

FAVILLE GROVE SANCTUARY

VOLUNTEER NEWS

Madison Audubon Society

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Muddy March Madness

Our next brush-clearing/burning work party is scheduled for 9 a.m. on Saturday, March 14, so put on your waterproof boots and head down to [Prairie Lane](#) (click for a map). We have all of the large trees cleared from the ditch bank on the east edge of the Lake Mills Ledge Savanna, but have plenty of downed brush to burn. We'll skip the Wednesday work party on March 18, but will be back in our usual Wednesday routine again beginning March 25 on Prairie Lane from 9 a.m. until noon. We'll meet again on Saturday, March 28, and continue on the second and forth Saturdays of April. Over the coming weeks, besides brush clearing, we plan to hand-broadcast seed in the cleared savanna areas, pull or herbicide garlic mustard, or conduct controlled burns. When conditions are favorable for burning, we will shift work hours to later in the day, so please email Lars at favillegrove@live.com or give him a call at 608/220-9563 for last minute updates. We will also schedule other burn days on short notice as conditions permit, so let Lars know if you want to be on the call list.

April field trips (plural!)

Friday, April 3, 7:45 p.m. – Waddle down North Shore Road where we hope to see the spectacular courtship display of the American woodcock. Meet at [David and Roger's](#) (click for a map).



Sunday, April 19, 7:15 a.m. – Hike Faville Grove Sanctuary west as the wetlands and uplands return to life for the spring. Meet at [Buddy's Place](#).

Birders Needed:

Put your birding skills to work at Faville Grove Sanctuary

Here at Faville Grove Sanctuary there have always been many ways for you to contribute. We are very grateful for your financial contributions, donations to the sanctuary house, and of course, the many hours of on-site volunteer service. With your help, the sanctuary has grown to 550 acres (see p.4) and contains some of the highest quality restorations you can find. By maintaining and restoring high quality habitats over large areas we are truly beginning to have an impact on a landscape scale for a variety of species whose futures still remain uncertain. With your help, we hope to begin monitoring the status of wildlife populations, especially birds, to document what we are doing right and where management could improve.



Checking out the birds at Faville Marsh.

With more information on the status and trends of bird populations we can begin to make better informed management decisions that have the most lasting impact for species of greatest concern. Information on bird populations will help to identify which species need management attention and which species appear to be doing fine. We are especially interested in determining the status of

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imperiled species which could potentially find suitable habitat at FGS under a proper management regime. Here are a few examples of how information gathered from bird surveys could potentially help inform management decisions:

- *Determining the timing and frequency of prescribed burning for a given site.*

Some grassland species, such as the Henslow's Sparrow, require standing residual vegetation during spring arrival, while other species, including the upland sandpiper, respond very well to sites that have been burned in the spring.

- *Determining the seed mix for new restorations.*

Different grassland birds require different vegetation structures. For example, the vesper sparrow needs short, sparse, vegetation while the sedge wren requires much taller grasses.

- *Identifying important stands of woody vegetation.*

Restoration often includes removing dense undergrowth and brushy thickets, however, islands of woody shrubs are critical habitat for the Bell's Vireo and Loggerhead Shrike.

With enough volunteer support, we hope to begin conducting area search censuses throughout the sanctuary this breeding season (June 1-July 4). This survey method involves walking through a plot and recording all birds seen or heard within a 20-minute period. This method can be ideal for people with limited identification skills because observers are able to interact, compare notes, and track down unfamiliar species or sounds. Non-birders may even participate by serving as recorders or tallying obvious species. If you are interested in helping out or have questions please contact Lars Higdon, FGS ecologist and land steward, at favillegrove@live.com or 608/220-9563. Your birding efforts at Faville Grove Sanctuary can help make a difference. And if birds aren't your thing, how about insects, plants, mammals, frogs, lichens? You name it, we would love to work with you to develop a monitoring protocol. We hope you can join us!



Faville Marsh's Buck Island after Sunday's late snow.

