



# CFC News

*Saving Living Room for Living Things*

A conservation newsletter published by Citizens for Conservation, Inc.

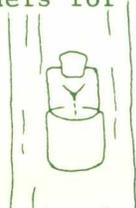
Barrington, Illinois

Vol.1, No. 4, Winter 1985

## SATURDAY SESSIONS

It was cold, but the gale winds of a day earlier had subsided when twenty children and adults met at Crabtree Nature Center to learn more about animal tracks. Inside, participants analyzed track patterns and individual animal footprints, learned how to look for clues that tell animal stories in the snow, and made plaster casts of animal tracks. The outside part wasn't nearly as excruciating as some imagined. The day was calm and brilliantly sunlit and once some fox tracks were spied, and then some rabbit tracks, and the wing pattern of a songbird taking off from the snow, and WOW, some weasel prints, and LOOK, a fawn's trail right near the building-- some trackers didn't even want to come in.

Leaders for the class were Vicky Allard, Sue Allman, and Wendy Paulson.



The next Saturday Session will focus on making maple syrup. It will be held on Saturday, March 9, at the Max McGraw Wildlife maple grove in Dundee. Details will be included in a flyer and in the local papers.

Later in the spring, probably in early May, a Saturday Session will take place at Baker's Lake. It will concentrate on the heron population on the island in the center of the lake.

## ANNUAL MEETING

On a frigid January 31st (not to be inconsistent with the three previous annual meetings!), more than 100 members and friends of CFC attended the annual meeting at the Barrington Hills Country Club. Waid Vanderpoel chaired the meeting which included committee reports, election of Directors, presentation of William H. Miller Conservation Awards, and a slide presentation on the Wagner Fen. A brief review of the committee reports follows.

## RECYCLING - Frank Spreyer

The recycling site at the base of Park Avenue was improved this year by the planting of 5 mature evergreen trees (there ensued a brief debate on pines vs. spruces--ed.), thanks to the generosity of Bill and Grace McMullen, and the painting of the collection bins. Paper collection reached a four-year high -- 247.06 tons -- but glass recycling fell off, as the following statistics show:

Glass	1984	1983	1982	1981
Clear	34.6 T	41.15 T	80.9 T	25.36 T
Brown	5.32	5.27	6.37	8.48
Green	25.36	30.2	31.9	52.9

According to a report published by World Watch, only 25% of the world's paper was recycled in 1983. If this were raised to 50% (as is the case in Mexico; Japan recycles 45% of its paper; the U.S. 26%), recycled paper would meet 75% of the world's new paper needs. Twenty million acres of forestland would be freed from paper production.

## EDUCATION - Vicky Allard

This year we focused on communication with CFC members and the community. Projects included:

This newsletter, published every four months during the past year. It takes a BIG EFFORT; we would welcome offers to help with typing, proofreading, layout, collating, mailing. A red bucket at the top of the stairs next to Sam's office awaits articles, relevant events, book reviews. Or, call the office (382-SAVE) with your ideas.

Periodic field trips, begun this year with one to Volo Bog.

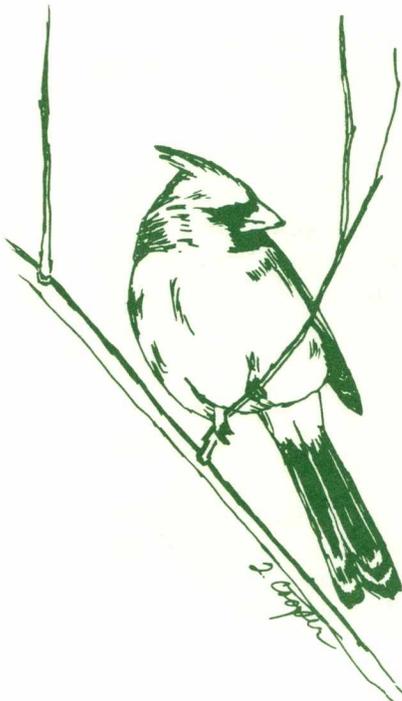
Saturday Sessions, a series of nature study classes for students in grades 4-6 and their parents.

The development of a slide presentation on the Wagner Fen. The program may be reserved for any organization by calling 382-SAVE.

To continue these programs and possibly add others (e.g. we'd like to develop a slide presentation for the schools on recycling from the kitchen all the way back to the glass and paper recycling plants), we need any help you can offer: ideas, assistance with classes, etc. Call Wendy Paulson (426-8879) or Sam Oliver (382-SAVE) if you'd like to join this committee.

