



Friends of Oxbow

P.O. Box 6552 • Rochester, MN 55903

February/March 2008

Many changes, events are noted at Oxbow Park during 2007

2007 was an especially eventful year here at the park. A massive ice jam and flood in March followed by another extensive flood in August kept the staff and volunteers frantically busy with clean up and repair in addition to all the usual tasks required to maintain the park in the busy summer season. This was also the year we had a change in leadership for the first time in nineteen years. Here are the highlights of the year at your park.

New Leadership

The biggest news was the promotion of Tom Ryan to Olmsted County Park Superintendent to replace Jim Foote who retired this year. Tom had been with Oxbow for 23 years, four as a naturalist and 19 as the park director. He oversaw the beginning and steady

improvement of the Zollman Zoo to its current state-of-the-art level, directed the thoughtful expansion of its educational and recreational services to the community, and was personally responsible for shepherding the development of the Seasons Hospice at Dr. Donald's house. His vision and wise leadership have made this park the gem that it clearly is. The new director, Kevin Crilly, comes to us from our sister Park Chester Woods, and plans to continue that vision and keep the park up to date with the needs of future generations.

Prairie Restoration

Encouraging degraded agricultural land to return to prairie continues to be an important objective at Oxbow.

This year a total of 30 acres was burned and 10 new acres seeded fulfilling the park's goal for the year.

Zollman Zoo

A quarantine shed for housing new and recovering animals was constructed, current exhibits were maintained and new ones were planned such as the new raptor exhibit for 2008. Several new memorials were constructed,

(continued inside)

Huge ice blocks were deposited in Oxbow Park during 2007 spring flooding.



Hibernation . . . The Big Sleep

The morning air is crisp with the threat of snow. You lie in bed, warm beneath thick blankets, and reach for the alarm clock. Wouldn't it be nice to drift back into a deep sleep until . . . the first warm days of spring?

Alas, that's not an option; we humans must face the challenges of winter. But there are some creatures that cope with the cold temperatures and the food shortages by taking very long naps. Whether or not we can call their behavior hibernation though, depends on a number of factors.

When most people think of hibernation they picture bears. Yet bears aren't true hibernators; their long nap is more properly called winter lethargy. A true hibernator, like a chipmunk, can reduce its body temperature to nearly freezing during hibernation and change its heart rate from 350 beats per minute to as low as 4 beats per minute within hours of retiring to its den.

The heart rate of a bear also drops, though not as rapidly. During the early part of its winter dormancy, a bear's heart rate averages 50 beats per minute.

After several months of uninterrupted sleep, the rate may drop to as low as 8 beats per minute. But a bear's body temperature remains nearly normal during this period. That's the reason a bear can wake relatively quickly -- a fact that's resulted in more than one hasty exit from a bear den by researchers. Pregnant females wake in mid-winter to give birth, then go back to sleep while their newborn cubs nurse. Still, most bears sleep all through the winter if left undisturbed.

Rodents that practice true hibernation, by contrast, wake every few weeks to eat small amounts of stored food and pass wastes. These brief periods of activity are extremely costly: up to 90 percent of the stored energy reserves (mostly fats) allotted for the entire winter are consumed during these bouts of arousal. Thus the animals that truly hibernate don't actually sleep all winter, while "winter lethargic" species often do.

The difference between these two strategies -- true hibernation and winter lethargy -- is related to the animal's size. Bears are too large to dissipate the heat necessary to enter hibernation, whereas smaller mammals, with their high surface-to-volume ratio, can achieve this temperature drop quickly and evenly.

Possibly the largest rodent that truly hibernates is the Woodchuck (also known as the Groundhog), and it's a champion napper. In the Northeast, it has been known to enter its burrow while the weather is still warm in September and not emerge until late March. In other words, a Woodchuck can spend more than half of its life sleeping.

Sound like a good plan? Would you like to doze off after the end of the World Series and wake up just in time for opening day? The concept isn't too far fetched; researchers are experimenting with the compounds responsible for inducing hibernation, and they're finding that even species that don't hibernate will respond to treatment with these hormones. But would you really want to sleep half your life away? You'd miss out on an awful lot of fun -- sunny vacations, winter sports and fun holidays to say nothing of all those paychecks....

Like Gardening? Want to do More?

With Val Piechowski

If you like gardening, working with plants and people here's a fun way to do it all. In 1977, the U of MN County Extension began offering a Master Gardener Program to teach people how to grow both healthier plants and relationships in their communities. This program is nationwide in scope and there are similar classes in other states.

All that is needed to enroll is an active interest in gardening and a desire to share this interest with others. My interest in gardening started with many questions about my own garden and lawn.

Master Gardeners are not expected to have all the answers to yard and garden questions but we learn how to be a resource for finding the answers.

