain, Miss Martha.

Volunteer Educators

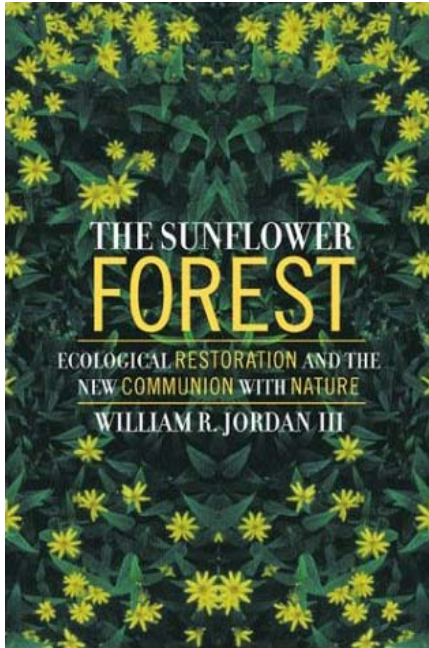
A big "thank-you" to the wonderful class of volunteer educators who just completed their initial training. We have already put them to work:

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| Susan Rentfrow | Judy Ruffus |
| Rose Schulte | Yvona Hopkins |
| Marypat Ehlmann | Carole Dean |
| Marty Schmitt | Bob Short |
| Katarina Staples | Gerry Miller |



Ecological Restoration—Where People and Nature Meet: Reflections on *The Sunflower Forest* by William R. Jordan

By Eddie Jones



In July of 2007, I invited a small group of St. Louis teachers to accompany me to Madison, Wisconsin and its fabled Arboretum, alleged birthplace of the modern ecological restoration movement. Those two weeks are proving to have been a major milestone in my professional life as an environmental educator. The significance has become more apparent since reading *The Sunflower Forest*, written by former Madison Arboretum staff, William R. Jordan III and recommended by Shaw Nature Reserve's restoration ecologist, James Trager.

In *The Sunflower Forest*, the author notes that the modern environmental movement has focused

heavily on the negative and on the tension that exists between humanity and nature. In short, we are the Bad Guys. According to this view, the best way that we can serve nature is to go away.

There is just one problem with that: we can't. We are absolutely dependant upon nature for our very lives. That dependence requires that we interact with nature, with the result that nature is changed and some aspects of nature are destroyed. People are a part of nature; the actions of humans, therefore, are...natural!

Why has this approach not been a more central focus of the modern environmental movement? Jordan's answer is that we have failed to come to terms with the troublesome and shameful aspects of our relationship with the natural world. While traditional cultures have turned to religion, ritual, and the arts to resolve this tension, modern western culture has no counterpart. Ecological restoration, as an emerging community value, may serve to fill that void.

Jordan argues that ecological restoration is valuable not so much as a product, but as a process. The process of ecological restoration allows for

a positive interaction between humans and nature; or, to take it a step further, a re-affirmation that humans and human activity are part of nature; part of the ecology of a place.

The author further suggests that the process of ecological restoration can be done in a set, ordered, and ceremonial way. That is, ecological restoration can be performed as a ritual: a means of establishing a meaningful community environmental ethic. In this context, ecological restoration is elevated somewhat to the level of religion. In that vein, it is of interest to note that rebirth, renewal, and reconciliation are themes of ecological restoration as well as the Bible and other religious texts. And like the Biblical mandate to bring peace and justice to the earth, the work of ecological restoration will never be complete. Both contexts require patience, understanding, compassion, and love. This is the work, at its best, of Litzinger Road Ecology Center and the expanding community of teachers and students who are catching a vision for native habitats at LREC and their own school neighborhoods.

If you have a chance, read this thought-provoking book. ☞



Christmas Geese

By Malinda Slagle

The holidays are coming up, and of course some of the most important traditions involve food. An important food in this season is Christmas goose. The tradition primarily started because the migrating goose was associated with the change of the seasons.

Most of the geese in this area are Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*). We have had several residents at LREC, including one with only one foot. The native range of Canada geese is throughout North America. They migrate from their breeding grounds in Canada to the American South for the winter, but are resident throughout the year in the Midwest, New England, Great Lakes region, and the Pacific Northwest. Their migration pattern has changed a little with changes in temperature and increases in suitable habitat and

food. They migrate from September through the beginning of November. They fly in a vee formation to minimize drag and rotate the front position, since it uses the most energy. They fly between a few kilometers to 1500 km.

Canada geese are monogamous, often for life. The females incubate the eggs for about 30 days. They are not able to fly when they are incubating. Like other birds, they are primarily in danger from predators such as gulls, common ravens, American crows, skunks, and domestic dogs while they are young and unable to fly. Canada geese usually make their nests on elevated areas near bodies of water surrounded by open grassy areas so they can see danger approaching and have good access to the water. Their young fledge (are able to fly) in about 70 days. Until then, they

follow their mothers in a line. Canada geese are primarily vegetarians, eating grass, grains such as wheat, corn, and rice, and seaweed.

