

Promoting Native Plants for Natural Landscapes.

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Ecology 101
Thursday, September 15, 2011

Location: Burpee Museum of Natural History
737 N. Main St., Rockford IL
Time: 7:00 pm



Are you really seeing what's in front of you when you're looking at it? Did you know that there is more to what you are seeing that, without closer inspection, you simply don't see?

Last month we learned about the vast and varied ecology within the soil. This month we'll learn the rest of the story... about the ecology all around us. Landscaping is a narrow and sometimes myopic view of ecology. Understanding the greater systems that you are landscaping within will help you to create long-term sustainable landscapes.

Jack Pizzo is the founding partner of Pizzo & Associates, Ltd. and serves the firm (a business member of our chapter) as President, Senior Ecologist, and Registered Landscape Architect. A prescribed fire expert and instructor and the local expert on successful natural area restorations, Jack presents programs throughout the area and around the country. This promises to be a photo-filled and informative program.

This program is free and open to the public.
For information regarding this or other programs,
please contact Lenae Weichel at 815-282-5482.

Submitted by Lenae Weichel
Interim Program Chair



Articles for the October 2011 newsletter, must be submitted to the Newsletter Editor, at: dkcamps@aol.com by September 23, 2011.

Call for Nominations

The end of the year is not far off, and it is time to call for nominations for our chapter's board. If you are interested in running for one the elected board positions, please contact Constance McCarthy at kublakahn@mac.com or (815) 282.0316 by September 30.

Ballots will be sent out (along with the annual membership survey) in October, with the aim of announcing the results at our November potluck and seed exchange at Burpee.

Message from the President Constance McCarthy

Chapter development meeting in Appleton

I returned from the chapter development weekend at the Wild Ones national headquarters in Appleton, Wisconsin, with a head full of ideas and inspiration. I think it's fair to say that Tim Lewis and Ginnie Watson did, as well.

While a chapter president can send out an email to all other chapter presidents across the country, for example to ask for help in solving a problem or to learn how other chapters deal with a certain issue, the face-to-face discussions at the WILD Center were invaluable. There were plenty of networking opportunities, too, and now that I can put faces to names, I'll feel more comfortable reaching out to other chapters for helpful suggestions in the future.

Tim and I shared our plant sale fliers and annual membership survey with other participants, who were interested in tweaking these to suit their

chapters' purposes. Another chapter has also shared several brochures that it has created to help promote membership in Wild Ones (and in the chapter, or course), and Tim already has plans to alter these documents to help us promote the Rock River Valley chapter.

Collaboration is a really important value of mine, as I feel that people working together towards a common goal can always achieve more than a person (or group) toiling alone. I am confident that our chapter will benefit from the relationships forged and strengthened as a result of the participation by me, Tim, and Ginnie in this event. And I look forward to continuing to share with other chapters what the Rock River Valley chapter has done and created over many years of hard work.

Thanks to everyone who has helped us to get this far. Onward and upward!

Rock River Valley Chapter Mini Grants

Kim Lowman Vollmer, Youth Education and Grant Chair

Our chapter has its own mini grant program available for various not-for-profit groups doing native planting projects. This one is at Prairie Hill Elementary School in South Beloit, Illinois. It was started last year with funds from this program and was continued this year with addition plants provided from the mini grant program. Contact Kim Lowman Vollmer if you would like information about our chapter's mini grants; her contact information is on the back of this newsletter.



Membership Update Marilyn Heneghan, Membership Chair

157 memberships on September 1, 2011

Special Thanks to Recent Rock River Valley Chapter Donators

(any amount about the \$30 basic dues)
Melanie Costello

John & Cathy Schafman

Sandi Andresen

67 attended the August program. Thank you to Kirby Doyle and Lisa Johnson for greeting members.

Note: It is preferred that renewal donations be sent directly to the Chapter's Membership Chair, Marilyn Heneghan, rather than to the national office. Processing goes quicker this way for the chapter. Your expiration date is on your newsletter and your Journal address label. Thank you.