Typical activities include:

- teaching gardening classes & workshops
- guiding and supervising community plantings or school gardens

- teaching & judging youth horticulture projects
- writing newspaper columns & gardening newsletters
- staffing Farmer markets, county & state fair exhibits

To become a Master Gardener, you first call to enroll in your County Extension program (see link below). You will be given an interview and a form to complete. To become certified, you must attend the Master Gardener Core Course of 48 hours of classroom instruction and complete various projects for a total of 50 hours the first year. To remain certified you need 25 hrs of volunteering per year.

The classroom instruction covers 12 topics at a basic level: botany, plant pathology, entomology, soil science, fruit, vegetables, indoor plants, annuals, perennials, pesticides, landscape design and management of lawns, trees, shrubs.

For more information call 507-285-8253 or go to: www.co.olmsted.mn.us/extension/mastergardener

Park Report . . .

Many changes are coming at Oxbow Park

by Celeste Lewis, Park Naturalist

2008 is here and I cannot believe it. It is true what they say about time going by faster the older one gets!

There have been many changes to the county park staffing during the past few months, so this year should prove to be new and exciting. As most of you

Oxbow Park Programs

In case of inclement weather, call 775-2451 for program details.

All programs are appropriate for all ages unless otherwise noted

Feed the Bison - February 2 at 1:00 p.m.

SPECIAL PROGRAM

Bluebird Workshop - February 9 at 1:00 p.m.

This hands-on activity will prove to be informative and fun! A short video will delight you with the life history of the Eastern Bluebird. Bring a hammer, because after the video we'll get you started on building your own nest box, as well as suggest tips for where to place it, etc. Only 20 boxes (\$5.00 each) are available, so call 775-2451 to reserve one soon! (Ages 5 and up)

Feed the Otters - February 16 at 3:00 p.m.

Owls - February 23 at 1:00 p.m.

Animal Tracks and Signs - March 1 at 1:00 p.m.

Making Maple Syrup - March 8 & 15 at 1:00 p.m.

Children's Zoo Time - March 22 at 10:00 a.m.

Raptor Feeding - March 29 at 3:00 p.m.

Phenology

February: Moon of the Dark Red Calf

- Horned larks, the first spring migrants, can be seen along roadsides
- Ice may cover up to two feet on some southern Minnesotan lakes
- The tree squirrels have started their mating season

March: Moon of the Snowblind

- House finches begin their spring call
- White-tailed deer begin shedding their winter fur
- Maple syrup runs well on sunny days in the 40's following freezing nights

are aware, Kevin Crilly is our new park manager at Oxbow. However, a change that many of you may not be aware of is the resignation of naturalist Craig Connelly.

Craig, who is a full-time fireman for the city of Rochester, has decided to spend more time with his family. He is a wonderful guy and will be missed tremendously here at the park. He has promised to visit often though! We are currently in the process of filling this vacated position, and hope to have a replacement sometime in February.

As for other news, Pat and Tim have been working, along with the county highway department, on the riprapping of the riverbank near Caulfield, second bridge, and the campground. Kevin and I have been busy updating records, filling out annual reports and permit requests, as well as getting ready for winter classes.

We have also begun meeting with the remarkable architect Byron Stadvold discussing this summer's bird exhibit project. We are only currently in the early design stages, but knowing Byron and Pat, the end result will be beautiful!

Probably the most notable change here at the park, besides staffing, would be the completion of the Birdseye memorial in the zoo. This memorial consists of three granite benches, cedar swing, stone fountain, carved memorial stone, and numerous native plantings. It is located just south of the otter exhibit, right as one exits the nature center toward the zoo.

So, when cabin fever starts to set in, which has a tendency to happen during Minnesota winters, come on out. Check out the ski trail, rent a pair of snowshoes, or just meander around the zoo, and take advantage of your gorgeous park.

Note from the President:

Friends of Oxbow will be having a special Annual membership meeting at 10 a.m. on Feb. 16th at the park. Please join us for this wrap-up of our 2007 accomplishments and to hear what plans Friends has for 2008. We will also ask for nominations to the board of directors and any suggestions or comments you might have.

As always, you are invited to attend not just this meeting, but any board meeting throughout the year. Contact any director for information; we welcome any input or suggestions.

Light refreshments will be served. Please join us.

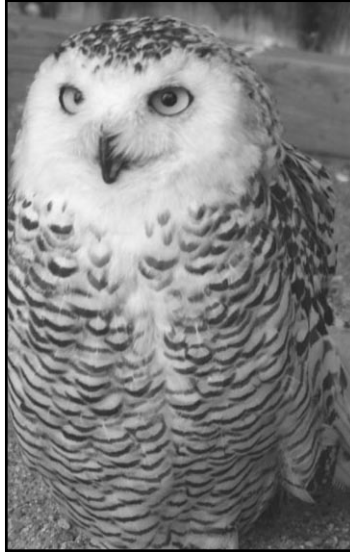
Cindy

Big year at Oxbow Park is reviewed

(continued from front page)

including the beautiful Birdseye memorial where the old otter exhibit once stood, the Morman memorial bison viewing platform, the Voll elk viewing platform and the Douglas lady-slipper habitat. Other memorials were refurbished and repaired.

