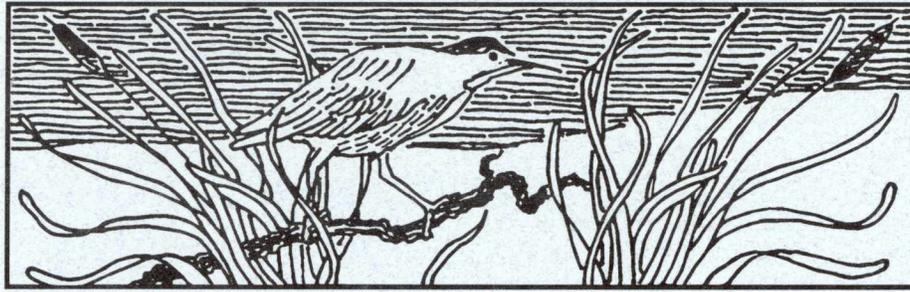


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



WINTER 1995/96

A Red Fox Tale

--Mark Spreyer

A pair of black-tipped ears pokes above the cut branches, then disappears. A few seconds pass, a buff-brown cottontail zig-zags from the brush pile while a red-furred bundle of muscles parallels the rabbit's path, a step behind. The cottontail dashes under a wire fence and, by doing so, trespasses on the property of a young dalmatian. The dog takes up the chase as the rabbit's original pursuer, a red fox, trots away through an ice-covered cattail marsh.

The fox's route takes him from the marsh to an east-west running tree line. This line of dogwood, buckthorn, half-grown spruces and dead elms is regularly travelled by many types of wildlife. The path is a banquet of scents to the curious fox.

One particularly piquant aroma leads him to the long-dead remains of a Canada Goose. As he sniffs the meatless bones, he detected the odor of the goose's predator, a coyote. The coyote is an animal the fox always avoids.

He continues east along the hedgerow, the morning sun shining in his eyes. His hunt had begun before dawn and, so far, has proven fruitless. The arrival of daylight brings little warmth to the hungry fox.

As if to advertise the fox's hunting failures, a gray squirrel scolds him from his sunny perch in a dead elm. The fox pauses, ignoring the squirrel, he directs his ears to sounds coming from his left and beneath the snow.

In a tunnel, cut through dried grass and roofed with snow, a meadow mouse eagerly consumes the nodular roots of a vetch. The gnawing sounds made by the rodent's tiny teeth directs the fox's focus to a spot about four feet north of where he stopped. The vole continues to chew the root's tender inner bark as the fox's body tightens, poised on tiptoes, loaded for the pounce.

A moment passes as the fox takes final aim at his target. He launches himself into a graceful arc that spans the distance from path to chewing sounds. Landing in an puff of snow, the red fox pins the vole between his dexterous forepaws. Without hesitation, he devours the mouse.



Still hungry, the fox continues to follow the hedgerow east. The animal path becomes less obvious as the tree line descends into a wet area dominated by tall grasses. The fox walks through the archways formed by bent-over grasses until he reaches the edge of a frozen pond.

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • SOUTH BARRINGTON • IL • 60010

Continuing on the ice, he is drawn by an intriguing smell delivered by a northwesterly breeze. Reaching the pond's northern shoreline, he springs from ice to woodland. The inviting smell is familiar and bloody. The fox trots along a flagstone walk that leads past an abandoned brick barbecue to a short gravel driveway.

Scanning the driveway ahead, he can see his aromatic quarry, a freshly dead rabbit. The cottontail lies at the corner where the gravel drive meets a much wider, paved road. The fox knows that large, dangerous creatures travel on this hardened path but he is very hungry. He follows a line of shrubs that edge the driveway until he hesitates just a few feet from the road-killed cottontail.