Explore local birding hot spots

There's no better way to improve your birding skills than to join experienced birders in the field. Beginning in April, Nolan Kollath, Brad and Royan Webb, and Karen Etter Hale will lead a second field season of bird hikes to birding hot spots in Jefferson and Dodge Counties. They have not yet set the schedule for 2009, but will post it on their website as soon as they do. Check it out at <http://www.theropod.org/walks.html> where you can also join their mailing list to be notified of upcoming trips.



It's time to close bluebird houses, including this one at the Snake Marsh.

Just Walking in the Rain

“One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring.”

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

March is when we expect (and some of us hope for) those late winter storms that can dump ten inches or more of wet heavy snow. Yesterday it rained an inch. It’s raining again today. At least we won’t have to shovel! Not the best conditions for a walk, but why not? Things are happening out there.

Getting soaking wet. Despite recent temperatures in the 40s and 50s, the ground is still frozen and shunts the rain down slope as fast as it falls, filling every dip and swale. Ephemeral puddles, ponds, and even small lakes dot the landscape: a late “winter waterland” with Faville Marsh as full as we’ve seen it, as are other surrounding wetlands. We hoped that there might still be a chance to walk out onto the frozen marsh to see things up close one more time, but that was wishful thinking. The ice is already honeycombed and too soft to trust.

This of course is of no concern to the recently arrived Canada geese; we imagine they are quite grateful for the changing conditions. But, they are not pleased at all with our intrusion into their reclaimed territory. We can see at least four pairs out there standing on the water-covered ice, plus a single goose high on a muskrat lodge, most likely staking it out as its soon-to-be nesting site, complaining with incessant honking as we pass by. Up ahead, first a pair of mallards and then a pair of hooded mergansers take the geese’s discontent seriously, and explosively take wing from their small area of open water close to shore. Further out, with nary a sound, a pair of sandhill cranes on lanky legs struts away and out across the slushy marsh toward greater security, as a lone muskrat sits nearby pondering it all. The now driving rain evidently doesn’t suit our other early migrants - red-winged blackbirds, robins and killdeer - who arrived at Faville Grove just days ago, as they are nowhere to be seen.

As we pause and watch this awakening theatre, we admire the hues of the marsh and its surrounding landscape, which have deepened with the rain: a subtle



Staking out this year’s territory.

but rich palette of tawny browns, magentas, golds, and tans. Even the unweathered cedar boards of the ten additional wood duck houses, recently installed by neighbor Ohne Raasch, have taken on a new glow. The foliage of the leatherleaf (a close relative of blueberry), which seems to flourish in the zone between the sedge meadow/sphagnum bog and the shrub-carr, is already responding and taking on its characteristic dusty gray-green pinkish color as it rehydrates after the winter’s cold drying winds. Here and there in the shallows of the marsh’s edge the first willows are opening their silver catkins, those soft pussy willows we have long awaited, heralding too that spring is upon us.

But now, here comes that snow. We might have to shovel after all, but at least the snow won’t last.

