

Write



PRAISE FOR "FIREWISE"

I live between Elkhart Lake and Plymouth. I have 25 acres bordered to the west by county-owned Gerber Lakes wilderness area. When I bought my property in 2000, the 50-acre idle farmland to the west of me was approved by the town to become a subdivision. Sheboygan County approached the landowner who decided instead to sell the 50 acres to the county to add to the wilderness area. Now the wilderness area is about 150 acres. After the purchase the county hired a farmer to farm the land for three years to control the weeds. During that time the Boy Scouts collected wild native prairie seeds. The fourth year after the farming was done the farmer drilled the native prairie grasses into the soil.

The county had good intentions for doing this planting and I supported it. However, as time went by the dead grasses piled up year after year and I started to realize it was a ticking time bomb waiting to happen during wildfire season. The DNR tried doing controlled burns but my barn (which is assessed more than my house) is located only 50 feet from the grass edge and the winds are rarely favorable for a controlled burn. The winds this year were finally favorable after seven years. The DNR staff said they rarely see flames so high (several hundred feet) and were amazed how powerful the burn was.

For the past five years I've been writing to our county officials about the threat of the prairie lands with no luck. They just did not understand the threat the unmanaged field presented to my family and property. Then last year I found the Firewise program that helped bring neighbors and the community together to help understand the threat wildfires can present and what we can do to help protect ourselves.

In the spring of 2016 I went to the Sheboygan County Planning and Conservation Department meeting and told them about the DNR-sponsored Firewise program. Next, I got on the next month's agenda and the Planning, Resources, Agriculture and Extension Committee (PRAECom) approved the Firewise-recommended home ignition zone for my situation. The following month, the Sheboygan County Recreational Facilities Management Advisory Committee approved the Firewise-recommended home ignition zone for me.

The agreement is that in the fall I cut a 200-foot area of the grassland, marked out by the county surveyor, with my haybine. I then bale the grasses, hence removing the fuel a wildfire needs. I will then place the bales in another area of the field to help promote habitat for mice, moles, and other small mammals, which are the main food source for prey birds, especially the barn owl. This winter my son and I will build approved houses for the barn owl and will place them on my barn and on the tree line of the wilderness area.

I want to thank the DNR because without the Firewise program this couldn't have happened. Next year's fire season will bring much less stress and anxiety.

Brian Niemi
Plymouth

NEED TO FIND A BETTER BALANCE

I was heartened by a piece in the groundwater section of the February 2017 issue ("Groundwater: Powering Wisconsin's economy") highlighting groundwater conservation efforts of the Diercks family at Coloma Farms. The partnership between Coloma Farms and UW researchers on groundwater conservation is a step in the right direction. With pressure from both economics and Mother Nature, modern agriculture can be quite challenging. Often it seems that stewardship of the land and water seems to take a back seat. Hats off to the UW and to the Diercks family for working together to come up with viable solutions. The efforts of UW need to extend beyond water to also aid agribusiness in finding ways to conserve soil, use fewer chemicals and find ways to preserve natural habitats and woodlands. We need to find ways to better balance the effects of modern agribusiness with maintaining Wisconsin's cherished landscape in ways that can make sense economically.

Jeff Wittrock
Delafield

EXPERIMENTAL GAME FARM

We have subscribed to your magazine for many years and enjoy every issue. We usually pass them on to friends and neighbors. I've been going through old booklets and travel information in an effort to downsize. I found this old booklet about the game and fur farm that you might enjoy. At one time I had some photos taken at the farm but they were nothing special so I purged them some years ago. Where do the years go? I was 14 years old when the booklet was published. I still remember my experience at the farm with much pleasure.

Juanita Parsons
Menasha



Thanks so much for your loyal readership and for sharing this old treasure. The State Game Farm in Poynette is a modern facility where staff incubate over 300,000 pheasant eggs each year in incubators that have been in use since the 1950s when this booklet was published. In those days, the farm was more than a game farm. Its experimental work included pathological post-mortem examinations of wildlife to learn about food habits and diseases. It also raised many species of pheasant, partridge, quail, peafowl, wild turkey, grouse, many species of ducks and geese, and furbearing animals like deer, black bears, raccoons, martens, fishers, wolverines and many more. The year this booklet was printed, the game farm raised and stocked 265,843 day-old pheasant chicks and 1,349 raccoons.

