



Hickory Hills Highlights

Hickory Hills Chapter - Illinois Audubon Society

Stewards of H & B Wildlife Sanctuary

Hillsboro, Illinois

Winter 2025 - 26

The H & B Bremer Sanctuary was donated by Helen and Betty Bremer to the Illinois Audubon Society piece by piece until the entire 203-acre property was finalized in 1977. The Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society was founded in 1980 and is responsible for caring for the property. Volunteers meet on Tuesday and Thursday mornings to maintain the property for the benefit of the plants and animals that call the sanctuary home. All activities are guided by the management plan composed by the Bremer Board and approved by the Illinois Audubon Society's Board of Directors. We continually welcome members of the chapter and of the society to join us at the barn to help with our daily and seasonal chores as well as the special events that take place periodically. New volunteers are always welcome.



Rainbow over the prettiest little outhouse in Montgomery County



Photo by Don Krefft

Volunteer Opportunities

SPEND TIME IN NATURE WHILE MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

As stewards of H and B Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary, we offer a variety of volunteer opportunities. These may include:

- * **Assist** the sanctuary crew. Workday activities are on Tuesday and Thursday mornings & include trail maintenance, prairie and woodland management, maintenance of the barn and buildings.
- * **Assist** with children's educational programs.
- * **Participate** in citizen science projects.
- * **Organize** programs, events, and the bulletin board. No experience necessary. No set number of hours required. Come out when you can! You may volunteer or get more information by texting Don Krefft at 217 313-0382.



Compliments of Mark Olsen

Return of the "Snowbirds" Dark-eyed Juncos are in the sparrow family *Passerellidae* and are considered the "snowbirds" of the middle latitudes. Over most of the eastern US, they appear when winter approaches and then return north again each spring.

Many Dark-eyed Juncos return to the same area each winter. It is likely that you have many of the same birds at your feeder this winter that you had in previous winters.

New Year's Day Walk - by Don Krefft



Second Saturday Open House - 2026

February 14

10:00 Valentine's Day Bird Walk

**11:00 Winter Bird Feeder Workshop &
Build a Bird Feeder with Your Valentine!**

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Hardy souls who wanted to start the new year off on the right foot ventured out to the sanctuary to participate in the annual New Year's Day Walk on the morning of January 1st. Crisp clean air and a mix of sun and clouds welcomed approximately 50 attendees. Bremer volunteers Ken

Schaal and Jim Hefley lead the hikers. A nice assortment of soups, chili, and other tasty treats helped warm us afterward. It was a fun time visiting with the attendees, several who were first-time visitors. Two representatives of the Illinois Audubon Society's board also joined the group—a pleasant surprise to see Jo and Grace!



***“Remembered Things”* - a book of poems by Jerry Prater**

Kudos goes to local artist, Hickory Hills Chapter secretary, and Bremer Sanctuary volunteer, Jerry Prater, on the publication of his new book! *Remembered Things* is a collection of fresh new poems that speak directly to the heart. Easily accessible, these poems convey images of personal interactions, man's place in nature, and images of war. His book is available through Amazon [here](#). Congratulations, Jerry! Below is Jerry's response to learning more about his book. ed.

Jerry writes: “I think I was about thirteen when I discovered words might have an effect on a reader. Over the past seven decades I have tried to improve that skill. At a recent get together with some artist friends, one asked me what medium of art I was practicing. Almost without thinking I replied, “I am a poet”. I was surprised since I had never said that out loud and had rarely dared to think of myself in that manner. Soon after, I decided it was time to own that appellation. At the age of eighty-three, I sought out an editor to put together my first real book, *Remembered Things*.

Dave Ambrose, a friend and retired newspaper editor from Carlinville, took over the task of fixing my mistakes and eventually whipping sixty-two poems into a draft that resembled a publishable effort.

