

# Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Winter 2024-25

## Iowa Prairie Network Winter Seminar by Kenny Slocum

Love is in the air. Valentine's day is right around the corner, and right behind that, the Iowa Prairie Network Winter Seminar. This year's event will take place from **8:30-5:15** on **February 15th**, at Ames High School.

This year's theme, "For the Love of Prairie," highlights the unique ways practitioners from across the state steward and celebrate the iconic Iowa prairies. With topics ranging from grazing to bird gazing, this year's session features an array of speakers that tie together the myriad reasons we love our prairies.

The morning will consist of concurrent sessions, so check out the registration page to find the topic that interests you most! The afternoon will feature six different plenary sessions, with breaks in between to give you a chance to bid on items for the silent auction.

Proceeds from this year's auction will go towards the Richard W. Pohl Memorial Preserve, AKA the "Ames High Prairie." The preserve boasts a remnant tallgrass prairie right in the heart of Ames, spared from development by forward-thinking citizens of Ames in the 1970s.

The property had been heavily grazed, but never plowed, before Ames High School purchased the plot in 1956 with plans to build a parking lot.

Rather than pave paradise, the citizens voted to use the site for environmental education. Today the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation provides the bulk of the maintenance required to keep the prairie healthy - prescribed burning, invasive species control, and monitoring - with help from volunteers.

Unlike so much of the rest of Iowa's landscape, the work is done not in pursuit of commodification of some resource therein. It's not done to fatten a cow or a hog. It's not done to add board footage to a veneer-quality walnut. It's done, simply, For the Love of Prairie.

So join us and show those prairies love! Register on our website before February 10th to reserve a free lunch.



Sign welcoming visitors to the Ames High Prairie

# Ubiquitous Galls & Cryptic Flies by MJ Hatfield

We all know the Goldenrod Gall Fly, *Eurosta solidaginis*, or perhaps I should say we all know the ‘sign’ of the fly, those mostly round stem galls on common goldenrods, *Solidago canadensis*, *S. altissima* or *S. gigantea*.

But how many of us have actually met the unassuming, short-lived and cryptic adult fly? I finally met it, three times in the out-of-doors, twice resting on my silver/blue 2000 pick-up truck and once on a hill prairie remnant.

But the very first time I ever met the fly was in the house, in a jar, after it had emerged from its stem gall. Is it time for you to meet the fly?

Open the gall and you can usually find the larva but come spring, when the adult emerges, you probably wouldn’t notice it. It’s a squat sort of fly, rather cryptic in coloration, non-distinctive, and short-lived. But first, a little something about these flies.

In Iowa the adults usually emerge mid-April to mid-May, live about 2 weeks as they mate and the female lays her eggs, one per goldenrod stem. The larva emerges, eats into the stem, releases chemical(s) that direct the plant to form the gall surrounding the larva.

The gall provides a home, nourishment and some protection from parasitoids and predators. The larva overwinters, pupates in spring then emerges as an adult; the cycle continues.

Adult flies have sponging mouthparts and can’t chew their emergent holes, so the larva does that. Now this is pretty cool; these flies, like some others, have a ‘suture’ in their foreheads which houses a ptilinum, a balloon-like structure.

This balloon/sac busts out of the head, inflating then partially deflating, repeatedly, helping the fly out of the pupal case and possibly through the gall emergent hole.

If you can’t picture that, here’s a video of [another genus of fly with the same method of emergence.](#)

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## IPN Board of Directors

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## *Find a Prairie*

The IPN website now lists public prairies in all 99 Iowa counties.