USE SCIENCE-BASED SOURCES IN MAGAZINE

In the December 2016 issue of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine, I found some of the responses in the Readers Write column to be quite troublesome. The DNR is an organization that should be protecting and managing our resources using scientific data. When readers write in with questions, the responses should include scientific data and cite sources. Wikipedia, although a fun and usually fairly accurate place to gain limited knowledge, is not a source that should be used in a science-based publication ("Frog legs on the menu"), and citing "an online search" as a source ("Invasive crayfish") is not only irresponsible, but also denies the provider of the information credit when using it. In a society where facts and falsehoods are hard to distinguish and science seems to be under attack, the DNR should make a much greater attempt to provide factual information with solid documentation.

Matthew A. Robisch
Rib Lake

CORRECTION

In our February 2017 issue, we identified James White, Jr. (shown on page 18) as a member of the Oneida Nation. He is a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles tribe. We regret the error.



AUTUMN ON STONE LAKE

We have a cabin on Stone Lake just east of Danbury and I am also with the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. This is a stunning area in so many ways. I should have sent you these two fall pictures from my little lake in late October. Thanks for the magazine!

Mark Nupen
Danbury

KUDOS FOR "WOLF SONG"

Thanks for printing "Wolf song" by Stephen Lars Kalmon in the December 2016 issue. It was a brilliant piece of writing and led me to reflect on how we missed the howl of the wolf in Wisconsin for almost three decades. With its repopulation of northern Wisconsin we can once again be awed by this song of wilderness. We are lucky to be just one of 12 states to have a timber wolf population. I hope the *Canis lupus* serenade is here to stay so future generations can be awed by its haunting beauty.

Ray Pinter
West Bend

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MONARCHS

On Sept. 16 a friend and I were walking the Ice Age Trail in Janesville after an early morning rain. Suddenly, hundreds of monarch butterflies flew out of the woods on one side of the path, fluttered around us and then landed in the field of wildflowers on the other side of the path. We have never seen so many monarchs and wondered if they were gathering to migrate to Mexico for the winter?

Ruth Barrett
Janesville

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Regarding a Readers Write letter in the December 2016 issue ("Bee tree hunting" from Ron Winter), I thought I should give the "other side of the story." In 1950 after living through the Depression and the rationing of World War II, we all learned not to waste. After a windstorm a carpenter (who also kept a few hives of bees) and his son were doing repair work on the farm buildings where we lived. The subject of bees came up. Dad was telling him about a hollow cherry tree on a fenceline with bees in it. We all went and cut the tree down. I don't remember (it's been 66 years) just how he did it, but it had something to do with the queen. He got the bees in a hive and took them home. Nothing was wasted or destroyed. He got the swarm, we got almost a wash tub full of comb honey and I am sure the tree got burned for firewood that winter. Just wanted your readers to know we can have our honey and eat it too, all in a way that protects the bees. By the way, my wife is a Badger fan from Wisconsin and I'm from Iowa, so we get both *Iowa Outdoors* and *Wisconsin Natural Resources*. They are both great!

Ronald Donovan
Dubuque, Iowa

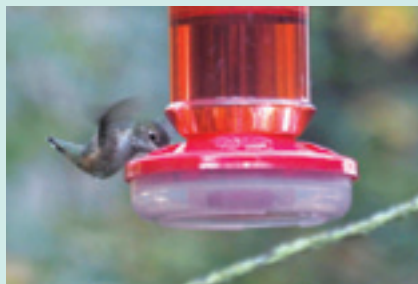


PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

I'm sending three stories each with a picture: First, on Nov. 10, a fellow birder called to report a hummingbird at his feeder that definitely was not a ruby-throat. He was considering either rufous or Anna's. With the help of my camera and a long lens, the ID was easy — rufous! This is way out of its range. Our thoughts were this was a rare sighting and that it had better go south soon. Second, here's another color variation of the gray squirrel at the base of my feeder. Third, I found this branch in my front yard in Iowa County. I believe that I read somewhere this is the behavior of the sharp-shinned hawk.

James P. Beck
Madison

Ryan Brady, a DNR bird expert stationed in Ashland, offered the following explanation: The hummingbird appears to be a rufous or Allen's hummingbird. Except for adult males (which this one is not), the two species are indecipherable without examining fine details often not visible in photos. Both are western species not found here alongside our typical ruby-throated hummingbirds during the summer months. Allen's is exceptionally rare in the eastern U.S. and has never been confirmed in Wisconsin. Rufous hummingbird, however, occurs in small numbers each year as birds migrate from the western breeding areas to wintering areas along the eastern mid-Atlantic to southern Gulf coasts. They are very hardy and routinely occur in mid to late fall like this one, some even staying well into December in years with late-arriving winters. One was seen regularly on the southwest side of Lake Mendota between Madison and Middleton last fall and may have been the same bird. If not, I'd encourage the reader to submit his sighting and image to www.ebird.org/twi. I'm not a squirrel expert but it looks like an aberrant gray squirrel to me. They show a wide variety of pigmentation from blonde to black and everything in between.

