



# Friends of Oxbow

P.O. Box 6552 • Rochester, MN 55903

August/September 2007



Summer interns at Oxbow, from left, Alicia Ice, Nolan Schlichter, Rachel Marden.

## *Interns provide Oxbow Park with great help*

Friends of Oxbow sponsors at least three interns every summer, providing the park with great help and the interns with great experience. A win/win program if there ever was one! Here are a few words of introduction from the current seasonal and two of our interns.

My name is Alicia Ice. I am 23 years old from Rochester. I am the seasonal naturalist here at the park and love my job. I hope to find a full time position this fall in another zoo somewhere in the country. I am especially interested in working with grizzly, black, and or polar bears. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology from Minnesota State University, Mankato. I previously volunteered here at Oxbow in 2003 and also completed an internship at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park in Eatonville, WA.

My name is Nolan Schlichter. I am from Rose Creek, Minnesota and will be entering my junior year at St. Olaf College in Northfield in the fall as a biology major with a concentration in zoology. I also have great interest in

conservation biology and genetics. I would love to get into zoo work after I graduate in 2 years. My current internship at Oxbow Park is helping me gain valuable experience. Thank you to everybody at Friends of Oxbow, Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo for giving me such a great opportunity.

My name is Rachel Marden. I am 23 years old from Rochester, and graduated from Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall in December of 2006. My degree is in Environmental Science with an emphasis on humanities. I also have quite a bit of experience in water quality, which is what I did my senior thesis on as well as many other projects. I plan on working as an environmental educator and am currently looking for a job. My internship at Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo is helping me to gain experience with educating the public. I want to thank Friends of Oxbow for this great learning opportunity, and also thank the staff at Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo.

# What's new at the Park?

by Celeste Lewis, Park naturalist

Summer is here! This means visitors, visitors, and more visitors!

Even without knowing exact numbers I am not afraid to say that park usage is up. The campground is nearly full every weekend and the picnickers just keep on coming.

Not only are visitors keeping the staff busy, we have had a number of park improvement projects this summer as well. Three very noticeable projects are the memorial viewing platforms for the bison, elk and deer. All three platforms were completed and look spectacular.

With the platforms completed, demolition and construction of the new quarantine shed has begun. The new shed is replacing the old brick shed that stood just southwest of the barn.

In our continuing prairie restoration efforts, we have

## Chester Woods Programs

**Audubon Society hike**—Sat., Aug. 11, 9 a.m.—Meet at boat ramp  
**Naturalist choice**—Sat., Aug. 18, 7 p.m.—Always fun! Meet at

Kisrow classroom

**Moonlight paddle**—Sat., Aug. 25, 8:45 p.m.—bring your own canoe and gear

**Full moon hike**—Sat., Aug. 25, 8:30 p.m.—Meet at boat ramp

**A Day in the Park**—Sat., Sept. 15, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.—register by calling RADAR at 280-6005

**Night hike**—Sat., Sept. 22, 8:30 p.m.—discover the critters of the night! Meet at Shelter #6.

**Campfire tales**—Sat., Oct. 13, 7 p.m.—enjoy hot cocoa around the campfire at Shelter #6

*A \$5.00 daily fee or \$25 annual vehicle pass is required to enter Chester Woods Park. Programs may be cancelled due to inclement weather. Call 287-2624 for information and registration.*

## Oxbow Park Programs

August/September 2007

*Recommended for all ages*

**Birds of Prey** - August 4 at 1:00 p.m.

**Bison Feeding** - August 11 at 1:00 p.m.

**Naturalist Choice** - August 18 at 1:00 p.m.

**Deer and Elk Feeding** - August 25 at 1:00 p.m.

**SPECIAL EVENT:** August 29 - Women in the Outdoors -

Learn new skills such as nature photography, carving walking sticks, bird identification, prairie restoration, and backpacking (ages 12 and over) 10 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Registration at 10.

Call 507-356-4411 (Miranda) for more info

**Black Bear Feeding** - September 1 at 10:00 a.m.

**Feed the Otters** - September 8 at 1:00 p.m.

**Snake Feeding** - September 15 at 1:00 p.m.

**Children's Zoo Hour** - September 22 at 1:00 p.m.

*\*In case of inclement weather, call 775-2451 for program information.*

burned and planted approximately 10 acres in small prairie plots throughout the park.

We are also in the process of acquiring a few new raptors. Over the past few years our aging bird population has left us with a number of vacancies on our federal permits. We have slowly been working at filling these vacancies.

Acquiring raptors is a little different than the other animals here at the zoo. We need to wait for an injured bird that is non-releasable to become available. So chances are, when visiting the park/zoo in the next few months, you may see some new faces!

