



Litzsinger Road Ecology Center

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

www.litzsinger.org

May 2014

in this issue

- 2 Bison and Third Graders
- 3 Horticulture & Restoration Offerings for School Groups
- 4 Glass House Quiz: Camouflage
- 7 LREC Reading Corner: *Noah's Children: Restoring the Ecology of Childhood*
- 7 LREC Announcements & Local Events

Students impact their environment—and that's a beautiful thing. Read more on page 2. Photo by Eddie Jones.

Memories and Souvenirs

by Bob Coulter

Dusting off my high school French, “souvenir” is actually a French word for memory. But for a minute, I'd like to explore a difference. All of this is in the context of our increasingly digital lives: kids texting each other endlessly, and schools trying to “stay current” by giving each student an iPad. But, what is the trade-off? All too often when kids are using digital cameras and iPads in their field work, they engage in souvenir hunting in the form of rushing to snap a picture and move on. Instead of observing, touching, and reflecting—the kind of experiences that build lasting memories—it becomes nature as a take-out order. Perhaps we could start providing souvenir t-shirts: “I went to Litzsinger and all I got was a set of snapshots.”

People who know me know I'm hardly anti-technology. (As I write this, three computers, an iPhone, and an iPad are within reach.) But, we need to think more about how to make kids' use of technology extend their experience with nature, and not act as an intermediary. As we collaborate to build plans for next year, I'll challenge each of us to bring our best thinking to this. We'll publish your promising examples in the newsletter and online. ✎



THE LITZSINGER ROAD ECOLOGY CENTER
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
IS GOING ON SUMMER HIATUS.
LOOK FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE IN SEPTEMBER 2014.

Bison and Third Graders

by Eddie Jones

What does a woodland look like? How about a prairie? Or a schoolyard habitat?

These questions were provoked by a blog post that was, in turn, inspired by another blog post!

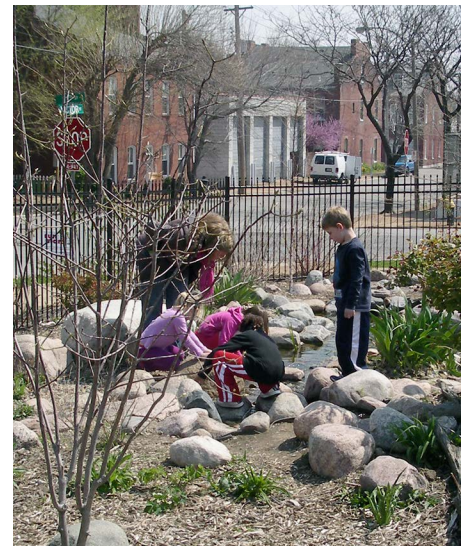
In the original inspiration (<http://woodsandprairie.blogspot.com/2014/03/prairie-and-veldt-what-tallgrass.html>), the author reflected on a visit to a grassland wilderness area in South Africa where he observed the obvious impacts made to the landscape by the big animals that live there. The author of the second post (<http://prairieecologist.com/2014/04/22/an-adjusted-aesthetic-and-reflections-on-portraying-change/>), extended the conversation to include the impact of large grazing animals on midwest prairies in Nebraska.

A phrase used in both posts caught my attention: “adjusted aesthetic.” When large herbivores inhabit a grassland, they leave their mark... everywhere. And those marks are not necessarily pleasing to the observer (think elephants and bison, muddy wallows and crushed plants).



While the comparison may not be appealing, it occurred to me that the presence of school children in a schoolyard habitat may have similar impacts...crushed plants and wallowing included.

It appears that an authentic prairie, woodland, or any natural area is going to be a bit on the messy side, things askew. And so it is with schoolyard habitats. They are not always the prettiest things to behold. But when school children are included, they bring a sense of authenticity, a more complete ecology to these small habitats. 🌱



Kids making their mark on their schoolyards. Photos by Eddie Jones.



Horticulture & Restoration Offerings for School Groups

by Deanna English

It has been such a long, cool spring that it's hard to believe that May is finally here, and we will soon be headed into summer. May is the month for putting plants in the ground both here and at partner schools. Many times I have the opportunity to visit the schools and see the beautiful native gardens that the teachers and students are working so hard to establish. It is very satisfying to witness students, teachers and LREC staff work together through the whole process. We all work to collect seed and plant in the fall, start seeds and transplant in the winter and then put plants in the ground all around St. Louis in the spring.