This year also saw the passing of several of our more elderly animals; a porcupine, salamander, badger, raccoon, turkey hen and screech owl. We welcomed several new ones as well – a gorgeous snowy owl, new Eastern screech owl, kestrel, and two porcupines.



Added in 2007

Education

School classes are a crucial part of what your park does to serve your community. A total of over 7300 students representing 59 schools and daycare groups were served. Park staff taught 1854 students various aspects of their Minnesota natural history. An additional 5474 students were brought to the park by their teachers as part of their school curriculum.

Over 5000 members of the general public participated in a variety of programs such as tree and flower identification, making maple syrup and kite building. This represents a 43% increase over 2006 attendance!

Events & Groups

Your Park played host to several special events again this year, including the annual Friends of Oxbow Spring Fun Fest, the Volunteer Recognition dinner, and the ever popular Friends Halloween Party. A partial list of the organizations using the park for meetings and events includes: Girl Scouts,

Boy Scouts, Zumbro Education District, Prairie Smoke, Women in the Outdoors, DNR Hunter education, Zumbro Valley Audubon, and Photo Safaris by Karen Davis.

Volunteers

The invaluable Oxbow volunteers again donated over 4250 hours to the upkeep, maintenance and improvement of your park. Their work included but was certainly not limited to assisting with habitat maintenance and construction, zoo cleaning and care, prairie restoration and record keeping. The park simply could not function without them.

Donations

Your park has never charged an admission fee – a key philosophy that enables all people to return often and learn more about their Minnesota natural heritage. This policy, in addition to the ongoing county park budget problems, make the generosity of the surrounding community critical to the park's survival as a top tier resource and attraction.

To preserve this special gem of a park, grateful and generous visitors gave over \$23,000 in unrestricted donations this year. An additional \$12,700 from park visitors and Friends of Oxbow members was earmarked for the new Wildcat Exhibit. Construction will not start until the entire \$85,000 cost of the exhibit is in hand.

Visitation

Since your park does not charge admission it is difficult to obtain an accurate count of the tens of thousands of visitors welcomed during the year. There were over 1340 campground site rentals (each site generally has more than one occupant), and an estimated 50,000+ people explored the park hiking trails, nature center and zoo.

This is just an overview and obviously doesn't cover everything the staff has accomplished, such as flood cleanup, ice damage repair and countless other everyday tasks and maintenance duties that would take a whole book to document! Staff would like to thank all the volunteers and visitors without whom there would be no Oxbow Park!

The Critter Column . . .

by R. Yaeger

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

This small but ferocious raptor is a common summer sight in Minnesota as it peers down from telephone wires and fence posts, searching for prey. Because of its small size, many people may not realize they are looking at a raptor and think it is just another small perching bird, but take a closer look – kestrels are not only fierce, but very beautiful. Here is a little bit about this fascinating predator.

Natural History

The smallest North American falcon, the kestrel is often smaller than a robin at 8-9 inches, with a 21 inch wingspan and weighing 3 1/2 - 6 oz.

Unlike other raptors, the kestrel sexes do not look alike. The male has blue-gray wings and a reddish, lightly spotted chest and belly. The slightly larger female has reddish wings barred with black, and the chest is white with brown streaking. Both sexes have blue-gray heads, narrow, pointed wings, and two black vertical stripes on either side of their eyes giving them the look of those ancient Roman helmets you see in movies.

They live from near the tree line in Alaska and Canada, south as far as Central & South America. Most of the birds breeding in Canada and the northern United States migrate south in the winter, although some males may stay as year-round residents.

Deforestation has increased habitat for this bird – it is found in deserts, forest openings, marshes, grasslands, agricultural, suburban and urban areas.

Where do kestrels nest?

A cavity nester, kestrels don't really make nests. They will simply lay their lightly spotted white eggs in tree cavities, building crevices, nest boxes, or holes in earthen banks or cliffs. Pairs will use nest boxes and have much higher nesting success using boxes on poles than boxes on trees. Kestrels usually mate for life.

The incubation period is 29 – 30 days; unlike other raptors, both sexes incubate and develop bare oval patches on each side of their breasts where the warm skin can contact the eggs. Females do more of the incubating and are fed in mid-air by the male. They will renest if the first nest fails and have been reported to raise 2 broods per year in some of the southern states.

After the eggs hatch, the male brings most of the food. Chicks develop adult plumage at about 18 months.