"NEW EMAIL ADDRESSES"
Please notify Marilyn Heneghan at informationoptions@att.net if you change your email address.

Dues payments can be sent either directly to the National Office or to the Chapter Membership Chair, Marilyn Heneghan. Forty percent of the dues paid, regardless of the amount, are shared with Rock River Valley Chapter. Members wishing to make donations specifically for the local chapter, should make a separate payment or so note on their membership application under "Chapter Contribution" and mail to the Chapter Membership Chair. Dues payments, regardless of amount, are considered a donation and are tax deductible.

Looking for Help? Wanting to Show What You've Done?

Although the timing did not work out, we have had but few members volunteer their landscapes for either "Show" Mes or "Help" Mes this year. As a wonderful benefit of membership, we want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

Show Me/Help Me Days are evenings or weekend days when we arrange a tour of several chapter members' yards. We hope each tour will contain both established landscapes ("show me") and yards in-progress or with potential and need of plans ("help me"). Chapter members of all levels of experience and knowledge can participate together to learn and share. And those whose

landscapes have been "helps" in the past just might find they're ready to "show."

It matters not whether you have a small city lot or a rambling country estate. Location is also not a big factor because we will try to schedule different events in particular areas so that travel distance is reasonable on each day.

If you are considering making use of this membership benefit for next year (or even later this fall!), please contact Lenae Weichel, Show Me/Help Me Chair at 815-282-5482 or lenae@weichel.org.

Seeds for Education Grants due October 15th

It is that time of the year again when the Seeds for Education Grants are fast approaching the National Deadline – October 15! These are grants available to various non-profit organizations, like schools, churches, and parks, that wish to do native plantings. Think of a small area that might be enhanced with beautiful prairie plants, that people can enjoy and learn about the native plant community. Maybe your child's school and grandchild's school has an area that could become a learning center with these plants for the children to care for and enjoy. For more information go to the Wild Ones site at [. There you will find information and the online form. If you would like our chapter's endorsement, please, contact me before you submit the grant. If you need any other information or help please contact me at 815-397-6044 or kimlowvol@aol.com](#)

Kim Lowman Vollmer, Youth Education and Grant Chair

Board of Directors in Action

Shey Lowman, Secretary

Highlights of activities of the Board of Directors, as discussed at the August 11, 2011 meeting, include the following:

- Constance McCarthy, our President, was presented a Wild Ones denim shirt by the Board, in appreciation for all her hard work on behalf of the Chapter.
- The following Coordinator changes were announced:
 Lenae Weichel will be the Prairie Plant Sale Coordinator for next year
 Guy Smith is the new Volunteer Coordinator.
 Thanks to Ed Kletecka for his dedicated work as the Volunteer Coordinator since 2007!
- The Lending Library was gifted \$30 for the purchase of books. Ginnie Watson used the gift toward the purchase of the following children's books, be sure to check them out:

When Snowflakes Fall by Carl R. Sams II & Jean Stoick

Treasures Among the Trees by David Livingston Burdick

What Do Roots Do? by Kathleen B Kudlinski

Stranger in the Woods by Carl R. Sams II & Jean Stoick

Keepers of Life, Discovering Plants Through Native American Stories and Learning Activities for Children by Michael J. Caduto & Joseph Bruchac

First Snow in the Woods by Carl R. Sams II & Jean Stoick

One Child, One Planet, Inspiration for the Young Conservationist by Bridget McGovern Llewellyn

Eliza and the Dragonfly by Susie Caldwell Rinehart

Lost in the Woods by Carl R. Sams II & Jean Stoick

A Log's Life by Wendy Pfeffer

The next board meeting will be Thursday, October 13, 2011, at Aunt Mary's on State Street in Rockford. The meeting officially starts at 6:30 p.m., but many come at 5:30 to purchase their dinner. All chapter members are welcome and invited to attend board meetings..