We are busy planting spring plants here and we welcome the participation of visiting students. We have twelve beds in our demonstration gardens and they all need plants this spring, so come help us out.

We look forward to seeing many of you in May and into the summer. If you are fortunate enough to be visiting in May, please think about participating in some of the horticulture and restoration offerings. Hope to see you soon!

Stream cleanup—Cleanups available when the stream is at a safe level.

Stream monitoring—Use a kit to test dissolved oxygen, conductivity, pH, temperature (air and water), nitrates, turbidity, and chloride.

Invasive plant removal—Learn about invasive species and help us remove invasive plants from the site.

Roots and plant structure demonstration—Students are introduced to the purpose and function of roots and plant structures.

Plant seedlings—Depending on how we warm up this month we will be planting seedlings in the woodland and prairie.

Tree monitoring—High school and middle school students can work on developing tree identification skills, and learn techniques used to inventory a large area of trees.

Plant monitoring—Students can learn how the plant monitoring grid is set up at LREC and practice their own monitoring skills. ✂

MAY

by Martha M. Schermann

Monarda

Asclepias

Yarrow



Top: bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*).

Photo by Danelle Haake.

Middle: common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*).

Photo by Ryan Hagerty, USFWS.

Bottom: common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).

Photo by Theodore Webster, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org.

ATTENTION VOLUNTEERS:

Don't miss our annual

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION POTLUCK!

Thursday, May 29, 2014

11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

at the Windegger Shelter at Tilles Park

Family members are welcome. Please let Martha know (314-540-4068 or martha@lrec.net) how many are coming and what you will bring—we'll provide the meat and the drinks. Hope to see you there!



Glass House Quiz: Camouflage

by Deanna English and Danelle Haake

We have all been there: out for a hike with family, friends, or students, and someone says, “Oh, wow! Look at that!”

“Look at what?” you reply.

“The (fill in the blank). It’s right there, about eight feet away on your left.”

Yeah, missed that one...

The fact is, many animals do not want to be seen. They have special colors, patterns, and even extra growths or tufts of fur or feathers to help them become nearly invisible. This month, we hope you enjoy learning about a few animals that you may not be able to easily see!

- 1. There’s at least one species of these in Missouri that can change its color like a chameleon to suit its environment and help it hide. Which of these is it?**
 - a) Caterpillar
 - b) Frog
 - c) Fish
 - d) Bird
- 2. This endangered animal is very special to Missouri since one Ozark subspecies is found only in the White River watershed in Missouri and Northern Arkansas. It uses camouflage to blend into the surroundings and avoid potential predators during the day while it waits for nightfall to come out and hunt. What is this special Missouri creature?**
 - a) Crystal darter
 - b) Ebonyshell
 - c) Hellbender
 - d) Yellow mud turtle
- 3. This Missouri native rests in trees or overhangs and blends into its environment quite well. It’s a major predator of rodents, snakes, insects, and rabbits and has been known to hunt barred owls, turkeys, and even skunks. Which is it?**
 - a) Crow
 - b) Turkey vulture
 - c) Bald eagle
 - d) Great horned owl



Students look all around in the LREC woodlands. Photo by LREC staff.

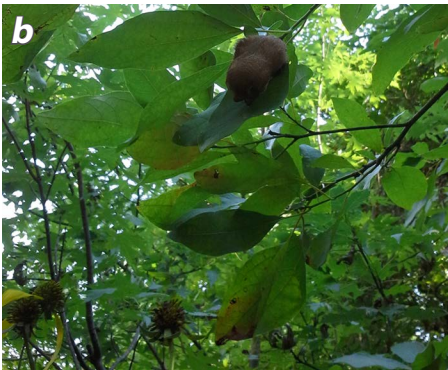
See **Quiz**, page 5



From **Quiz**, page 4

4. Now for the real fun! We have taken many photos over the past few years, including a few that we looked at and said, “Where is the bird in this one?” or “It says there’s a spider...”

Here are a few examples of animals that we thought did a pretty good job of camouflaging themselves (but not so good that you can’t find them).



See **Quiz**, page 6



From **Quiz**, page 5

Answers:

1. **b) Frog.** The gray tree frog (*Hyla versicolor*) has a scientific name that gives away its secret. While its color changes more slowly than a chameleon, it can change from nearly black to nearly white and many colors in between. It can have a mottled appearance that varies depending on the surroundings. We have seen some in shades of green and yellow here at LREC.

