



Co-Partners of the Volunteer Stewardship Network

# Gatherings Online

**A monthly email newsletter of the Volunteer Stewardship Network  
published by The Nature Conservancy**

To unsubscribe to this newsletter or if you would like to contribute articles, stories, or announcements to be published in future newsletters, please send them to Karen Tharp at [ktharp@tnc.org](mailto:ktharp@tnc.org) by the first day of each month.

The next newsletter deadline is **Thursday, February 1, 2007**

## JANUARY 2007

*Just living is not enough, said the butterfly. One must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower. - Hans Christian Anderson*

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### **INSIDE...GATHERINGS ONLINE** (\*denotes items for Chicago Wilderness members)

#### **I. NEWS**

- Bruce Boyd, Director of The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter – Begins New Venture
- New Mighty Acorns Website

#### **II. WORKSHOPS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES**

- Effects of Savanna Restoration on Bird Populations, January 10
- So What? Workshop in Cook County, January 13
- C2000 Ecosystem Program Workshops
- Herbicide Training and Testing Workshop, February 10
- ENTICE Workshops from IDNR
- Frog Monitoring Workshops 2007
- CW Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Workshops\*
- Michigan Prescribed Fire Council – Fire Training
- Bolingbrook Park District – Natural Resource Positions
- Champaign Forest Preserve District – Natural Resources Technician

#### **III. CONFERENCES AND OTHER EVENTS**

- Developing the World's Most Ecological Communities Seminar
- DuPage Environmental Summit
- Midwest Ecological Landscaping Association Conference
- Illinois Lake Management Association – 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference
- Wild Things Conference – March 3, 2007

#### **IV. GRANTS AND OTHER RESOURCES**

- **Indiana's Woodland Restoration Program**
- **Great Lakes Commission – Sea Grant Fellowship**
- **Friends of the Parks 2007 Seed Grant Program**
- **Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program**
- **Global Invasive Species Database Launched**
- **Native Plant Seed Propagation Webcast**

#### **V. JUST FOR FUN**

- **The January Woods – A Nature Essay**
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### **I. NEWS**

#### **Bruce Boyd, Director of The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter - Begins New Venture**

Bruce Boyd, Director of The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter has made the decision to begin a new venture as managing director and principal of Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisors in March 2007. Bruce joined the Conservancy in 1994. Through his leadership and support over these 12 years, the Illinois Chapter has accomplished many feats and is defined as a leader within The Nature Conservancy in regard to its innovative programs such as the formation of the Great Rivers Partnership, Chicago Wilderness, and the Volunteer Stewardship Network. Bruce says he will miss the community of conservationists both inside and outside the Conservancy but intends to remain close to conservation and the mission of preserving the rich biodiversity of this Earth. Please join us as we wish Bruce well!

#### **New Mighty Acorns Web Site**

The Mighty Acorns program helps connect thousands of urban youth with nature through a unique hands-on, experience. An outstanding example of creative partnerships, the program introduces more than 8,000 students annually to fresh air and to fresh ideas and may be inspiring our future biologists, ecologists, and restoration volunteers. To keep up with the growth of the Mighty Acorns program (there are more than 20 partners in the region from the Wisconsin border to northwestern Indiana!), the web site was recently revamped. Check it out and learn more about important work of Mighty Acorns and how your organization and volunteers can get involved: [www.mightyacorns.org](http://www.mightyacorns.org)

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### **II. WORKSHOPS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **Effects of Savanna Restoration on Bird Populations - January 10**

Dr. Jeff Brawn from the Illinois Natural History Survey, University of Illinois will give a presentation on the effects of savanna restoration (fire, cutting, etc) on bird populations and communities. The program will be held on Wednesday, January 10 from 7 to 9 p.m. at Pottawatomie Community Center. Dr. Braun has studied savanna restoration at a dozen sites in northeastern Illinois, the Peoria area and Kankakee Sands area. In each case the study would compare the species of birds in the restored savanna to those in a nearby closed forest similar to what the savanna was before restoration. The differences in bird species using these two types of habitat is the subject of his talk. The results of his studies have important implications for the conservation of birds associated with disturbance/mediated habitats.