The photo of the cardinal head is a tough one. Hawks and owls typically eat the head, though sometimes only the back of the head like this. However, they usually don't wedge it into a branch as shown here. Northern shrikes, small raptor-like songbirds, are nicknamed "butcher birds" for their behavior of impaling prey on sharp items like thorns or barbed wire fences. They occasionally wedge prey like this also, though a cardinal is a big prey item for a robin-sized bird. Iowa County also doesn't have many shrikes but if the photo was taken after mid-October then that's a possibility. Otherwise, these sorts of things are often a mystery!

Ed. Note: A follow-up email from Mr. Beck, who checked with a birding friend in Texas where Allen and rufous hummingbirds are common, confirmed this is a rufous hummingbird.



ROBIN'S NEST

I'm a subscriber of your *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine and thought you might enjoy the photos of a robin's nest with four little ones that hatched in early July. The nest was in a wreath that was outdoors in the front of our house, which is sheltered. Mother robin picked a good spot for her nest.

Jeff Vogt
Town of Sugar Creek

STINKY 'SHROOM

We photographed this image of a mushroom growing in our grove of pine trees. It has a strong odor, like a decomposing animal. Can you tell us the name of it?

Catherine Shirk
Owen

Thomas Meyer, wildlife biologist with the State Natural Areas Program, provided this identification: The fungus is the netted stinkhorn or veiled stinkhorn, scientific name *Dictyophora duplicata*. This, like all mushrooms, is the fruiting portion of the main body of the fungus, which lives underground. It emerges from the soil as an egg-shaped form from which a stalk quickly expands to the phallic-looking shape in the photo. In fact, the stinkhorns are placed in the scientific family Phallales, which also includes the earthstar and puffball fungi. The black, slimy mass at the end of the stalk is where the reproductive spores are produced. And the odor of that mass is truly fetid, reminiscent of rotting flesh. The odor attracts carrion-seeking flies and other insects, which serve the purpose of distributing the spores that stick to their bodies. The lacy, veil-like structure that hangs down from the cap is a defining characteristic of this interesting mushroom.



HEN OF THE WOODS

While hunting deer on the Aldo Leopold Foundation grounds with the shack group, I discovered these mushrooms. I showed them to Steve Swenson, who is the field ecologist with the foundation. He was sure they were a form of hen of the woods, a beautiful bunch of them. We have known the Leopold group for a long time and have hunted with Steve for pheasants. I'm the old man of the group at 80 years. I help with repair to the old shack. We live on the Wisconsin River across from the foundation.

James N. Fedkenheuer
Baraboo

A BONE TO PICK WITH WISCONSIN TRAVELER

As a reader of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* and its predecessors since the time I could read, perhaps 1954, I am a bit puzzled by some content that seems all but related to natural resources. These articles seem to be creeping into an otherwise good publication. A case in point is the Wisconsin Traveler article "Hops meet history at the Potosi Brewery" in the June 2016 issue. It begs the imagination to find anything in this piece that even remotely relates to natural resources or a location that is or has a unique natural resource. I say this without prejudice to Potosi, since I drank many glasses of Holiday beer in Potosi as a student at UW-Platteville in the 1960s.

While well researched and written and embellished with nice photographs, the piece has nothing to do with natural resources, even by a broad definition of the term. The piece belongs in a Wisconsin tourism publication. Indeed, the only outdoor experience associated with the brewery, a hard-to-find overlook of the river some distance away, is not even mentioned. Beer, cheese, bratwurst — all Wisconsin traditions, but having nothing to do with natural resources. There are so many sites of interest to a traveler and each related to natural resources in our beautiful state, indeed in Grant County alone, to write about in your Traveler section. Please do.

Michael J. Roy
Madison

We appreciate your feedback, Michael, and while the bulk of our magazine is devoted to stories about enjoying and preserving our state's natural resources, we occasionally use the Wisconsin Traveler section for broader travel-related items. Traveler in the past has highlighted Wisconsin museums, historical sites, day trips, food venues and festivals. Wisconsin Traveler was initiated in the February 1995 issue with an introductory paragraph that defined it as a "sprightly guide [to acquaint] readers with festivals, tours, museums, outdoor recreation and other divertissements offered all around the state." That issue's Traveler covered events at Olbrich Gardens, the Madison Children's Museum, Elvehjem Museum of Art and other venues. Thanks for your loyal readership and it's good to hear your opinion. We hope you continue to enjoy our magazine.