August Meeting Recap Lenae Weichel

Underground Ecology: Or How I Learned to Love Dirt

photos by Tim Lewis



Our August meeting brought us the long-awaited topic of life underground. Dr. Devin Wixon of the University of Wisconsin – Madison presented a fact-filled overview of the life of the soil. This fascinating presentation gave us a look into the little-known world underground. Dr. Wixon shared the analogy that “soil is the poor-man’s

rainforest” with more species in a shovelful than the entire Amazon rainforest above ground. In fact, fully two-thirds of earth’s biodiversity lives in soils and sediments and the oldest and largest creatures ever identified are sprawling underground masses of fungi (Armillaria) which far outclass blue whales in size and can live over one thousand years. One teaspoon (1g.) of soil contains upwards of a billion species of bacteria, not to mention fungi and small animals/insects. Even so, only one-percent of soil microorganisms have been identified and even fewer have been named due to the difficulty to collect, culture, and classify them.

Dr. Wixon began her presentation with three concepts for us to remember:

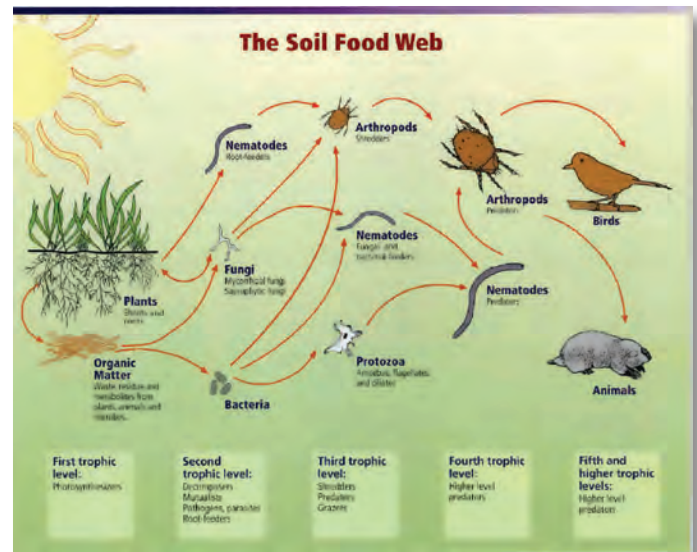
1. Soil is a habitat! Soil is alive with billions of living organisms.
2. Soil is fascinating and complex! Soil supports entire ecosystems and provides many services.
3. Soil is important! And easily impacted by external changes.

But what is soil, really? Dr. Wixon indicated that available definitions are neither particularly useful nor understandable. She suggested that more important to us are the basic composition as well as functions and services that soil provides and the organisms that enable those services. Soil tends to consist of just less than 50% solids, 25% air, 25% water, and 2 to 5% organic matter (which is why, she says, most soil organisms are starving most of the time). Functions important to native plant growers include decomposition, water reservoir (and quality), nutrient cycling (fertility based on nitrogen availability), soil structure, carbon storage, and disease control, to name a few.

Organisms, along with the climate and topography, directly impact the life in the soils at various levels (soil layers or horizons). To live, they need the proper

environment (food, habitat niches, and a full spectrum of relationships including succession, predation, symbiosis, competition, and weapons [antibiotic production or physical defense mechanisms like menacing jaws]). In many cases, plant roots provide habitat to support numerous organisms. Dr. Wixon suggested that we think of plant roots as farmers; cultivating specific environmental elements to have exactly what they need in terms of water, carbon, acidity, etc.

The cast of soil organism characters include nematodes, protozoa, fungal hyphae, and bacteria. But the abundant quantity of life in the soil is what astounds: in just 2.5 acres of healthy soil you will find 2,200 worms and arthropods and 5,900 fungi. Wixon suggests as a learning activity, shaking out a scoop of soil onto a white sheet of paper and look to see what’s in it and what’s moving. She also shared a graphic from the US Department of Agriculture showing the interactions of organisms in the soil food web.