2. **c) Hellbender** (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*). All the listed species are endangered in Missouri, but the Ozark subspecies of hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis bishopi*) may become extinct in

Missouri in the next 20 years. The Saint Louis Zoo is very involved in the captive breeding and release of this species. View their short documentary on hellbender conservation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8iamcw9gmQ>.

3. **d) Great horned owl.** A distinguishing characteristic of the great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) is the “horns” or “ears” that aren’t really ears at all. The owl’s ears are just slits on either side of the head, but the tufts of feathers on the head help make the owl look like part of a tree, its body blending into the tree trunk and the tufts looking like branch stubs.

4. **a) Toad**
b) Bat
c) Mantis
d) Katydid
e) Great horned owl
f) Caterpillar

Visit the LREC blog for additional camouflage challenges. 🌿



Top: two color variations of the gray tree frog. Photo by Dustykid.
Bottom: Ozark hellbender. Photo by Brian Gratwicke.

LREC READING CORNER

by Deanna English

Noah's Children: Restoring the Ecology of Childhood

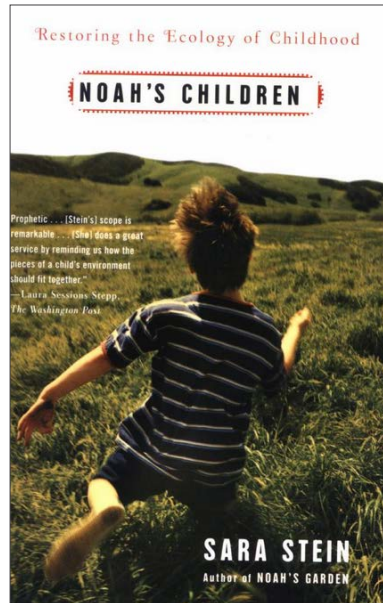
WRITTEN BY SARA STEIN

AUDIENCE: ADULTS

As the last review for this newsletter season I've selected a book for adults who work with children. *Noah's Children: Restoring the Ecology of Childhood* is an easy and informative read that could fit on anyone's summer read list.

In her book, Sara Stein explores the need for children to connect to the natural world while reflecting on the changes that have occurred in recent generations. I like how Stein uses developmental research along with personal stories to give examples of how things have changed. As I read I was struck by the differences between my childhood experience and those of children growing up today. What stood out the most for me was the lack of opportunities for children to experience unstructured play in the natural world. While as educators we often work to offer children opportunities to get outside, we seldom give children opportunities to explore on their own and create their own personal experiences. I hope this book will help us think about ways to re-gift these opportunities to our children.

During your summer break maybe you will find the time to take a peek at this book. Most importantly have a wonderful, relaxing summer and allow plenty of opportunities for unstructured play. ♪



LREC Announcements

May 28, June 5, July 30, August 27

Water Chemistry Monitoring

9am, meet at the Glass House. RSVP to danelle@litzsinger.org.

May 29

Volunteer Thank-you Pot Luck

11am to 2pm, at the Windegger Shelter at Tillis Park. We will provide the meat and the drinks. Family members are welcome. RSVP to Martha at martha@rec.net or 314-540-4068 and tell her what you will bring and how many are coming.

Local Events

Through January 4, 2015

Nature in Your Neighborhood

9am to 5pm daily, at the Brookings Interpretive Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Explore how you can reconnect with nature at this interactive exhibit. Included with Garden admission.

June 22

Sustainable Backyard Tour

11am to 4pm. This free, self-guided tour highlights sustainable spaces around St. Louis City and County. Learn more about attending the tour or being a host at <http://www.sustainablebackyardtour.com>.

July 16

Public Symposium on Ecological Restoration

9am to 5pm, at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Experts from around the world, including representatives of the Ecological Restoration Alliance of Botanic Gardens, will share contemporary issues and innovations in ecological restoration. Free and open to the public. No registration is required.

EDUCATOR SUMMITS at the Missouri Botanical Garden

June 30–July 2

Early Childhood Nature Summit

For PreK–Grade 2 classroom educators, pre-service teachers, and parents

July 14–16

BiodiverseCity: Nature in our Neighborhoods Educator Summit

For classroom educators spanning grades K–12

Share successes and struggles while you learn from case studies, speakers, field trips, and each other. Details at <http://www.mobot.org/schoolprograms>.