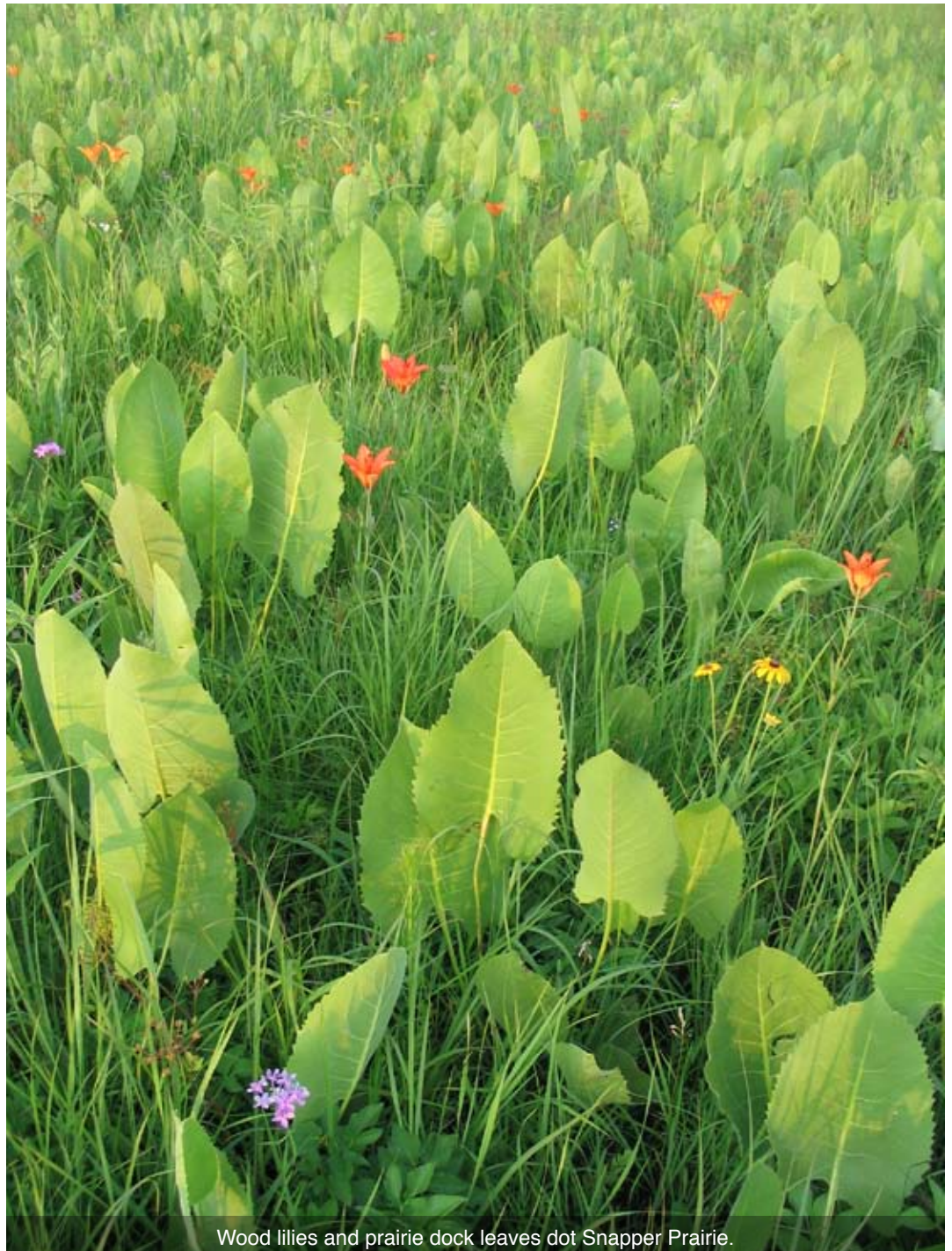
Snapper Prairie becomes part of Faville Grove Sanctuary

Faville Grove Sanctuary now officially includes about 550 acres and a dedicated State Natural Area, following the transfer this week of the deed for Snapper Prairie to Madison Audubon Society from The Nature Conservancy. The 28.33-acre site includes about 22 acres of remnant floodplain prairie—one of only two remnants (the other being the original 60-acre Faville Prairie tract) of the great Crawfish Prairie, a 2500-acre wet prairie opening that graced the west bank of the Crawfish River, set in a broader landscape of savannas, wetlands, and scattered smaller prairie openings.

While Faville Prairie was saved from “cow and plow” intentionally as a scientific and ecological reserve through the efforts of Aldo Leopold and the generosity of Phillip and Eleanor Miles, Snapper’s history is more serendipitous. A part of the larger Miller farm, Pearl Miller had a deep love for her “flower patch,” and especially its annual show of prairie phlox. Pearl steadfastly refused to allow her father and brothers to plow the patch, so the Millers continued to mow the prairie for marsh hay in late summers even as the surrounding prairie lands disappeared. The annual mowing kept woody vegetation from invading the prairie, and strongly encouraged the short-statured, fall-blooming, lady’s tress orchids—so much so that it is said that the fragrant orchids filled the air each fall with their scent. It is unlikely that Pearl Miller ever heard of Aldo Leopold’s ideas regarding a “land ethic,” but clearly, she understood.

