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sweet clover and to identify species. My daughter asked where I had been.

"There's a new plant behind the high school. I was looking for it." I said.

"New?"

I explained that it wasn't a new plant, just new to us, new to this place. I was fixed by her incredulity.

"It's a secret." I said. "Don't tell. Someone might take it."

"A secret?" She grinned.

She had found me out. I prized the plant, but I also prized the secret. If this is the way of secrets, and I think it is, we must reconsider what it is to educate about a prairie that also is secret. Maybe we like it that way.

### **Outcomes**

My students did not solve the puzzle of the best way to educate about the prairie.

However, we gained ground. Several arrived at important insights. I will mention a couple. A student named Eldon arrived at insight that amounted to the prairie's need for "social presence." Talking in my office about Eldon's logo project for the prairie, we marveled that there were no brochures, no kiosks, no dedicated website, and no educational plaques. We realized that the power of such things did not coincide with their educational value, which admittedly was slim. However, their absence was telling. Brochures and whatnot legitimize a place. They deem a place consequential. Without such things, places remain invisible, the stuff of secrets. Presence, it seems, comes first; education, second.

Two other students, Reggie and Les, visited small prairies all over Iowa. They looked for signs, literal and figurative. Every one of the small prairies lacked signage. There was nothing to welcome the newcomer. And in Iowa, nearly all of us are newcomers if not to the state, to prairie. The students' discovery was a comfort. Our local prairie was not the worst. In fact, there was a big wooden sign at the entrance to our prairie. Their insight, however, was also a worry: nearly

everywhere in Iowa, the great tallgrass prairie had no presence.

The power of these ideas enabled me to understand a puzzling conversation with a girl who volunteered at a workday. She attended the high school but this was the first time she had taken the 10 giant steps to the prairie. The girl, a senior, cleared brush, mainly buckthorn. I asked about the reactions of her peers to the prairie. All of them looked on to the prairie from classroom windows during some point in their high school careers. I expected her to chat about field trips, biology labs, or photo excursions involving the prairie. I was wrong. She said something like, "Oh, no! The students never go in there." She paused to clarify, "They never do anything bad or anything." She pointed to the sign, which declared the site to be a preserve for educational and scientific purposes. To her, and likely to her peers, the sign read: KEEP OUT. It conveyed fragility and importance. It prohibited the entry of ordinary people. It occurred to me that disregard of prairie may be lodged in politeness and duty more than in hubris.

### **Prairie Fire!**

A final outcome came from my daughter. Something affected her during the semester of the educational plan. On a drive to Michigan in April to visit my son at school, we counted 71 prairie fires over three days. We learned to distinguish landscape-scale fires from the pin-point fires of burn barrels and brush piles. My daughter was the first to shout, "Prairie fire! Number 50!" An impossible number in a state that has lost its prairie. We joked that the first week in April should be designated National Prairie Fire Week. The outcome was the enthusiasm of a 14 year old—a commodity that is hard won.

### **End Notes**

The impulses of the educator are not universally welcome. But something went right that spring. I did the right thing by asking others to engage themselves in an environmental dilemma of great magnitude.

There were trees to reconsider, but also secrets. Becoming engaged helped the students, and it helped me. Then it spread. Something is burning in the hearts of Iowans. It burns in people who have lived in Iowa a long time and in those who have lived in Iowa briefly. Prairie belongs in Iowa. Cut the trees, weed the garden, plant the seed, and light the fire. If not in Iowa—then where? If not Iowans—then who?

**Biography and Acknowledgments:**

Nancy Grudens-Schuck is assistant professor in the Departments of Agricultural Education and Studies and the Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. Special thanks to members of the spring 2004 course who put more of their hearts into prairie than they expected. Thanks also to Ann Bugler, Jean Eells, Rod Fischer, Clare Hinrichs, Joyce Hornstein, Erv Klaas, Carl Kurtz, Inger Lamb, Laura Norian, and John Pearson for information, enthusiasm, and assistance. All names have been changed except Clare's. Features of the "new plant" were changed to protect its identity. This essay won the Wild Iowa Essay award in 2005 and is reprinted with permission.

**AMATEUR BIRDING WITH A  
(SCIENCE) TWIST**

*Cindy Hildebrand*

For prairie enthusiasts who are interested in birds, there's a website that can help you keep track of your bird sightings, on or off prairies, in a way that also helps scientists. The website was created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the address is [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org). Other sponsors include the National Audubon Society, the National Science Foundation, and the Bird Conservation Network.