## Prairie Seed collection trips - 2007

Enjoy learning about prairie plants while collecting seed! Dress for spending 2-3 hrs walking through tall vegetation and bring water. **In case of damp weather, the session will be cancelled.** If you have questions contact Joel at 507-365-8091 (home), 507-269-7064 (cell), [jdunnette@gmail.com](mailto:jdunnette@gmail.com).

**Chester Woods:** meet at the park entrance kiosk

Sunday, September 9, 2-5 pm

Sunday, September 23, 2-5 pm

Thursday, September 27, 1-4 pm

Saturday, October 6, 1-4 pm

Thursday, October 18, 1-4 pm

**Weaver Dunes:** Help increase the diversity of the restored sand prairie. 10 am to 3 pm the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month. Come for morning or afternoon or both; bring lunch and wear long pants.

**July 21** – pull invasive plants, collect seed and locate areas for future collection

**August 18** – collect seed and locate areas for future collection

**September 15** – collect and spread seed

**October 20** – collect and spread seed and possibly cut brush

To reach Weaver Dunes office in Wabasha County, go north on Highway 61 from the town of Weaver about 2 miles, then turn right on Co. Rd 84 and wind north through wetlands. In about 2 miles you will come out on the prairie. Look for the sign for the preserve office.

## Phenology

**August: Moon of the black raspberry**

- House wrens are hatching from the second nesting of the year.
- Monarch butterflies can be seen migrating to Mexico.
- Black bears begin preparation for their winter hibernation.
- Juvenile male wood ducks begin to take on adult plumage.

**September: Moon when the calf grows hair**

- Acorns are dropping from red and white oaks.
- While fall colors peak, ever-bearing and fall-bearing raspberries ripen in gardens.
- Black bears begin to hibernate.
- Baltimore orioles leave to winter to Central America.

# Common Birds in Decline . . .

*With excerpts from National Audubon Society articles*

Do you remember hearing the familiar “bob-WHITE” of that pretty little quail? Or perhaps you remember feeding lots of brilliantly colored Evening Grosbeaks at your feeder. Or maybe your favorite duck was the elegantly marked Northern Pintail.

If you have noticed that you don't see these birds much anymore, you're right. These and many other once common species of birds are disappearing. This decline is due to habitat loss from relentless development, expanding crops with attendant pesticide and herbicide use, roaming and feral pets, as well as ever increasing numbers of cell towers, transmission lines and buildings with large plate glass windows. The numbers of bird losses from these various problems are simply staggering.

The Audubon Society reports that “since 1967 the average populations of the common birds in steepest decline [*not* the already endangered ones] have fallen 70%...” This statistic comes from data gathered from Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, the USGS Breeding Bird Survey (both ongoing for forty years), as well as power line and cell tower monitoring.

What are your parks doing to help reverse this decline? Oxbow park and sister park Chester Woods have many efforts already in place. Both parks have programs for timber stand improvement, non-native vegetation control and providing nest boxes for a variety of birds. They are also actively engaged in prairie restoration, including prescribed burns, reintroduction of native forbs and seed harvesting.

Oxbow has also supplied the MN Department of Natural Resources with surplus native wild turkeys that are thriving in the restored habitat of the park. These birds will be used to repopulate other restored areas in Minnesota that can now support them. Friends of Oxbow supplies volunteers to help with these programs as well.

What can you do? It's not too late! Here are a few things you and your family can do to help.

**Support sustainable forests** by purchasing certified lumber, supporting active management, including burns, on public lands. Promote deer management and back incentives for active management by private owners.

**Stop invasive species** by supporting federal, regional, state and local regulations to control exotic invasive plants. Plant native flowers and trees in your yard and garden.

**Conserve wetlands** by supporting wetlands programs and farm bill conservation programs such as the Wetlands Reserve Program and “swampbuster” rules. Encourage governments to enact and enforce protection and water quality regulations.

**Preserve farmlands** by supporting strong conservation

provisions such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

**Save grasslands** by requesting that local and state officials increase the amount of habitat through smart growth and protection of open space.

**Monitor feeders.** To avoid spreading bird diseases don't put out food if you see dead or diseased birds, and clean feeders regularly.

**Halt global warming** by backing federal, state and local legislation to cap greenhouse gases and spur development of alternative energy sources. Use energy efficient appliances, compact fluorescent bulbs, and complete the recycle loop by purchasing products made with recycled materials.

**Volunteer** at either park to help with the various programs mentioned above.

Working together, we can halt this tragic decline and provide for our own welfare and enjoyment at the same time!