Pottawatomie Community Center is located on the east side of the Fox River at the north end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue approximately 7 blocks north of Route 64. This free program is sponsored by Kane County Audubon, St. Charles Park District, and the Kane County Forest Preserve. Call Bob Andrini at 630 584-8386 for more information.

### **So what? Workshop on January 13, 9am - 1pm, FPDC Volunteer Resource Center, 6100 N. Central, Chicago**

That is the big question site stewards, many other volunteers, and managers are confronted with when introducing activities to new volunteers, or advocating for and defending management activities. The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) will present a workshop designed to provide volunteers with skills and ideas that will help them answer that question. Based on the CW Communicating Biodiversity Workbook for volunteers and the National Association for Interpretation thematic message skills, we will spend an engaging morning reviewing messages, tangibles and intangibles, and skills to help get across a memorable message in a short time. Reserve your space by phoning 773-631-1790, ext. 10. Snacks and beverages will be provided, participants are welcome to bring a lunch to enjoy by the fireplace after the workshop, and stay for an afternoon of discussions, walks, or other activities. The workshop is free; participants will receive a copy of the CW workbook.

### **C2000 Ecosystems Program Workshops**

C2000 Ecosystem Program workshops will be held in the upcoming weeks at a variety of locations. The workshops will be an opportunity to learn about some of the positive changes that are developing within the Ecosystem Program. This will also provide an opportunity to voice any suggestions or accolades you may have to offer to the staff or other Ecosystem Partnerships members from around your area. The following are the dates, time and place where each workshop will be held:

- Jan 19th, 10:00am - 2:00pm, Illinois Waste Management & Research Center, One East Hazelwood Dr., Champaign, IL
- Jan 25th, 12:00pm - 3:30pm, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, 3 S. 580 Naperville Rd., Wheaton, IL
- Jan 26th, 10:30am - 2:30pm, Nash Recreation Center, 304 South 5th St., Oregon, IL
- Jan 31st, 10:00am - 2:00pm, IDNR, 11731 State Hwy 37, Benton, IL
- Feb 15th, 10:00am - 2:00pm, IDNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL

\*a box lunch will be provided at each workshop.

All five workshops have the same agenda, therefore you only need to attend the one most convenient for you. Up to four members from your partnership can attend. Please call your Ecosystem Administrator at least five days prior to the workshop to register. For more information contact Lynn Boerman, IDNR, at [Lynn.Boerman@illinois.gov](mailto:Lynn.Boerman@illinois.gov).

### **Herbicide Training and Testing Workshop – February 10**

Interested in becoming certified and licensed to use herbicides on public lands? If so, The Nature Conservancy will be hosting the next herbicide training and testing workshop for volunteers on Saturday, February 10 at The Brookfield Zoo from 8:15 am to 4:00 pm. All volunteers are invited to attend this annual one-day weekend clinic that includes General Standards training (for Operators license) in the morning and (Operator's and Applicator's license) testing in the afternoon.

- To be certified as an Operator (a person who uses herbicides and who is "sponsored" by a licensed Applicator), volunteers must pass the General Standards test.

- To be certified as an Applicator (the person in an organization who has responsibility for all Operators licensed under him/her with regard to the use of herbicides), volunteers must pass both the General Standards test and one or more Category exam. Those category exams most appropriate to VSN work are listed here; choose the one you think is the most applicable to the herbicide application you will be doing:

Right-of-way pest control: chemical weed control on noncrop sites such as parking lots, along roads, in access rights-of-way, and in fence lines. [This is the license that most volunteers acquire.]

Aquatic pest control: herbicide use for weed control in standing or running water.

Please bring a photo ID and calculator for the testing session. The clinic is scheduled for Saturday, February 10, 2007, 8:15 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. The training will run from 8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (lunch on your own); the testing will run from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The workshop is located at the Brookfield Zoo in the Discovery Center. (see directions on back of this page).