## STEWARDSHIP - George Luehring

Activities this year centered on the Wagner Fen:



- 1) Action began in February with the burning of brush piles left over from cutting activities in previous months.
- 2) In April, the west part of the fen was burned, under the leadership of Steve Packard of The Nature Conservancy. Plants responded with spectacular display in the growing season.
- 3) Several brushing sessions were held in the summer in a losing battle with buckthorn and dogwood.
- 4) The Environmental Services Division of Davey Tree Company was contracted to clear vast stands of woody invaders and treat the stumps with an herbicide.
- 5) In November, the east part of the fen was burned with Ed Collins of Pleasant Valley Outdoor Center leading the volunteer crews.
- 6) Various committee members attended workshops on prairie, fen, and wetland management. Some members helped burn areas managed by other conservation groups in the area in return for help given to our burns.

Plans for the coming year include brushing and burning the property along Roberts Road north of Farm Trails South; formulating a management plan for the Barrington Bog, a prime site east of Lake Barrington Shores; formulating a plan for the Richards property in Barrington Hills; disposing of the huge piles of brush in the Wagner Fen.

## REAL ESTATE - Bill Miller

CFC now holds the deed to one-third of the Barrington Bog, an inventoried Illinois natural area opposite the entrance to Lake Barrington Shores. The balance of the bog will be transferred to CFC no later than December 31, 1986, bringing the total area to 41 acres.

Brushing and mowing were conducted on the Richards' tract in Barrington Hills, as a first step in a management program for that property.

## WILLIAM H. MILLER CONSERVATION AWARDS

CFC has established the William H. Miller Conservation Award, to be given "in recognition of outstanding contribution to conservation in the Barrington area." The award is named after Bill Miller, primary founder of CFC and its president for 13 years. Bill currently serves as chairman of the Real Estate Committee.

At the annual meeting, the recipients of the first awards were announced. One was given to Frank and Ruth Wollney, long-time residents of Barrington and, for over 20 years, leaders of the Barrington Pioneers 4-H Club. Waid Vanderpoel, in making the award, cited the extraordinary commitment of the Wollneys to the education of young people, particularly in nurturing a knowledgeable and caring attitude toward their natural surroundings.

Two Girl Scout troops from Countryside School also received a conservation award. Three and one half years ago, Brownie Troop 380 began a paper recycling project within the school. Every week, the scouts gathered, weighed, and took paper from special collection boxes in the classrooms to the recycling center in town. Calculations indicate that they saved over thirty-four trees. The girls have graduated to Junior Troop 359, but still share the project with the scouts in the current Brownie Troop 380. Five other schools in the district have adopted similar projects through the scout troops in their buildings. Jody Pelletiere, co-chairperson of Girl Scouting in the Barrington area, accepted the award for the scouts. The girls will have a special presentation made to them at the annual Countryside award assembly later in the school year.



## BOOK BROWSING

Has there ever been a winter more suited to cross-country skiing and investigating animal tracks, trees in raw silhouette, and wildflowers and weeds in their winter aspect? Here are some books to help you along:

A Guide to Nature in Winter, by Donald W. Stokes

An excellent general guide to winter's natural world, it covers most of what you might observe on a winter outing: snow crystals, trees, tracks, nests, mushrooms, etc. Mr. Stokes writes non-technically but with lots of information that makes good sense out of oft-confusing studies, e.g. tracks. Line drawings illustrate the book throughout.

Weeds in Winter, by Lauren Brown

On the jacket, Roger Tory Peterson writes, "For many years I've wished for a book like this." It will be a great help to anyone who wants to identify plants in their skeletal forms. Detailed drawings and one plant per page give the book an appealing format.

EASTERN COTTONTAIL



Track Finder, by Dorcas Miller (small paperback, \$1.25 at Crabtree Nature Center)  
An ideal track guide for child and adult alike, this little book has as many illustrations as it does words and fits easily in a pocket.

Winter Tree Finder, by May Theilgaard Watts

Another guide in the "Finder" series, designed to help you identify trees only by their winter twigs. It's based on the same principles of wordy, technical keys in tree guides, but it's far easier to follow, largely because of the many illustrations.