The ebird program allows you to pinpoint your favorite birding locations on a map, including your backyard, and keep track of the birds you see at those sites over months or years. You can enter casual observations or enter species lists that result from timed bird walks. The site also includes interesting reading about birds and bird research.

I wasn't sure this site would work for someone like me. I'm a very amateur birder with dubious computer skills. But I found the site easy to use, and also discovered that ebird doesn't require users to be expert

birders. The site explains that researchers need many kinds of data, and observations of common birds can be very helpful.

It's handy that ebird is better at keeping track of my bird observations than I am. And I'm feeling inspired enough to finally try to learn to identify more of those little brown birds that bounce around in prairies during spring and fall!

**DON DUVICK, 1924 - 2006**

*Inger Lamb*

Iowa lost another great conservation supporter on May 23, 2006.

From the Des Moines Register: "After serving in the military during World War II, he received a bachelor's degree in Agriculture from the University of Illinois in 1948, and a doctorate in Botany from Washington University in 1951."

"Duvick's professional and personal interests were plant breeding and genetics, preservation and use of genetic diversity, conservation of natural resources, vocal music performance, field botany, natural history, and archaeology."

"He was a member of the National Academy of Science, American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Iowa Academy of Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science, New York Academy of Science and the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology."

Don participated in many conservation circles, including the Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and the Iowa Native Plant Society e-mail list. He often provided valuable and interesting comments, perspective, and gentle, low-key humorous offerings in response to postings on that list. I never realized how much I valued his commentary until it dawned on me that I would never hear from him again.

Condolences can be sent to the family at 6837 NW Beaver Dr., Johnston, IA 50131.

### BOARD MEMBER CHANGES

The IPN board has had several changes recently. Kevin Pape, Kirk Larsen, and Kathy Koskovich have resigned their positions - and we will miss all of them. All work with prairie in a professional capacity and brought much useful perspective and knowledge to the IPN. They will continue to support and promote prairies, of course - and Iowa's prairies will benefit from their work. A sincere thanks goes out to all three of these dedicated prairie enthusiasts.

We have two new members to welcome, both in the NW part of the state. Dianne Blankenship has re-joined the board. She was very active with the IPN in the past, and happily now that she's retired she has time to work with us again. Dianne lives in the Sioux City area, is active with the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center there, and also has taken on coordination of the Loess Hills Seminar.

Ginger Vietor also has agreed to join the IPN board. She works with the Cherokee County

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Conservation Board; almost immediately after she came on board she was promoted as the CCB Director. We are fortunate that she chose to remain with the IPN in addition to her new responsibilities.

These new board members will soon be planning some activities in the Region 1 area. We start off with a seed harvest on Steele Prairie in Cherokee County on Sept. 23 (see page 1 and the listing in the upcoming events section).

### **LESS MEETINGS, MORE PRAIRIE!**

The IPN has representatives spread across the state. This allows us to keep on top of local prairies issues and provide relatively close contacts for people with prairie related questions and issues. However, this creates an issue because many board members must travel a long distance to attend board meetings. It's asking a lot for someone to take virtually an entire weekend day to attend a meeting - often instead of spending precious time with family. All three of the members that recently left our board expressed frustration that they were not able to attend more board meetings.

In response to this issue we're shifting board member responsibilities away from attending board meetings and toward more local activities. A winning situation for all! We will focus on our Annual Meeting (or Prairie Party as we prefer to call it) and a winter board gathering - but otherwise work to hold more prairie walks and events. Check out our list of Upcoming Events and join us on a prairie!



### **IPN ANNUAL PRAIRIE PARTY**

*July 14-15, 2006*

This year Mark Müller has been coordinating our Annual Meeting. He's got some great stuff lined up for us! We'll mail an information and registration form in late June.

Highlights include a keynote talk by Iowa State University professor Jim Pease, a presentation and field trip to Rochester Cemetery (20 acres, 300 species!) by University of Iowa professor Diana Horton, a talk and field trip about wetland restoration by Lon Drake, and the premier showing of Mark's new video, "All Roads Lead to a Tallgrass Revival". All that in addition to enjoying Mark and wife Valerie Cool's great homesite, and tours of nearby Kent Park Williams Prairie. And entertainment by Lazy Boy and the Recliners!



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