**Please register with Karen Tharp, VSN Coordinator, by phone at 866-VSN-LINE (876-5463) or email at [ktharp@tnc.org](mailto:ktharp@tnc.org) by Friday, January 26, 2007.** When registering, please relay the following information: your name and address, phone number, your landowner/sponsoring agency and/or volunteer site, your volunteer title (i.e. Steward, Co-Steward, volunteer, etc.), what test(s) you are taking (if just operator, who is your sponsoring applicator), and if you are planning on attending the morning training session or just the test in the afternoon.

NOTE: the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) will only offer weekend training and testing if we have at least 50 attendants at this workshop! So please avail yourself of this excellent opportunity and spread the word to other volunteers! Please note that this workshop is offered for volunteers of the VSN; this year it may be possible to open the workshop to agency staff, although volunteers will have first priority.

We recommend that you purchase and review the training materials BEFORE the workshop. Study materials are available by phone, fax, or mail order. Call 1-800-644-2123 for phone orders. Fax your order to 217-244-3469. To order by mail, write to the University of Illinois, PAT Program, 1201 S. Dorner Dr., Urbana, IL. 61801. Specify when ordering which study materials you would like (i.e., for the General Standards exam and/or for one of the Category tests). Allow 1-2 weeks for delivery.

### **ENTICE Workshops from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

Join us for an enlightening ENTICE (Environment and Nature Training Institute for Conservation Education) workshop from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources! Registration continues for the workshops listed below. ENTICE workshops provide background information, lessons, supplemental resources and Continuing Professional Development Units. To see the complete workshop description and/or to register, visit <http://www.ilcf.org/Workshop/Courses.asp>.

- Mammals From Illinois' Past, The Field Museum, Chicago, February 16, 2007
- Investigating and Evaluating Environmental Issues and Actions, IDNR Center, Springfield, March 3, 2007
- Illinois Birds Featuring the Wild Turkey Moraine Hills State Park, McHenry, March 10, 2007
- Schoolyard Habitat Development, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, April 14, 2007

- Lake Michigan Fishes, John G. Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, May 11, 2007
- Lake Michigan Ecology, Highland Park Yacht Club, Highland Park, May 18, 2007
- The Microscopic World, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago, May 19, 2007
- Global Positioning System, Vermilion County Conservation District, Danville, June 9, 2007
- Mammals From Illinois' Past, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, June 13, 2007
- Geology of Giant City, Giant City State Park, Makanda, June 15, 2007
- Native Americans and Nature in Illinois, Dickson Mounds Museum, Lewistown, June 27, 2007

### **Frog Monitoring Workshops 2007**

These frog workshops are for both beginning and experienced monitors. We'll teach and review the calls of our 13 species of frogs and toads, help new monitors find survey sites, and discuss the monitoring protocol. Experienced monitors are encouraged to attend, in order to learn any protocol changes, obtain data sheets, review frog calls, and share lessons learned from last year.

#### Wednesday January 24<sup>th</sup> - 6:30-8:30 pm - DuPage County, IL

The Grounds and Resources Complex at 29 W 220 Mack Road in West Chicago, within Blackwell Forest Preserve. From Route 59, travel east on Mack Road for 0.6 miles. Turn north into the complex. Pass through the chain link gate and gas tank area. Park in front of the center building. Follow the signs to the workshop at the rear of this building. Contact Cindy Hedges, 630-876-5929.

#### Tuesday February 6<sup>th</sup> - 7:00-9:00 pm - Lake County, IL

Welcome Center at Ryerson Woods. Located about a mile south of Half Day Road, between I-94 and Hwy 45. Head west on Half Day road from I-94, then turn south on Riverwoods Road and look for the entrance on your right. Contact Tom Smith, (847) 968-3329.

#### Wednesday February 7<sup>th</sup> - 7:00-9:00 pm - McHenry County, IL

Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake. At 2112 Behan Road, just south of Hwy 176, between Hwy 31 and the Fox River. Heading NE from -Crystal Lake on Hwy 176, turn right on Behan Rd after passing Valley View/Silver Lake Rd, and take another right at the end of the road. Please call (815) 479-5779 to pre-register. For questions, contact Sara Denham, (815) 728-8307.