## CHECK OFF A GIFT FOR WILDLIFE



What do bluebird workshops, bat roosts, and burning prairies have in common? All are projects designed to enhance some aspect of our rich natural heritage. These projects, and many others, are made possible, in part, because 36,000 citizens elected last year to make a commitment to wildlife in Illinois. This group contributed \$260,000 to the Illinois Nongame Wildlife conservation Fund through the nongame wildlife checkoff on their state tax forms.

A checkmark in the box on line 11b of the Illinois State Income Tax Form will automatically earmark \$10 for your refund for nongame wildlife projects (a \$20 option is available on joint returns). Line 11b is located on the back of the tax form. Taxpayers not expecting a refund may also contribute by simply making a check, in any amount, payable to the Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund and mailing it to:

Illinois Department of Conservation  
Division of Forest Resources and Natural Heritage  
524 S. Second St., Lincoln Tower Plaza  
Springfield, IL 62701-1787

If wildlife in some way enriched your life in 1984, how about returning the favor: check off on line 11b on your tax return.

## GREAT HORNED OWLS: AGGRESSIVE AND ADAPTABLE by Mark Spreyer

It was early on a bitter cold morning and I was checking for bursting pipes. In the snow lay the bones and feathers of a hen pheasant. It hadn't been there the night before and no mammal tracks led to or from the kill. I share a piece of land with a pair of Great Horned Owls and have learned to recognize their handiwork as well as I recognize their familiar call.

"Hoo/hoo - hoo - hoo... hoo - hoo/hoo - hoo."

That deep, low hoot means trouble for cottontails, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, voles, muskrats, skunks, ground squirrels, gophers, weasels, woodchucks, ducks, pigeons, pheasants, hawks, sparrows, blackbirds, woodpeckers, crows, smaller owls,



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robins, crayfish, beetles, grasshoppers, snakes, fish, and anything else that breathes and looks edible to a Great Horned Owl. This varied diet is just one example of the Horned Owl's adaptability, the reason for its continuing success in our area and throughout the country. Flexibility in nest site selection, a wide range of habitat, large size, and an aggressive nature further explain the owl's abundance in the western hemisphere. Before discussing these other reasons, let's take another look at his voracious appetite.

Although they will eat just about anything, Great Horned Owls do have their favorites. A fresh cottontail would top the menu but a fragrant skunk is also a beak-tempting delicacy. Owls' zeal for skunks has caused many to wonder about his sense of smell or lack thereof. The important thing to remember about this long list of food items is that Great Horned Owls are opportunists and not specialists like some other owls. What they choose off the menu is determined by its availability. If the rabbit population is high, they'll eat rabbits. If the mouse population is high, they'll eat mice. We're not talking about one or two mice. In one evening a Great Horned Owl puts away as many mice as will a dozen cats!

This is not to suggest that a Horned Owl is twelve times heavier than a cat although it may seem that big if you're surprised by one flying over your head at dusk. A male owl rarely reaches three pounds and the females average three and a quarter pounds. They range in length from eighteen inches to two feet and have a wingspan that averages just over four and a half feet. Some of you may be wondering, "Just where does a bird this large nest?" The answer is, "Anywhere they want to."

Like most owls, the Great Horned Owl does not build a nest. Instead, he simply uses someone else's nest. Being adaptable creatures, the owls are not too choosy about whose nest they use. It might be the nest of a red-tailed hawk, a red-shouldered hawk, a great blue heron (like the ones on the island in Baker's Lake), a crow, a squirrel, or that of a bald eagle. A study of bald eagle aeries in Alaska showed that six per cent of the nests were appropriated by Great Horned Owls. There is less of a struggle over nest sites than one might imagine since Horned Owls start nesting very early. In this area, the owls have mated and are already watching over a pair of eggs by mid-February. Why nest so early? Because by spring, when the young owls are partially grown and exceptionally ravenous, there are plenty of young mammal and bird families for the parents to plunder. Also, as suggested earlier, it makes it easier to pre-empt a nest from its former owner. The urge to reproduce is not limited by available nesting sites. An observer in Texas has found nests in hollow trees, on rock outcroppings, and even on the ground.

The variety of nest sites not only illustrates adaptability but also reflects on the variety of habitat that can support a pair of owls. Take a look at the range map in a current field guide and you'll discover that the Great Horned Owl is a year-round resident from the tree line in northern Canada and Alaska south throughout North, Central, and South America. Within this tremendous range owls can be found in city parks, deep forests, riparian groves, and in farm yards. This wide assortment of habitats is not surprising considering their eclectic tastes in food and housing.