As for what the book is about; I think Dave said it best in his blurb for the back cover: ‘One does not have to be an aficionado of poetry to appreciate these poems by Jerry Prater. (His) verses are lyrical, evocative, emotionally engaging and, perhaps most of all, accessible to readers of all backgrounds. In *Remembered Things*, (he) explores themes of loss, the communal experience of the Vietnam War, and humanity's relationship with the land and the natural world. The voice is rich and deep as the prairie topsoil in central Illinois, where (he) resides. If you crave straight forward poems that abandon academic pretense in favor of honesty and directness, pick up a copy of *Remembered Things*. You will not be disappointed.’ ”

December Scenes at Bremer Sanctuary - by Ken Schaal



Post Oak tree



Trumpet Creeper vine



a Snag for nesting



**Hibiscus pods at
Turtle Pond**



Hazel nut catkins



Bee balm flower heads



**Arrowwood Viburnum
fruit**



Bluebird house



**Lichens on Cherry
tree**



Brush pile



Deer tracks in snow



"Ghost Tree" - Sycamore



Cress Creek



Turtle Pond

Brown Creeper - A Winter Visitor

As winter settles over our region, birdwatchers may spot a distinctive visitor, the Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*). Known for its unique ability to cling to trees, this small bird becomes particularly interesting in mature woodlands during the winter. It often searches for insects and larvae hidden beneath the bark.

You can recognize the Brown Creeper by its camouflaged brown and white feathers. Its characteristic upward spiral as it ascends tree trunks makes for a fascinating observation. What sets the Brown Creeper apart from many other birds is its graceful and deliberate foraging technique. It spirals up the trunk of a tree in a slow, methodical manner before gracefully gliding down to another tree...and repeat. This behavior not only aids in finding food but also provides safety from predators that may be overhead.



Wikipedia

The breeding range of the Brown Creeper stretches across Canada and the northern United States; many individuals migrate south for the winter.

Their arrival in Illinois usually coincides with the first snowfall and a drop in temperature, offering a delightful sight for local bird enthusiasts. It has been observed frequently at Bremer Sanctuary.

To enhance your chances of spotting this winter visitor, explore mature forests and parks where large trees create favorable habitat. Additionally, setting up bird feeders filled with suet can help attract them. As we enjoy the beauty of nature during the winter months, remember to look for the elusive Brown Creeper, a true reflection of wildlife's resilience through changing seasons.

Volunteer Activities at Bremer Sanctuary



Montgomery County Prescribed Burn Association

What is a Prescribed Burn Association, and what does it have to do with Bremer Sanctuary? First, a Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) is a group of landowners who share resources, equipment, and training in exchange for helping put fire on their properties. PBAs may charge dues and require members to participate in several burns each year. The dues and participation requirements make sure the members of the PBA have adequate equipment and training; plus, members receive the fire they need on their properties. Joining a prescribed burn association is often the most cost effective and easiest way to get a burn on your property. It can also be a gateway to other forms of conservation practices and a good way to connect with like-minded landowners. Additional resources may include the Soil and Water Conservation District, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever.



Bremer Sanctuary has become an integral part of the newly formed Montgomery County PBA (MCPBA). Since the sanctuary is centrally located, all the in-person meetings have been held at the barn. Since many of the members have little experience in prescribe burns, both observation and hands-on training are valuable activities. On November 6, MCPBA members joined the Bremer fire volunteers with a burn on a 12-acre plot in the northwest corner of the property. This plot was

previously sprayed, and a burn was necessary to get the plot ready to plant for a CRP pollinator planting that will take place next fall.

To learn more about the MCPBA, contact MontgomeryCoPBA@gmail.com.

Project Wingspan: A Volunteer Program



Every year, Project Wingspan awards locally sourced seeds and plugs to pollinator habitat programs around Mid-west. The purpose of Project Wingspan is to collect wildflower seeds to enhance and secure more than 18,000 acres of high-quality habitat in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio that support declining species, such as the Monarch Butterfly and the Rusty-patched Bumblebee, as well as all species in need of safe prairie habitat. Project Wingspan is a Midwestern initiative that aims to expand and enhance pollinator habitats using volunteer-collected, local native wildflower seeds. The project is conducted by Pollinator Partnership and funded by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Illinois Project Wingspan coordinator, Eleanor Schumacher, recently spent time in our area collecting prairie seeds. Although she did not visit Bremer



A field of Prairie Blazing Stars

Sanctuary this year, she did visit the Illinois Audubon Society's Adams Wildlife Sanctuary in Springfield, as well as prairie areas of several Montgomery County residents. This fall she and her volunteers collected wetland species at Glenn Savage's prairie and then spent time at Ken Schaal's prairie garden collecting several

buckets of Prairie Blazing Star seeds and a handful of rare Prairie Gentian seeds. Seed collecting has become an annual event for Project Wingspan in our area, and volunteers are welcome. Contact our Project Wingspan coordinator at es@pollinator.org.