#### Saturday February 10<sup>th</sup> - 9:00am-noon - Kane County, IL

Pottawatomie Park, St. Charles. Coming west on Route 64 (called Main St. in St. Charles), turn north at 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., two blocks before the river. Second Ave. ends at Pottawatomie Park - head west and go to the large building down by the river. Contact Mary Ochsenschlager, (630) 584-1885

#### Tuesday February 13<sup>th</sup> - 7:00-9:00 pm - Will County, IL

Sugar Creek Administrative Building of the Forest Preserve District. At 17540 W. Laraway Road in Joliet. Take Rte 80 to Briggs, head south on Briggs (turns into 52-S), then west on Laraway Road, and look to the north side of the street after about a half mile. Contact Renee Gauchat, rgauchat@fpdwc.org.

Thursday February 15<sup>th</sup> - 7:00-9:00 pm - Southern Cook County, IL

Camp Sagawau, 12545 111th St., Lemont, IL. One-hundred yards east of Archer Ave., or four miles west of Swallow Cliff Toboggan Slides on Rt. 83. Contact Diana Krug, (708) 839-0696, [diana.krug@comcast.net](mailto:diana.krug@comcast.net).

Monday February 19<sup>th</sup> - 7:00-9:00 pm - Northern Cook County, IL

Edgebrook Community Center. Located at 6100 N. Central on Chicago's northwest side. Contact Diane Huebner, [d-huebner@northwestern.edu](mailto:d-huebner@northwestern.edu).

Thursday February 22<sup>nd</sup> - 7:00-8:30 pm - Porter County, IN

Valparaiso branch of the Porter County Public Library, located at 103 Jefferson Street in Valparaiso, IN. Workshop will be in Meeting Room A. For location details, see: <http://www.pcppls.lib.in.us/>. Contact Alan Resetar with questions, 219-465-7231.

### **CW Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Workshops, February 22 -23 and February 24 -25 at Brookfield Zoo\***

The CW Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training course is designed to provide staff and volunteer stewards with the fundamental knowledge necessary to safely participate on the crew of a controlled burn in the Chicago Wilderness region. The CW Natural Resources Management Team continues to organize both weekday and weekend sessions. For registration information, please contact Chris Mulvaney, the CW Science & Natural Resources Management Teams Coordinator, at 847-242-6424 or [cmulvaney@chicagowilderness.org](mailto:cmulvaney@chicagowilderness.org).

### **Michigan Prescribed Fire Council – Fire Training**

Are you interested in working as a volunteer crew member on prescribed fire? Working with agencies to fight wildfires? The Michigan Prescribed Fire Council is offering the prerequisite courses you will need.

S-130 Firefighter Training (No Prerequisite) A 32-hour field course that provides entry level fire fighting skills. Topics will include: safety orientation, firefighter preparedness, tools and equipment, firing devices, use of water and suppression techniques, securing a burn area, using maps, scouting, hazardous materials and standards for survival.

S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior (No Prerequisite) A 6-hour course that provides instruction in the primary environmental factors that affect the start and spread of fire in wildland fuels. The course also stresses the basics of recognition of potentially hazardous situations.

These courses are the prerequisites for any additional training you may take. You must attend the full 40 hours to receive your certificates of completion. Instructors will include representatives from The Nature Conservancy in Michigan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan State Firemen's Association and the U.S. Forest Service.

Where: Edward Lowe Foundation, Big Rock Valley Conference Center in Cassopolis, MI

When: February 26-March 2, 2007; 8 am-5 pm Mon-Fri

How do I register? Contact Lara Rainbolt (see info below) for registration form and mail with a check. Include MasterCard or Visa information on Registration Form and fax to Lara Rainbolt at 616.785.7065. **Registration Deadline: January 26, 2007.**

Costs: Scholarships may be available; MPFC is determining the process for application Course Registration (includes course materials) - \$150.00 Regular / \$75.00 Student with ID Overnight Accommodations & Meal Plan - \$220.00 Regular / \$110.00 Student with ID Meal Only Plan - \$100.00 Regular/ \$50.00 Student with ID

Questions regarding Training or Registration? Contact Lara Rainbolt at (616) 785-7055 or [lkramarz@tnc.org](mailto:lkramarz@tnc.org).