Checking first for possible trouble, the fox steps out to enjoy the best meal of the morning. Tearing off a mouthful, he is disrupted by the rumble of a gravel truck. He grabs the remains of the rabbit and dashes back down the driveway and through overgrown formal gardens. He rests by a clump of yew bushes where he satisfies his hunger before caching the leftovers under a mound of snow and leaves.

It is late in the morning for the fox to be out and he is uneasy. Luckily, it is only a short jaunt home. His route takes him along a low stone wall.



Personal Journal Entry. 1/27/95.

I was on the phone discussing photo possibilities with a reporter when, as if on cue, a beautiful red fox appeared walking along the stone-lined north wall of the parking lot. It seemed bigger than average and moved like a cat although, at one point, it paused and adopted a pointer-like pose. The fox's right front paw was held in mid-step as it looked back over its shoulder. Perhaps, there was something in the air that deserved either a closer look or sniff. As I talked, the fox went on its way, acting like it owned the place which, of course, it does.

Minutes later, the fox ducks under a fallen tree and into a snug, leaf-lined den. Full of rabbit meat, he curls his bushy tail over his nose, and slowly falls asleep.

PROGRAMS

MAKING TRACKS: A WINTER WALK AT STILLMAN

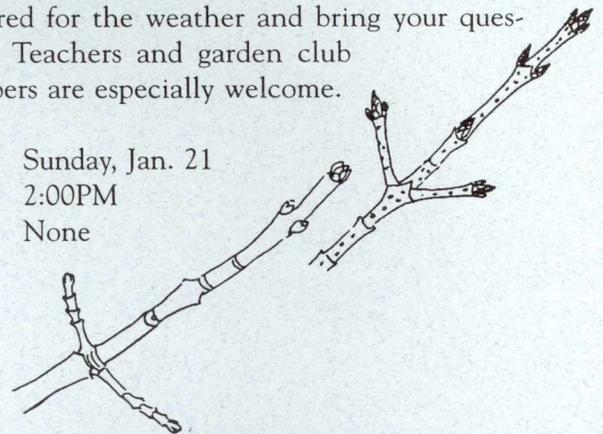
Sure the groundhogs are still hibernating but that's no reason for you stay in your burrow. You're invited to explore Stillman's trails looking for signs of animal activity. Rabbits, squirrels, deer, and fox are out every night leaving us a story to read in their tracks. Join us as we look for plot lines in the snow.

Date: Sunday, Feb. 4
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

NAME THAT TREE OR THIS BUD'S FOR YOU !

Join Stillman's naturalist as he shows you how to identify some of our midwestern trees. Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will keep you from barking up the wrong tree! Come prepared for the weather and bring your questions. Teachers and garden club members are especially welcome.

Date: Sunday, Jan. 21
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None



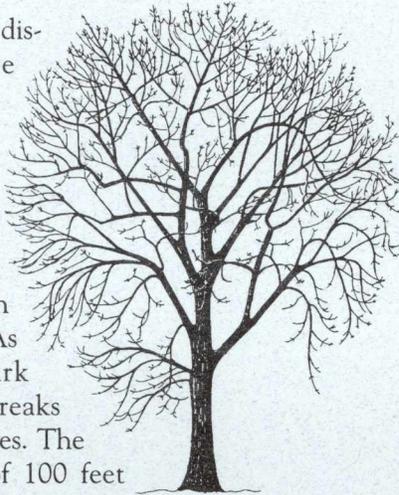
Questions? Call 428-OWLS.

PLANT PROFILE

Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)

A tree's leaves can cool us in the summer and delight us with their color in autumn. When the leaves finally fall, other aspects of a tree's beauty, such as bark texture and branching pattern, can be more easily appreciated.

When viewed from a distance, silver maple, like american elm and hackberry, has a vase-like silhouette. It usually has a short trunk which divides into a number of large ascending limbs. The bark of a young maple is smooth and reddish to yellowish-gray in color. As the tree matures, the bark turns a darker gray and breaks into long, thin flakes or scales. The tree can attain a height of 100 feet with a trunk diameter of three feet or more.