Young birds tend to stay with the adults for a while after fledging. They are fairly short-lived – the oldest known wild bird was over 11 years old; captive birds have lived up to 17 years. Do they kill rats and mice like other raptors?

Kestrels feed largely on grasshoppers, dragonflies, lizards, mice, voles, and other small birds. In cities, they often attack House sparrows. Because they can feed on both insects and vertebrates, Kestrels maintain fairly high population densities.

Do they hunt like hawks and eagles?

Not entirely. Unlike other raptors, falcons use their bills for killing, not just for tearing up carcasses. They can capture prey either by dive-bombing or plunging feet first. Usually, prey is captured on the ground, rather than in the air like most falcons.

The American Kestrel is the only North American falcon to habitually hover with rapid wing beats, keeping its head motionless while scanning the ground for prey. Although hover-hunting is conspicuous, it is not often used unless winds are strong enough to create updrafts favorable to hovering, or if suitable perches are not available. The kestrel commonly hunts from elevated perch sites, waiting for prey to move on the ground. It will bob its head and pump its tail before attacking.

Other prey capture techniques include direct pursuit, landing and flushing prey from the ground and then taking them in flight, capturing flying insects from an elevated perch, and nest robbing, including the burrows of Bank Swallows and the nests of Cliff Swallows. It may also occasionally snatch a bat from a tree roost, or strike bats in flight from above or as the bats leave or enter caves. The kestrel will kill and cache food items, and may occasionally rob others of the same species. It has also been known to rob a shrike of its prey. Kestrels sometimes harass other hawks and even Golden Eagles in flight.

Hunting Kestrels are at risk of predation by dogs, cats, and other raptors, in particular, Cooper's hawks.

Are kestrels used for falconry?

There are few falconers in the United States (estimated at less than 4,000) but American Kestrels (along with the Red-tailed Hawk) are one of only two raptors used by new falconers in the United States. This is largely due to federal laws restricting apprentices to possession of only those two raptors in the lower 48 states.

Behaviorally, kestrels usually tame down relatively quickly (2-4 weeks), especially in comparison to other raptors. The downside of this tameness is their penchant to begin "screaming" (food begging) - incessant, piercing, loud calls - whenever the handler appears.

Kestrel facts

- Nestling kestrels back up, raise their tails, and squirt feces onto the walls of the nest cavity. The feces dry on the cavity walls and stay off the nestlings. The nest gets to be an awfully smelly place, with feces on the walls and uneaten parts of small animals on the floor.

- In many southern parts of their range, female and male American Kestrels use different habitats in winter. The female uses more open habitat, and the male uses areas with more trees. This situation appears to be the result of the females migrating south first and establishing winter territories. The males then are forced into the less preferred areas.

- Recent research suggests that kestrels may see in the ultraviolet range, since they can follow urine trails - visible in UV only - that voles use to mark paths leading to their burrows.

- Formerly called Sparrow Hawks, the Kestrels actually belong to the Family Falconidae whereas hawks belong to the Family Accipitridae.

- Visual acuity was found to be 2.6 times better than the best humans could do by using several falcons trained to discern various grating sizes from coarse to extremely fine.

- It is speculated that the black markings on the back of the head may look enough like a beak and eyes to repel predators or mobbing song-birds.

What about the kestrel at the park zoo?

Our current kestrel is a beautiful adult male who came in July 2007 from the Raptor Recovery Center in Elmwood, Nebraska. He was blind in his right eye due to an unknown injury. He winters inside the Nature Center office and will be outside on display again this spring.



Rochester, MN 55903
P.O. Box 6552
Friends of Oxbow



Yes! I want to support Oxbow Park by becoming a member of Friends of Oxbow Park membership opportunities - Be sure to ask if your company matches donations!

Want to sponsor a Zoo animal? Check our web page: www.friendsfoxbow.org

_____ Friend - \$25 - \$49 _____ Sponsor - \$500 - \$999
_____ Partner - \$50 - \$99 _____ Philanthropist - \$1,000 - \$4,999
_____ Patron - \$100 - \$249 _____ Director Circle - \$5,000
_____ Ranger - \$250 - \$499

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

**MAIL TO: FRIENDS OF OXBOW
BOX 6552 • ROCHESTER, MN 55903**

_____ New Member
_____ Membership Renewal

Oxbow Park Home Page: <http://www.olmstedpublicworks.com>

OXBOW PARK HOURS — Zoo: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Nature Center: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; General Grounds 7 a.m.-10 p.m.

FRIENDS OF OXBOW BOARD

OFFICERS

Cindy Krueger President
Dory Gardner Vice President
Chuck Pavesich Treasurer
Ruthann Yaeger Secretary/ Newsletter Ed.

DIRECTORS

Jen Rand Everett Beck
Loren Deling Paul Piechowski
Peggy Morris Paul Zollman
Bob Whitworth Jean Davison
Val Piechowski