### **Bolingbrook Park District – Natural Resource Positions**

There are three positions available at the Bolingbrook Park District in the newly created Natural Resources Department. The Natural Resource Manager is full time; the Conservation Specialists are 10-month seasonals with July and August off. The Natural Resource Manager is responsible for land management planning, leading crews, serving as liaison with contractors, etc. The Conservation Specialists are responsible for the day-to-day work in restoration. All positions require the majority of their time in the field. For more information and/or to apply go to [www.bolingbrookparks.org](http://www.bolingbrookparks.org) and download an application for employment. Send the complete application, resume and references to Alice Eastman at the address below. Alice Eastman, Superintendent of Natural Resources, Bolingbrook Park District; 301 Recreation Drive; Bolingbrook, IL 60440; (630) 783-6570; [aeastman@bolingbrookparks.org](mailto:aeastman@bolingbrookparks.org)

### **Champaign County Forest Preserve District - Natural Resources Technician**

Join the team responsible for conserving, restoring, and caring for nearly 3,500 acres of preserved land throughout Champaign County, Illinois.

Responsibilities: The Natural Resources Technician is responsible for assisting Natural Resources Staff with the conservation and restoration of natural areas throughout the District. This may include but is not limited to prairie and forest restoration, arborist work, exotic species control, seed collection, data collection, and natural resource monitoring. There are some office and clerical duties with this position.

Qualifications: High school graduate required. Bachelor's degree in Restoration Ecology, Natural Resource Management, Park Management, Forestry, Botany, or related field of study preferred. Knowledge of conservation biology, restoration ecology, environmental science, hydrology, soil science, environmental laws and regulations, and environmental impact assessment principles and practices are essential. Under unusual circumstances, extensive direct experience may be substituted for all or part of the educational requirement.

Other Requirements: Candidates must be able to communicate clearly orally and in writing, have a valid Illinois driver's license, and have the ability to obtain an Illinois Pesticide Applicators License.

Expectations: This position will report to the Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve in Mahomet, Illinois, but work will take place on all District owned lands throughout Champaign County. This is a full-time hourly position with benefits. Hours must be flexible to accommodate occasional evening and weekend work. Starting pay is \$13.00 per hour.

To Apply: To apply for the Technician position, please send resume, cover letter and names and numbers of three references to Dan Olson, P.O. Box 1040, Mahomet, Illinois 61853. Applications accepted until Friday, February 2, 2007.

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## **III. CONFERENCES AND OTHER EVENTS**

**Developing the World's Most Ecological Communities Seminar on January 10, 12:30-2:00pm at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), 233 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 800, Chicago**

Gary Lawrence, Principal and Global Leader for Sustainable Urban Development with Arup, will

discuss sustainable principles of Dongtan City, Chongming Island in metropolitan Shanghai and Treasure Island in San Francisco. His presentation will compare and contrast the pursuit of similar goals related to the development of carbon-free communities. For more information or to RSVP, contact Kerry Leigh of CMAP, at 312-386-8704.

**DuPage Environmental Summit on January 10, 11:30am - 5pm at Benedictine University, Lisle, IL**

Speakers at this year's 4th Annual DuPage Environmental Summit entitled "How to Save on Energy Costs and Help the Environment" will discuss ways to integrate energy conservation and sustainable design into new construction, and retrofit energy conservation into existing buildings. The Summit is free; advanced reservation is required. To register or for more information call 630-428-4500, ext. 10 or email [cthompson@theconservationfoundation.org](mailto:cthompson@theconservationfoundation.org)

**Midwest Ecological Landscaping Association Conference, February 15, Chicago Botanic Garden**

The Midwest Ecological Landscaping Association (MELA) invites you to the 2007 annual conference, fifth in an ongoing series called MELA G-3: Getting Green Greener. This year's focus is on strengthening the link between people with the environment, both natural and designed. Speakers will discuss putting a "green" consciousness into action by creating a demand for green landscaping and raising awareness of environmental issues. Speakers will provide information and techniques for talking to clients about the role of green landscaping in a larger campaign to live healthier lives. Registration for non-MELA members is \$140. For more information, please visit the conference web site at <http://www.melaweb.org/con2007.htm>