Once they establish a territory and nest site, a pair of owls will defend their turf against all intruders. Bruce Fortman, a researcher in Pennsylvania, described what happened when he approached a Great Horned Owl nest, "...an owl suddenly dive-bombed me. I felt like I was being hit by a sharp brick." He now wears a scar on his neck, a hard hat on his head, and a heavy jacket when he goes to study owls in the woods.

Unlike the Great Horned Owl, many other raptors take flight when the nest is approached. At a hawk conference in Massachusetts, a speaker from Cornell University talked about the effort to establish the peregrine falcon in the east. In the early years of the project more falcon nests failed because of attacks from Great Horned Owls than for any other reason. Shakespeare recorded this behavior centuries earlier when he wrote in MacBeth,

"A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd."

Even other owls should keep a wary eye out. Barn owls and Great Horned Owls have recently begun to share the same range in Washington state. A study by Knight and Jackman from the University of Wisconsin on how the two species cooperated revealed that, "Common barn-owls are the fourth most important prey item, in terms of total prey biomass, in the diet of Great Horned Owls." Those who attempt to restore the barn owl population in Illinois should keep that finding in mind.

Many authors defend the owl as an important predator of rats and other vermin. They are absolutely right. But those writers who are not fans of the Great Horned Owl seem to sum up his skills with more feeling. In 1898, Neltje Blanchen wrote that the Great Horned Owl, "...does more damage than all other species put together. ...his ponderous body gives him impressive size and power, earned through constant exercise of savage instincts. No one ever finds this hunter in poor condition; diligent and overpowering in the chase, he feasts where others starve..." Indeed he does, especially if pheasant feathers and bits of rabbit fur are any indication. Two weeks after finding the pheasant carcass I went for a walk on a brilliant moon-lit night. As if on cue, a Great Horned Owl soullessly flew from a stand of pines. Seeing the owl and thinking of the carcass reminded me of the last stanza of the poem "The Great Horned Owl" by David McKain.

Thin as rice paper,  
the morning moon shines through the sky.  
I no longer think of mystery and wisdom  
when I hear a forlorn and empty cry.  
It is only the call of the rat catcher  
and the brain eater, the killer  
who leaves the rooster without its song,  
blinking dumb on a barrel against the cold.



## FROM THE STAFF DIRECTOR

Your response to our Annual Membership Invitation/1985 has been heartwarming. To those who still have action on CFC membership on your "Do in the New Year" list: why not mail in your membership dues now before your resolve dissolves. As a reminder, dues are \$5 Individual, \$10 Family, \$50 Sustaining and \$1,000 Life. Send to Citizens for Conservation, Box 435, Barrington. Contributions are tax deductible. Please join us - it's a great way to bring in spring!

Help solve The Case of the Missing Member: If you are the mystery member who, on Christmas Eve, mailed your family membership dues using two pieces of strong, clear tape from a dispenser to affix a stamp you had cut from another envelope (you will receive extra points for being so conservation minded), please notify the office at 382-SAVE. In my haste I didn't realize your name was not on the envelope. We place high value on each member, and don't want you to miss a single CFC event in this new year.



## WILDLIFE ARTIST

Our thanks to Therese Cooper, wildlife artist, who has contributed her talents to this issue of the newsletter. Therese also drew the black-crowned night heron on the CFC News Baker's Lake and Its Birds article which the village of Barrington is distributing with its 1985 blue heron village sticker.

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## CFC NEWS ALMANAC

- March 9 Making Maple Syrup, CFC Saturday Session
- March 7, 14, 28 Lecture series at Shedd Aquarium, "Wetlands and Waterways of Illinois", call 939-246, ext. 362 for brochure.
- March 14, April 11, May 9 Natural History Society of Barrington (meets second Thursday of each month, downstairs, Barrington United Methodist Church, corner of Lincoln and Hough Sts.).
- March 14 Ed Collins will give a talk on the Humm Prairie and will discuss how to begin one.  
8:00 P.M. United Methodist Church.
- April 27 Management of Small Lakes Symposium VII and Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program Conference.  
William Rainey Harper College, Building J., Room 143 Palatine, IL  
Contact Virginia Balsamo, 381-0175 for schedule.
- April 28, May 5, 12, 19 Smith Symposium, "Birds and Their Habitats",  
Ryerson Conservation Area, Deerfield, call 948-7750 for brochure.
- June 1, 2 7th Northern Illinois Prairie Workshop, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn. Contact CFC for more info.