Populations of Canada geese have increased greatly in recent years when most other wild bird populations have decreased. They are well adapted to people. People have reduced their predator populations, increased the amount of waste grain left in agricultural fields in the winter, and created many habitats attractive to geese such as man-made bodies of water in golf courses and developments.

In some areas Canada geese are considered pests. Their presence is associated with an increase in fecal coliform, and they may attack people who get too close

See **Geese**, page 5

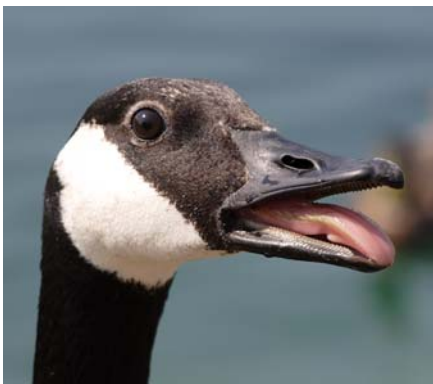


Left: Adult Canada goose pair with goslings. Photo by Dave Palugyay (Creative Commons License Attribution-Noncommercial 2.0 Generic)

Bottom left: Canada goose close-up. Photo by Robert Lawton (Creative Commons License Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic).

Opposite page: Canada geese in vee flight formation. Photo by Greg7 (Creative Commons License Attribution-Noncommercial 2.0 Generic)

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to their nests. The large amount of waste that is present in favorite goose locations can also be unattractive. Hunting season for Canada geese has been lengthened, and noisemakers, traps, and dogs are used to deter geese from nesting in certain areas. One particularly effective solution is to allow tall

vegetation to grow around bodies of water, making the area unattractive to geese. We don't consider the geese to be pests at LREC, but students should not get between a mother goose and her goslings and should not touch goose droppings.

Geese are fun to watch throughout the year. Watch for them to nest by the creek in the summer and as they fly overhead in fall and spring. 🌐

References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Goose

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Branta_canadensis.html

I started at the Litzsinger Road Ecology Center (LREC) as an intern in May of 2004, shortly after moving here from Colorado. The amount of rain and the greenery were astonishing to me after spending all my life along the semi-arid front range of the Rocky Mountains. I will never forget experiencing one of my first big St. Louis deluges within my first week of working at the LREC. During the rain event, I took the opportunity to put on my rain gear and venture out onto the property to explore the drainage patterns on the ground. I went back to a section of the North Prairie where I spent the earlier part of the day planting. Within minutes I was standing up to my knees in rushing water coming from what is now the rain garden and, ultimately, storm water from neighboring properties. Needless to say, I didn't have to worry about watering the planting!

Down by the creek I watched with pure astonishment at how rapidly the water levels rose to bank-full height, setting into motion a rush of adrenaline within myself and sparking much of the interest that would drive my work and energies here at the LREC. I had never seen that much water at one time, and I was amazed by the sheer force and influence that it had on the site's resources. From then on, I was hooked on studying this phenomenon and sharing what I learned about our urban stream corridor with others.

I feel privileged to have spent the last 4½ years getting to know this place. There will be many aspects about my job that I will miss, but by far the greatest is the amazing group of people that make up the LREC community. I would like to give thanks to:

- Bob for his support and vision of our role in place-based education and for the freedom he has given me to develop and evolve my position
- Mary for always having confidence in me, for sharing her enthusiasm and love of growing plants, and for her nurturing and cheerful spirit
- Malinda, my partner in restoration, for always being there to back me up, bounce ideas off of, and strategize management activities with
- Eddie for mentoring me in my school partnership role and for his passion and vision in creating sustainable schoolyards
- Martha for the countless ways she has assisted me in setting up programs and for all of her little reminders
- Sean for his help with the water monitoring program and occasional IT support
- Leslie, whom I have not had much of an opportunity to work with, but I know we caught a keeper when we hired her
- Jennifer Krause and her flexibility with late newsletter submissions and help with the design and formatting of the Clean Water Education materials
- Anne for helping to pick up the slack while Malinda and I were out on maternity leave
- all of the horticulture volunteers—your lively conversations, interests, and insights never made for a dull moment
- all of the education volunteers—your thirst for knowledge was always refreshing and it has been an honor to work at your side
- the LREC Steam Team and their dedication come rain or shine, even when it entailed breaking the ice on the creek in order to get to the water
- the teachers I have worked with along the way, especially my RESTORE teammates; though their jobs are often thankless and exhausting, they should be commended for continuing to find ways to engage their students in meaningful outdoor learning
- and finally, all the students who continue to be a source of hope and inspiration.

You all have imparted on me more gifts than I could ever list here, and I will always think of you as my Missouri family. The time has come now for me to focus more fully on my own family and preparing us for the next chapter in our lives. I look forward to staying in touch and hearing about all of the good work I know will be continued here in this gem of a place known as the LREC.

Jennifer Brown