**Illinois Lake Management Association (ILMA) 22nd Annual Conference, February 22-24, St. Charles, IL**

The mission of the ILMA is to promote understanding and comprehensive management of lakes and watershed ecosystems. This year's annual conference includes workshops, panel sessions, and a poster exhibition. For more information visit [www.ilmalakes.org](http://www.ilmalakes.org) or contact Dick Hilton at [wildick@comcast.net](mailto:wildick@comcast.net) or tel. 800-338-6976 access code 01.

**Wild Things Conference - March 3, 2007**

You are invited to a day-long conference that brings together the region's best experts, most dedicated volunteers and anyone interested in nature. Technical presentations and interactive workshops will explore the latest in natural areas preservation, wildlife protection and monitoring. The conference is organized in "tracks" designed for everyone from beginners to experts. There is special focus on empowering citizen scientists, stewards and advocates with information, networking and good ideas. Wild Things will feature more than 80 large and small-group sessions drawn from real-life experiences with everything from the nitty gritty of habitat management, botany, and zoology to advocacy, education, art, culture, history and backyard and neighborhood ecology. It's a great opportunity to listen, ask questions, and contribute to the effort to conserve the natural ecosystems and habitats of the greater Chicagoland area. More information is available at <http://habitatproject.org/WildThings/>.

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**IV. GRANTS AND OTHER RESOURCES**

**Indiana's Woodland Restoration Program (IWRP) - Deadline: Jan 19, 2007**

The Division of Forestry will offer funds for woodland restoration beginning December 18. The IWRP offers funding for the enhancement and/or establishment of woodland conservation practices. Funding is available for practices such as tree planting and reforestation, follow-up

weed control on established tree plantings, timber stand improvement, pre-harvest grapevine control and tree pruning. Interested parties should contact the division of forestry at (317) 232-4105 or their district forester. For a map to locate your nearest forester, visit <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/> and click on "private landowner assistance."

### **Great Lakes Commission-Sea Grant Fellowship - Deadline: Jan 31, 2007**

The Great Lakes Commission-Sea Grant Fellow will work with members of the Great Lakes' science, policy, and information/education communities to advance the environmental quality and sustainable economic development goals of the Great Lakes states. The Fellow will be assigned responsibilities in the areas of science/policy research, analysis, and inter-jurisdictional coordination. Students currently enrolled in graduate programs are eligible. Assignments are for on year, starting June 1. For more information visit: <http://www.glc.org/about/scholarships/fellow.html>.

### **Friends of the Parks 2007 Seed Grant Program - Deadline: Feb 9, 2007**

Friends of the Parks provides small monetary grants to park advisory councils and adopt-a-park groups committed to improving Chicago's parks. The intent of these grants is to build community alliances and stronger parks. Many different kinds of projects may be funded through this program including planting gardens and tree planting. For more information contact Friends of the Parks at 312-857-2757 or [www.fotp.org](http://www.fotp.org).

### **Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program Requests Research Proposals - Pre-Proposal Deadline: Feb 9, 2007**

The Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program seeks proposals for research related to the use, development, and conservation of Lake Michigan coastal resources in Illinois and Indiana. Researchers in Illinois and Indiana are eligible to apply. Research will be conducted in the 2008-2010 biennium. Projects are normally funded for two years at up to \$40,000 per year. For more information visit <http://www.iisgcp.org> and see the link under "Newsworthy Notes."

### **Global Invasive Species Database Launched**

September 2006 saw the launch of new content and functions for the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD), the world's premier source of free, authoritative information about introduced species that threaten native biodiversity and livelihoods. The GISD is available online at [www.invasivespecies.net/database](http://www.invasivespecies.net/database). It is also available in CD-ROM format.

### **Native Plant Seed Propagation Webcast – January 10**

Join us ONLINE Wednesday January 10, 2007 11:45 to 1:00 pm Eastern time for a presentation and discussion on Native Plant Seed Propagation. Leading the webcast will be the following panel of experts: Suzan Campbell of Michigan Natural Features Inventory; Lisa Brush, Executive Director of the Stewardship Network has been working to bring groups and individuals together to build capacity to manage our natural areas.