## From Our New President

Hi! My name is Cindy Krueger and for the last five years I have had the honor of serving on the Friends of Oxbow (FOO) board and volunteering at Oxbow Park. This year I was elected President of the board.

I was able to start volunteering at the park several years ago. I got to clean the habitats and feed the animals. Do you have any idea how exciting it is to hand a banana to a porcupine, or feed an otter, or woodchuck? I also get to talk to the children and adults while I held a Fox snake, and explain to them the necessary role that snakes play in our environment, and how important it is to respect them in the wild. What a treat!

Being a graphic designer at Insty Prints, I've also designed several graphic jobs for the park and as a novice woodworker I designed and built the bison display at Oxbow Park Nature Center.

Friends of Oxbow puts a high value on education. We believe that in order to preserve the wildlife and flora of Southern Minnesota people should be given the opportunity to learn about these natural wonders. That's what we do at Oxbow, EDUCATE!

Unfortunately, with all the cutbacks in the county budget, Oxbow has not had a full-time educator since 1989. This is something that Friends of Oxbow is trying to correct. We are looking for people who want to help the park find a teacher, or a benefactor to pay the wages of a teacher. Unfortunately, money for a teacher is just not in the budget. Other projects we are saving for are a new Native Wild Cats habitat and a new raptor habitat. Both are getting old and need to be replaced.

If you like the outdoors, enjoy animals, trails, trees, flowers and grasses, Oxbow Park will fit right into your lifestyle. Come on out to the park, bring the kids and enjoy the beauty of Southern Minnesota. You'll be glad you visited us, and while at the park, pick up a Friends of Oxbow membership application. We would love to have you join us in our quest to preserve Minnesota's flora, fauna and wildlife. Who knows, you might end up helping to feed the bear!

# Landscaping for Wildlife

*With excerpts from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) website*

Farmers and ranchers are making progress in natural resource conservation and **you can too** in your own backyard. You don't need to be a horticulturist to attract beautiful songbirds, cheerful butterflies and other interesting wildlife. A willingness to use native instead of exotic species is really all that's needed. Using native plants also means far less work once they're established – almost no weeding or watering needed!

Watching wildlife can be fun for the whole family. Wild animals need a little help from their “Friends” since more habitat is destroyed for developments and crops every day. Your result will be a more natural environment and a peaceful place to relieve your stress or unwind, day or night.

## Ten things you can do in your backyard:

Plant a tree, create wildlife habitat, make a backyard pond, create a wetland, make or use compost, mulch plants, manage nutrients, terrace your yard and manage pests responsibly. The USDA produces a free booklet titled Backyard Conservation to help you accomplish each of the above activities. Go to [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

**Top Ten Native Plants** - All of these plants are appreciated by wildlife, are hardy and easy to grow. For a full list of native plants in this region, visit “[http://www.enature.com/native\\_invasive/](http://www.enature.com/native_invasive/)” Native Plant Guide at [www.eNature.com](http://www.eNature.com). The top ten native plants for landscaping and gardening in the Midwest are:

**Northern White Cedar** (*Thuja occidentalis*), **Black Oak** (*Quercus velutina*), **Northern Hackberry** (*Celtis occidentalis*), **Cranberry Viburnum** (*Viburnum opulus*), **Gray Dogwood** (*Cornus racemosa*), **Common Chokecherry** (*Prunus virginiana* – seeds should never be eaten by humans), **Swamp Milkweed** (*Asclepius incarnata*), **Wild Columbine** (*Aquilegia canadensis*), **Cup Plant** (*Silphium perfoliatum*), and the **New England Aster** (*Aster novae-angliae*). Many others are favorites as well.

## A few tips to get you started:

1) Provide water. An easy way is to put out a birdbath. The key to having a successful birdbath is to change the water at least every other day, which keeps the water fresh so mosquitoes cannot breed. Every few days empty the bath, scrub it with a stiff brush, and rinse it well. Bleaching is not necessary and is harmful to the environment! If you must clean with something, use white vinegar and rinse well.

An even better source of water is a small garden pond, but this requires a little more work. Visit the USDA website (above), the NWF website or your local library to find out what's needed. The rewards are great, since such a pond will attract not only birds, but many lovely dragonflies as well as frogs and other amphibians who will help to rid your yard of mosquitoes and other insect pests.

2) Provide cover. Wild critters need a place to hide in order to feel safe in your yard. The easiest way is to use existing vegetation, dead and alive. Shrubs, dead trees, logs, brush or rocks are homes for lots of different wildlife. Nesting boxes allow birds to raise their young. The right kind of box depends on what types of birds come to your area – check with the Oxbow Park naturalist (775-2451).