Then, in the late 1970s while hunting pheasants, two DNR staff stumbled onto the remnant, which ultimately led The Nature Conservancy to acquire the site and an access easement in 1979 with a generous donation from Joan Heymann and Arthur Snapper, Jr., and it was named the Arthur and Albena Snapper Memorial Prairie in memory of their parents. Faville Prairie was transferred to the University of Wisconsin Arboretum in 1945, making it the world’s

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Wood lilies and prairie dock leaves dot Snapper Prairie.

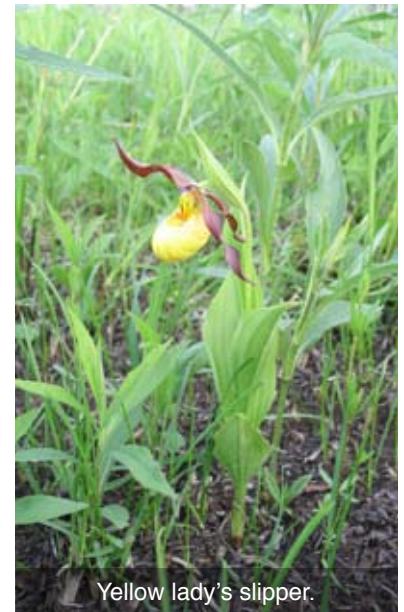
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first publicly protected prairie preserve. It was dedicated as Scientific Area (later State Natural Area) # 3 in 1952 (at the same meeting of the State Board for the



Pale-spike lobelia blooming on Snapper Prairie.

Preservation of Scientific Areas at which SNAs #1 and #2, Parfrey's Glen and Cedarburg Bog were dedicated), granting it the highest protection provided by state law. Snapper Prairie received State Natural Area protection only in 1987 (SNA #168), and yet ironically, Snap-



Yellow lady's slipper.

per fared better than Faville during the intervening years. While Snapper was mowed almost annually for hay under the Miller's care, Faville suffered from benign neglect as an outlying property of the

overstretched UW Arboretum. Faville endured many long intervals without burning, and brush and trees made significant inroads on the open prairie.



Eastern prairie fringed orchid.

Following its acquisition by TNC, Snapper too suffered a period of neglect, and aspen, cottonwood and willow began to invade, although TNC soon recognized the consequences of inaction and began a regular burn rota-

tion for the site. More recently, however, TNC established a policy of focusing on large, landscape-scale projects (its Last Great Places initiative) and the organization has sought to divest itself of small tracts like Snapper. Volunteers and summer interns with Faville Grove Sanctuary have managed Snapper under a



Pearl Miller's favorite – prairie phlox.

formal management agreement since 2003 (and we assisted TNC informally before that). Just as we have partnered with the UW Arboretum in recent years

to improve stewardship on Faville Prairie, we have burned a portion of Snapper annually, cut and girdled invading trees, pulled and cut sweet clover, dug wild parsnips, and cut out the woody fence row along the south edge of the property to improve habitat for grassland birds.

Going forward, we hope to restore a significant portion of the Crawfish Prairie and integrate Snapper Prairie fully into the larger Faville Grove landscape (with your help, of course!). While we are sorry to lose TNC's partnership in this grand undertaking, we are honored to be entrusted with the care of this gem of a prairie.

Recent sightings at Faville Grove



Black oaks and wet snow on the edge of a very full Faville Marsh.

Faville Grove Sanctuary Volunteer News is a collaborative effort by Roger Packard (rpackard@uwalumni.com) and David Musolf (dmusolf@uwalumni.com), volunteer sanctuary managers and Lars Higdon (favillegrove@live.com), restoration ecologist and land steward. It is published sporadically and distributed electronically to friends of Madison Audubon Society's Faville Grove Sanctuary. Please pass it along to anyone you think may be interested. We welcome pictures, articles, and other contributions, as well as comments and address updates. Stop out for a visit soon!