To join the meeting, please click on the following link:

<http://www.instantlyglobal.com/msuwebconference33> and log in anytime after 11:45am Eastern time. Once you have logged in to the meeting, you will be able to ask questions of and share information with these experts and others who join us online. You will be able to hear Suzan and Lisa through speakers on your computer (make sure they are turned on!). You will be able to share your thoughts, ideas, questions, and perspective via your keyboard. Participants will be able to see everyone's typed comments. If you encounter any technical difficulties, please contact Todd Shunneson at 414-254-0122. We'd also encourage everyone to do a quick trial run AHEAD OF TIME (by going to [http://www.instantlyglobal.com/system\\_test](http://www.instantlyglobal.com/system_test)) to make sure you are able to access the meeting on your computer. If you try beforehand and encounter difficulties Todd will be able to help you discover what the problem is.

We know that some people have had problems accessing similar presentations when trying to enter from their company's servers because of strict "firewall" configurations. Most of these people who had problems were trying to access the presentation from government buildings. If you are having problems accessing the presentation, some helpful tips can be found here: [http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/knowledgebase/index.cfm?id=tn\\_19546](http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/knowledgebase/index.cfm?id=tn_19546)

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## V. JUST FOR FUN

### The January Woods

*From: Essays on Nature by Virginia S. Eifert, 1967*

Real winter has come at last, now that January was here; and the low ebb of heat from the sun, aided by the loss of summer-stored heat of the earth, brought long cold nights and days that sometimes were bitter-bright. Sometimes the days were mild and sunny, fresh with the smell of a false spring. For the Illinois winter may be like that, too. We never know. January may be like March, and dandelions may hasten into bloom; or it may be real winter like the one known as Eighteen-Hundred-and Froze-to-Death, or a winter like the Winter of the Deep Snow. If there is going to be any real winter weather, then, it has better be snows and cold in February and in March, the opportunity of long duration is spoiled by the disconcerting appearance of a bluebird on February 1<sup>st</sup>, or the sight of crocuses and aconites pushing up through the leaves in a garden, or ruddy, curled-over heads of spring beauty buds on a sunny bank in the woods. There may be a robin or two even in January. Some stay over and spend the winter here. When February comes, the likelihood of robins grows even brighter, and by March it's all up with winter. It can make a comeback with some effort and effect, and often it does so with some of the deepest snows of an almost snowless winter, but it won't last.

Everyone knows it, when the robins who, fluffed up and a trifle indignant at all that cold stuff on the ground, contrive to find a thawed place on a southern exposure and haul forth the worms lurking there. If there's to be any winter in most of Illinois, it usually comes in January. And when it does, and the mercury slides in chilly silence down into the nether regions of the thermometer, and open waters finally freeze to an expanse of shining glass, and there may be snow sweeping viciously out of the north, the wild things are ready for it. Ready now, or not at all. By this time, most of the summer birds long since have gone to South America and Mexico where even now they may begin to feel an inexplicable pull toward the north again.

Weaklings, months ago, were eliminated from the ranks of remaining winter birds, and the survivors are equipped to handle blizzards and below-zero cold if they come. The chickadees maintain a temperature of around 114 degrees by the simple expedient of wearing an extra-thick under-layer of downy feathers to keep heat in, and they manufacture that heat by turning every bit of protein food they can find into the fuel which keeps a small body alive. You can see the chickadees hunting meat on a bitter day – spider-egg sacs, tiny cocoons, the chain of eggs laid by a katydid along a twig, sleeping insects tucked into crevices of bark. Cardinals and juncos and sparrows are endlessly busy eating rich seeds in the weed patches. Many birds fare well. On a winter's walk in the woods of Illinois, you will find a surprising population of birds comfortably living through the cold. With feathers fluffed to maintain dead-air spaces which conserve warmth, the birds live through the day and sleep through the January night. Like the junco most wild things ride out the storms of any January severity which comes to Illinois (January 1954).

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