3) The best way to make your land friendly to wildlife is to reduce the size of your lawn. Lawns often require toxic chemicals and if you use a gas-powered lawnmower, the engines are very polluting and noisy. Since lawns contain so few types of plants, they are of almost no value for wildlife. Other environment-friendly tips include using a drip soaker hose, capturing rain in a barrel, using plants that don't need watering (xeriscaping), keeping your cat indoors, and removing invasive plants.

4) Dried lawn clippings and leaves are great mulches! Wait for 2 mowings before using them on vegetable gardens if you have applied weed killers and avoid cypress or peat mulches – their sources are becoming endangered.

Remember to have fun, sit back and enjoy the results!

# The Critter Column . . .

by R. Yaeger

## American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*)

Badgers are a native animal you are unlikely to see in the wild, but will enjoy seeing at the Zollman Zoo. They have a fearsome reputation but do not simply attack on sight as some seem to believe (unless you are between them and their babies, of course!). To increase your enjoyment when you come to see them, here are a few answers to common questions about these handsome creatures.

First, a little natural history:

Badgers are a large, robust, short-legged member of the weasel family. They have a broad, squat body, a distinctive white stripe going from near tip of nose over the top of head to the shoulder area. A white crescent is next to their eyes and at anterior base of the ears outlining a black area.

In size, they range from 30-35 inches long, usually weighing 12-16 pounds, but occasionally over 20 pounds.

Badgers are not common, but are found throughout the mid and western US. They prefer areas of sandy or porous soil that are relatively easy to dig - usually open grasslands and prairies - and can have territories of 3-4 square miles. After mating in mid spring to summer, implantation may be delayed depending on environmental conditions. Gestation lasts for 210 to 230 days. The time of birth depends on latitude and altitude, usually from February to May but can be as late as June.

A den area is dug into side of knoll or grassy field and 1-5 pups are born, blind and furred. The eyes open at about 5 weeks and they are weaned after 6 - 8 weeks, remaining with the mother for several months. Badgers are known to live up to 15 years in captivity.

Like us, badgers are omnivores, meaning they eat both animals and plants. Small mammals such as mice, rats, and ground squirrels are favored, but they also eat insects, slugs, earthworms, roots, grasses, and some fruits.

*Where did the name "badger" come from?*

The name most likely is derived from the old word *badgeard* (badge + -ard) referring to the white "badge" or mark on the animal's face. The badger is Wisconsin's mascot because the early miners there were called "badgers", alluding to the creature's celebrated digging ability.

*Lots of animals like to dig, including my dog – why are badgers so famous for digging?*

Unlike your dog, badgers are supremely designed especially for earth moving, with long sickle shaped claws and short, powerful forearms. These claws have special pressure sensors not found in any other mammal. A pointed snout flaring to a triangular body forms a wedge that assists the animal in moving efficiently underground. They are also equipped with protective ear and eye membranes to seal sensitive tissues from dirt. Legendary excavators, they can send a 5 - 8 ft plume of dirt out behind themselves and completely disappear into the ground in less than 3 minutes of furious digging. Can your dog do that?

*Are badgers really as ferocious as they look?*

They are indeed determined fighters with powerful jaws and teeth that can crush bones easily. They are also endowed with tough, loose skin that allows them to turn around and bite any attacker foolish enough to grab them by the neck. Like most wild animals though, they prefer to avoid confrontation unless threatened or harassed.



*Here are a few bits of badger trivia to spring on your Wisconsin friends:*

- Badgers hold fresh bedding between the chin and forepaws and enter their dens backwards.
- They will kill and eat rattlesnakes, but not the head.
- A quarter of all badgers die before the age of 2 months. Only one third survive more than 3 years.
- They are mostly nocturnal and solitary, hunting all year but staying in their burrows during bad winter days.

*What about the badgers at the Zollman Zoo?*

We have two, a rather elderly male and a much younger female. The male, found orphaned in Centerville, Iowa in March 1996, came to us in June of that year. The female was born in March 2004 and arrived here in July of 2005 from a game farm in Sandstone, MN.

The old male had become rather lazy and was a bit shocked to have to defend his favorite sleeping places when the female first arrived. Things were a bit unsettled at first, but now they get along fine.

They usually put on a good show for the zookeepers with much impressive hissing and fake lunges when their food is brought in and the pen is cleaned, but no one has actually been bitten by them in the course of daily cleaning and feeding.

This pair can often be found snoozing on their backs in the sun with all four legs in the air – the picture of summer relaxation! Come on down and see them!

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

**I WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE FRIENDS OF OXBOW:**

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00 Family                      \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$15.00 Individual                  \_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in volunteering  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Senior Citizen  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 5.00 Student/Child

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_



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

***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.

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