Seed Collecting (compliments of Jeanne Handy, AWS)

IAS Announces Addition to Prairie Ridge State Natural Area

The Illinois Audubon Society recently purchased 80 acres of land in Jasper County, expanding the mosaic of grasslands at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area near Newton, Illinois. “Breeding birds including Sedge Wrens, Henslow’s Sparrows, and Northern Bobwhite will certainly benefit from this new acquisition, as well as many wintering raptors including Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers,” stated Nathan Goldberg, the IAS Director of Conservation Science.

Deb Carey, chair of the IAS Lands Protection and Stewardship Committee, remarked, “Acquiring wildlife habitat, like the recent purchase of the 80-acre parcel in Jasper County, is one way to increase biodiversity. Other methods we utilize include instigating scientific research on native flora and fauna, inspiring people to work together on land stewardship, and educating young and old on the intricacies of Nature. Share our passion for the planet by joining us on our journey.”



King Rail, Dickcissel, Henslow's Sparrow, and Northern Bobwhite
(Photos taken at PRSNA by Leroy Harrison)

Bremer Hosts Merriweather Lewis - by Jerry Prater



A special guest at this year's annual meeting and open house was Merriweather Lewis (AKA “Fox” Ellis). Dressed in buckskins and tricorne hat, “Fox” brought to life the adventures of Merriweather Lewis and the Corps of Discovery with the roar of a grizzly bear and chants of indigenous tribes.

“Merriweather” detailed the difficult keelboat journey up the Missouri River, the sole subsistence on pounds of wild game meat for weeks on end, the near tragedy of a grizzly bear attack, and first contact with native tribes. One story detailed the difficulty of communication. Having recently met the Shoshone woman, Sacagawea and her French husband, Charbonneau, and needing horses from the Mandan Tribe, his request had to be translated from English to Shoshone, to French to Mandan. Fortunately, the slow process was finally granted, and the Corps of Discovery was able to finish their journey to the Oregon coast.

Merriweather Lewis was serving as the Private Secretary to President Jefferson when he was assigned this historic task. He recruited Captain William Clark as a co-leader. Together, they completed the journey, bringing back a treasured trove of botanical and natural specimens never seen in the east and proving there was a possible overland route to the Pacific Coast. Lewis died of a gunshot wound on October 11, 1809, at the age of 35 in what was speculated as suicide following a lifetime of depression.

When attending events, please dress appropriately. Trails are open from dawn until dusk every day.

Donations are always welcome.

Hickory Hills Chapter Board of Directors and Officers

Butch Durbin – Restoration

Jerome Epplin – Restoration

Jim Hefley - Chapter President, Restoration

Ron Gazda - Building

Don Krefft - IAS Chapter Rep, Treasurer, Restoration

Ray Luebbert - Restoration, Website

Dane Murphy - Building

Jerry Prater- Secretary

Dick Rompasky - Building

Ken Schaal - Restoration

Bob Schwandner - Vice-President, Building

Susan Schwandner & Jeanie Nobbe - Bulletin Board

Jim Yount - Building



Photo credits go to Jamie Arntzen, Don Krefft, Ray Luebbert, Randy Sands, and Ken Schaal.



Trail Map is available above.



If you are enjoying this newsletter, you are either an Illinois Audubon Society member (dues reminder are sent directly from the IAS) or you are a “Friend of Bremer”, in which case the annual dues of \$10.00 are due in January and can be mailed to: Hickory Hills Chapter PO Box 395, Hillsboro IL 62049. However, you may join at any time.



You can join or renew online at illinoisaudubon.org or scan QR Code.