MONARCH BUTTERFLY MAGNET

Meadow blazing star (*Liatris ligulistylis*) is a prairie flower that performs well in full sun and well-drained soils. It blooms in late summer on tall spindly stalks with numerous flowers from top to bottom. The top flowers open first, generally in mid-July, with the remainder opening for the next 4-6 weeks. The attractive purple flowers contain nectar that draws the monarchs to them like a magnet. MBS grows tall — up to 6 feet — which makes it an easy target for the hungry monarch.

My first exposure to meadow blazing star was in September 2014. A friend invited me to visit him and see the monarchs swarming his neighbor's flowers. As a wildlife photographer, I jumped at the opportunity. It was an amazing sight. Monarchs were fighting for position on these tall purple flowers. There was an identification tag attached to the base of one of the stalks which named the flower so a few days later I purchased five plants and planted them in our flower garden. In mid-July 2015 the first flower opened and immediately a monarch landed on it and began feeding. For the next four weeks, there were monarchs feeding and mating every day but the flowers all dried out prior to the monarch migration. Back to the nursery to get three more plants. The next year, the three new plants didn't flower until mid-August, so we had monarchs, through their mating and migration, into September. During migration I was able to tag 25 monarchs in affiliation with "Monarch Watch," a study by the University of Kansas.

John Dart
North Fond du Lac



**CURE FOR CABIN FEVER**

Suffering from cabin fever, I knew a hike at Devil's Lake was the cure. Sunny skies and storm clouds were a perfect mix for capturing photographs.

David Edwards
Beaver Dam

**PEANUT THIEF**

Just digging into the new issue (February 2017) and saw in the Readers Write section someone who sent a photo of a "deer stand visitor." I have one that puts smiles on peoples' faces to share if you choose to publish it. For seven days in the very tall deer stand one gets bored especially in the Northwoods waiting for the 30-point buck. This is how I choose to pass the time, training black-capped chickadees. That is a peanut in my teeth, which they seem to enjoy very much. At one point they would be half-way into my mouth trying to reach the peanut!

Brian Niemi
Plymouth

ANOTHER X40 FAN

I was reading the February 2017 issue of your magazine when I turned the page to the Readers Write section. "Holy cow," I exclaimed to my wife, Brenda, "It's X40!" Dorothy Kruse had written about her experience with a trumpeter swan in 1998. Included was a photo of the swan known as X40. I, too, became intimately familiar with X40 while duck hunting at Meadow Valley in the late 1990s. It was not uncommon to see a trumpeter at Meadow Valley, as that was one of the areas where reintroduction efforts were taking place.

One morning while I was picking up my decoys, I noticed a swan several hundred yards away. I "honk-honk-honked" at him and he swam my way. Eventually he swam right up to me. He did a "duck and splash," and I imitated it. He did it again. This was too much for Tucker, my golden retriever. He ran out of the brush blind and charged through the water at X40. The swan did not appreciate that and he chased Tucker back to dry land. X40 returned to me and allowed me to pet him. I finished picking up my decoys with X40 staying by my side as I waded along. After I bagged the decoys, Tucker and I headed for the dike that ran parallel to the flowage. X40 stayed about 20 yards distant as I kept Tucker at heel. Once Tucker and I were on the dike walking to the parking area, X40 swam alongside. We bid each other goodbye at that point. When I got home I told Brenda about the incredible experience I'd had. I didn't think anyone would believe me. Now I know I wasn't the only one who came to know X40!

Curt Pluke
Wisconsin Rapids

**STANDING "TALL"**

During the 2016 gun deer hunt we had taken a midday lunch break. As we stood by a previously harvested deer I noticed a white animal scurrying in and around the hanging deer and the wood pile. It was as curious of me as I was of it and I got within a few feet and was able to take some great pictures of this ermine in its winter coat of white. I was lucky enough to snap a picture as it stood up on its hind legs.

Patrick Bohm
Shawano

COMMENT ON A STORY?

Send your letters to: Readers Write, WNR magazine, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. Or email letters to dnrmagazine@wisconsin.gov. Limit letters to 250 words and include your name and the community from which you are writing.

NO ACCESS TO THE WEB?

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