Upon close examination, differences between the silver maple and the other vase-shaped trees become apparent. For example, the maple's drooping outer branches are thicker than the elm's. Also, unlike an elm, the tips of the maple's branches curl up like fish-hooks. Finally, the twigs on a maple branch are in pairs or opposite of one another. There are, in this area, only three tree families with opposite branching: the Maples, Ashes, and Buckeyes.

The silver maple, also called the soft maple, can be found across Illinois often in wet areas such as river floodplains. This fast-growing shade tree does well in a variety of soils, including clay, and has been commonly planted in towns and subdivisions. Home owners should be advised that silver maple has brittle branches that will break under an accumulation of snow or ice. So, it is best to plant it away from buildings or wires that might be damaged by falling branches.

Should you have a silver maple in your yard, keep an eye on it in late winter. It is one of the first trees to blossom, its dense clusters of greenish-yellow flowers opening in February and March. If you don't have a silver maple, visit Stillman on any Sunday. We have many silver maples particularly along the north edge of the pond.

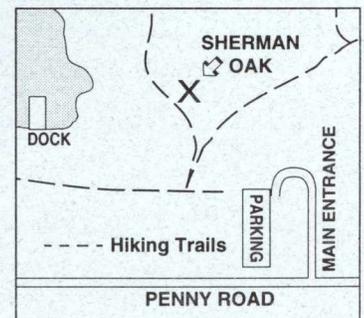
TREE CARE

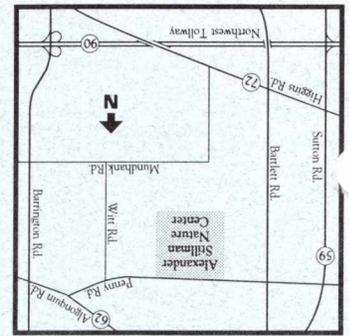
If you want to preserve the trees on a construction site, you must protect them above and below ground. It is easy to recognize and avoid damage to the above ground part of a tree. Roots need to be protected from heavy equipment traffic, changes in natural grade levels (both removal and addition of soil), trenching to install new utilities, and fuel and chemical spills. Prevent tree damage by controlling construction activities near trees you want to save. Protection methods include fencing, mulching, planning and placement of trenching, plus contract incentives and penalties.

OAK PLANTED IN MEMORY OF ANN SHERMAN -- Mark Spreyer

In November, with the help of Hendricksen Tree Service, a red oak (*Quercus rubra*) was planted in memory of Ann Sherman, the first President of Stillman's Board (see map). Ann was an avid birder, photographer, and was very active in the Prairie Woods Audubon Society. Her dedication and support were vital to Stillman in its formative years.

I was a Stillman Board member when Ann was President and I know her patience was an essential element in keeping our organization running smoothly. With that in mind, I invite you to visit her oak and remember these words written by Hal Borland, "Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience."





33 West Penny Road
 South Barrington, IL 60010
 (708) 428-OWLS

STILLMAN
 nature center



OPEN SUNDAY 1 - 4

**ALEXANDER STILLMAN NATURE CENTER
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Susan Allman, President • William Brough, Vice President
 John Albanese, Treasurer • Jennifer Rose, Secretary • Eva Combs, Legal Advisor
 Michael Graft • Susan Hargreaves • Jim Kaltsas • George Sawicki
 Frank Spreyer • Helen Withrow

Mark Spreyer, Naturalist & Newsletter Editor
 Jill Kohler, Newsletter Illustrator

If you aren't already a Friend, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a Friend of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from _____ to the name and address listed below.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Student	\$10.00
Friend	25.00
Supporting Member	50.00
Contributing Member	100.00
Sustaining Member	500.00
Partner	1000.00
Angel	5000.00

Please mail with your check to:

ALEXANDER STILLMAN NATURE CENTER, 33 West Penny Road, South Barrington, IL 60010