Source: US Department of Agriculture- Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dr. Wixon shared three types of soil organisms and explained their major functions. Macrofauna are larger species; vertebrates, burrowing mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and earthworms. Many attendees were surprised to learn from Dr. Wixon that earthworms are not native to the US (but to England) and that they are a cause of great changes to forest floors (lushness quickly disappears upon their arrival). However good they are at loosening and fertilizing soil, they aren’t very good to our woodland flora. Ironically, they have become endangered in parts of their native country. Macrofauna can be thought of as engineers of the soil, moving it about, aerating it, and creating mounds, structures, and tunnels.

Mesofauna are considered ecosystem moderators. Protozoa are likened to cows, grazing on bacteria and nematodes are actually water animals, living on films of water found in the soil structure. Both of these organisms are improving the nutrient cycling of the soil with their beneficial waste.

The third classification contains the Microorganisms, although not all microscopic, these tiny creatures are responsible for carbon transformation, antibiotic production (naturally, to fight pathogens/disease also living in soil), and much nutrient cycling. Bacteria fall into this category and each serves a specific function in the soil as do fungi. The filamentous growth can spread out to overcome food and water disadvantages, which accounts for the large size of the organism but this spread can also make it vulnerable to attack or disease. (For example, they die quickly when even a small section is tilled or cut.) Dr. Wixon also shared examples of beneficial mycorrhizal associations or the symbiotic structure formed by a fungus and a plant, allowing a plant to take up nitrogen or phosphorus outside of the immediate zone which may be depleted. Microorganisms are very important to soil health and Wixon suggested that if you don't think you've got them, success has been found in bringing in even small amounts of remnant prairie soil to innoculate a new area. (Author's note: do not dig in any natural area without permission of the owner and never in areas of sensitive or ecologically-important habitat.)

With all this great information on what is in the soil and how it functions, many members were interested to learn



Devin Wixon & Jerry Paulson

how they can best impact the health of the millions of organisms in their own soil and, in turn, their soil health. Dr. Wixon's best advice was to focus on building and maintaining a healthy food web. How do we do this? By reducing disturbance (tilling, digging), increasing plant diversity, reducing chemical fertilization (soil organisms respond negatively when their environment is changed), preventing compaction, and adding organic inputs (humus from compost is best but also straw mulch, natural leaf litter, etc).

The evening's presentation was ended with a quote from Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first chief of the NRCS (National Resource Conservation Service), who said, "if we take care of the land, it will take care of us."

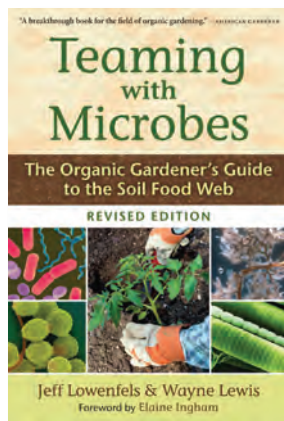


*Marilyn Heneghan,
Lynda Johnson &
Constance McCarthy
in discussion at
the August
Wild Ones meeting.*

Book Review Submitted by Shey Lowman

Teaming with Microbes: The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web, Revised Edition

Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis
Timber Press 2010



At the August meeting, during the amazing presentation on soils by Devin Wixon, Ph.D., there were many questions about how to “fix” the soils in our gardens. Here are answers to some of those questions. Call me crazy, but I love to read books about dirt. The “soil food web” is a fascinating and complex subject, one that I was ignorant of until rather recently. I just finished reading *Teaming with Microbes: The*

Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web by Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis. They not only go into detail about all the critters beneath our feet in Part 1, but in Part 2, they tell us what to do to “fix” our soil.

The authors are both lifelong gardeners living in, of all places, Alaska. Lowenfels is a member of the Garden Writers of America Hall of Fame and is a weekly columnist for the Anchorage Daily News. Lewis is the founder of Plant a Row for the Hungry. In researching this book the authors worked with Elaine Ingham, Ph.D., a soil microbiologist formerly at Oregon State University and currently president of Soil Foodweb, Inc. (www.soilfoodweb.com)

Did you know that there are “bacterially dominated” soils and “fungally dominated” soils? I sure didn't. On top of that, most trees, shrubs and perennials prefer “fungally dominated” soils so they can get their nitrogen in ammonium form (that's Rule #3 of “The Soil Food Web Gardening Rules.”) And Rule #2 is that most vegetables, annuals and grasses do best in “bacterially dominated” soils so they can get nitrogen in nitrate form.

On page 205 of the book are listed the nineteen “Soil Food Web Gardening Rules.” All simple things that can be done to literally bring the life back to your soil and make your plants thrive in it. Best of all this is done on the soil surface, absolutely no tilling or digging. In fact, contrary to what most of us have been taught, tilling is bad. It breaks up the beneficial fungi in the soil, especially the mycorrhizal fungi that exists in a symbiotic relationship with plant roots. Tilling exposes the organic matter in the soil to UV light destroying it along with bacteria and other beneficial microscopic critters. As the

authors state, “Sure, the soil is fluffy after rototilling, but that's a dog's name, not a soil description.”

Another detrimental gardening practice is using synthetic chemical fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides. One theory is synthetic chemicals burn or kill the soil critters. A second theory is that synthetic fertilizers being easier and faster for the plants to use, they stop relying upon their natural relationships with bacteria, fungi, nematodes, etc., which then die off. Either way soil becomes sterile and deteriorates. Worms and insects are no longer there to aerate the soils and create tunnels for water retention.

Some quick highlights:

To support soil fungi-

- Use aged, brown organic materials
- Add mulch to the soil surface
- Use coarse, dry mulches
- Use phosphate rock dust

To support soil bacteria-

- Use green organic materials, like dry grass clippings (untreated, of course)
- Wet and grind mulch thoroughly
- Work mulch into the soil surface (gently)
- Use kelp, humic and fulvic acids

This is not a dry, sterile book; it is written with humor and insight for us mere mortal gardeners. I laughed out loud many times and insisted on reading the best parts aloud to my husband, who could care less, but is now a better, more knowledgeable man for the experience. There are many beautiful electron microscope photographs showing us the unseeable. The first photo is of a fungus trapping a root-eating nematode for dinner, it's on page 12.

For those of you looking for answers to your landscape soil questions, this is a must have book. The language is straight forward, the science is fascinating, the practical how-to instructions enlightening. It will soon be available in the chapter lending library. For those of you needing your own copy, it is a hard cover book with a list price of \$24.95 and is currently available on Amazon.com for \$16.47. Once read you will never look at dirt the same way again.



WCFPD Board of Commissioners in Action

At the 24 August 2011 meeting of the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District board of commissioners, the following actions were taken:

- The irrigation system at the Ledges golf course, which was damaged by lightning, will be repaired for approximately \$56,000. Voting in favor: Randy Olson, Gloria Lind, Cheryl Maggio, Mary McNamara Bernsten, Judy Barnard, and Audrey Johnson. Voting against: Jay Ferraro.
- The Budget and Appropriations Ordinance and the Levy Ordinance were passed (unanimous).
- The use of WCFPD funds is being contemplated to hire a DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) officer to do programming at the Pecatonica Environmental Education Center.
- After going into closed session to discuss details, the meeting was opened again and the board approved the purchase of property from Mr. Gasparini (near the Four Lakes F.P.) for approximately \$216,000. Funds for this acquisition will come from the WCFPD's Contingency Fund, which is a sort of "rainy day fund" for urgent situations that arise. This land acquisition reduced the Contingency Fund to nearly zero, although approximately \$25,000 was moved from the law enforcement budget into the Contingency Fund before the end of the meeting. Voting in favor of the land acquisition: Randy Olson, Jay Ferraro, Gloria Lind, and Cheryl Maggio. Voting against the land acquisition: Mary McNamara Bernsten, Judy Barnard, and Audrey Johnson.

- Judy Barnard mentioned the need to have a matrix of criteria for land acquisitions.
- Dates are being set for the strategic planning process.
- Audrey Johnson recommended that the board consider forming a foundation to help support the work and mission of the WCFPD. There was some discussion of the various ways to go about doing this. The topic will be considered at a future meeting.

A representative of Speer Financial gave a presentation to the commissioners on various types of financing available to the WCFPD.

The WCFPD had a booth at the Winnebago County fair and folks were surveyed on their interests with regard to the forest preserves. Results of the survey were distributed at this meeting.

A grant was received to make improvements at the Mactown Historic District. The golf season could extend to Thanksgiving if the weather cooperates.

The next meeting of the Board of Commissioners will be on Tuesday, 13 September 2011 at 5:30 p.m. at the headquarters of the WCFPD, 5500 Northrock Dr., Rockford (just west of the Harlem Bridge). The public is welcome to attend.

2011 Chapter Programs and Events

September 9 & 10	<i>Native Tree & Shrub Pickup</i> See brochure for complete details	John Peterson Native Tree & Shrub Sale Coord.	14037 Baker Rd Durand, IL 61024 (815) 248-2110
September 15 7:00 pm	<i>Ecology 101</i>	Jack Pizzo Pizzo & Associates	Burpee Museum of Natural History
October 20 7:00 pm	<i>Bringing Nature Home; How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens</i>	Doug Tallamy Author, professor University of Delaware	Burpee Museum of Natural History
November 17 7:00 pm	<i>Pot Luck and Seed Exchange</i> Members only – all members welcome with or without seeds Bring a dish to share.		Burpee Museum of Natural History
December	<i>No Meeting-Happy Holidays!</i>		

Unless noted, programs are free and open to the public. Programs are subject to change.
Please contact Lenae Weichel at 815-282-5482 for more information.



ROCK RIVER VALLEY CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

c/o Pambi Camacho
6680 Hartwig Drive
Cherry Valley, IL 61016

Don't become extinct!

If the expiration date on the mailing label is **9/1/2011**, this is your last chapter newsletter and you have received your last Wild Ones *Journal* until you activate your membership

You may receive a renewal notice from both the National organization and your chapter. Your membership information will be updated quicker if you renew through your chapter so you won't miss an issue of the chapter newsletter.

Mail your renewal to Marilyn Heneghan
P.O. Box 114, Roscoe, IL 61073

Wild Ones - Rock River Valley Chapter

Board of Directors and Chairs

President: Constance McCarthy 815-282-0316 (kublaihan@mac.com)
Vice President: Kim Riskey 815-962-4584 (rip-cordo1@comcast.net)
Interim Program Chair: Lenae Weichel 815-282-5482 (lenae@weichel.org)
Secretary: Shey Lowman 815-757-4456 (slowman@niu.edu)
Treasurer: Janet Giesen 815-899-6139 (janetgiesen@gmail.com)
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Newsletter Editor: Pambi Camacho 815-332-7637 (dkcamps@aol.com)
Plant Rescue Chair: John Peterson 815-248-2110 (tacmot@msn.com)
Librarian: Ginnie Watson (815) 398-0138 VSWatson47@aol.com

Show Me/Help Me Chair: Lenae Weichel 815-282-5482 (lenae@weichel.org)
Youth Education & Grants Chair: Kim Lowman Vollmer 815-397-6044 (kimlowvol@aol.com)
Volunteer Coordinator: Guy Smith (815) 633-5293 guysmith99@hotmail.com
Booth Coordinator, FREC representative: Tim Lewis (815) 874-3468 natives.tim@comcast.net
Refreshments Coordinator: Bev Crittenden (815) 964.8252 bevcrit@aol.com
Merchandise Chair: Shey Lowman 815-757-4456 (slowman@niu.edu)

Regular meetings are held the third Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm at the Burpee Museum of Natural History, 737 North Main St., Rockford, IL

Special meetings, outings, and events are scheduled periodically and sometimes replace the regular meeting time/place. Contact any officer to confirm information about our next meeting.

Wild ones Annual Membership: Family \$30, Limited Income/Full-Time Student \$20, Business \$200
Entire membership contribution is tax deductible. Contact Membership Chair for additional information or to join.

Visit our Web site at wildones.org/chapters.html

Wild Ones Mission

Wild ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restorations and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.