<https://www.iowaprairienetwork.org/find-a-prairie>



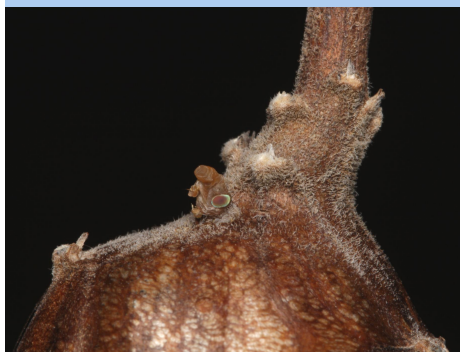
## Join our Board or Become a Committee Member

Our board currently has one opening, and we’re always looking for prairie lovers who want to help with our mission! Add your special talent to a committee (Communications, Finance, Marketing, Newsletter or Membership). Contact us at ([IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@Gmail.Com](mailto:IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@Gmail.Com))

*“The color of springtime is in the flowers; the color of winter is in the imagination.” -Terri Guillemets*

# Ubiquitous Galls & Cryptic Flies (Continued from page 2)

Since the integument of the fly has yet to harden, its soft body can squeeze through the small hole. After emerging the balloon continues to pulsate until it is no longer full of air and lodges back into the fly head, the suture sealing.



The easiest way to meet this ubiquitous fly, up close and personal, is pretty simple: rear it! And the time to try rearing is almost here.

The fly larva has nearly completed its overwintering in the most perfect of conditions, outdoors in winter, which means you don't have to try to mimic winter.

Unfortunately, this fly hardened before it could fully emerge.

A cold basement corner, barn, or refrigerator will work just fine.

Come March or early April, find and collect some round stem galls on goldenrod. Be sure they don't have a pecked hole in them, from chickadees or downy woodpeckers who relish the larvae and know how to find them.

Cut enough stem both above and below the gall. Collect more than one stem because you never know, there is life and death in nature.



Pecked galls

Confine the galls in clear sided jars covered with a tight weave fabric or fine netting secured with a rubber band. Set the jar(s) in a place where you will see them daily, then wait, and wait for the fly(s) to emerge, mid-April to Mid-May.



Goldenrod Gall Fl, *Eurosta solidaginis*

What an easy, fun and educational natural history project for children, grandchildren, and those who love to learn! You'll have to remember to look close because the fly, if sitting on the stem or the gall, may blend in. Great survival techniques, sit still and blend in.

As I watch the decline of insects (Is it just me?), seeing these galls in prairie remnants, road ROWs, waste areas, CRP and other plantings, has taken on new significance.

Both the flies and their host plants seem to be doing well even with pesticides, herbicides, mowing, burning, and weeding. These common goldenrods and their insect flies have managed to survive even as they are sometimes being considered weeds in our prairies.

*Continued on page 4...*

*"I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape. Something waits beneath it." -Andrew Wyeth*

# Ubiquitous Galls & Cryptic Flies (continued from page 3)

As an aside, perhaps a more accurate common name for this fly would be the Goldenrod Stem gall fly as there are a number of other fly galls on flowers and leaves of goldenrods. To view some of these, check out Beatriz Moisset (RIP) BugGuide, Goldenrod Gall Fauna:

<https://bugguide.net/node/view/324012>

which, I might add, generally does not include the non-gall species that feed on flowers, seeds, leaves, roots and stems of goldenrods.

## Thinking Outside the Box in Jefferson County by Dan Sears

With the winter of the new year upon us, I find myself thinking about the good work of 2024. Last year marked the first growing season of Jefferson County Conservation's new native plant propagation box.

Steve Taylor, Southeast Sierra Club's Conservation of Wild Places Team Lead and I prepped and sowed the first generation of "prop box" plants. We started with 11 wildflower species that could be sorted between upland or bottomland habitat preference, such as pale purple coneflower versus great blue lobelia.

Our goal was to boost biodiversity in Jefferson County Park. Over the course of 2024, Steve and I watered, weeded, thinned, and repotted until we wound up with 192 plants for which we needed to find homes.

JCC, Steve, and I selected the park's largest prairie reconstruction as the planting area to improve its wildflower diversity. It just so happened that this prairie was adjacent to the park's new 14-stall campground expansion in progress. The planting would be a win-win for future campers and local wildlife.

On October 26th, we had a total of 14 amazing volunteers lending a hand for the planting day. With the positive community response, Steve and I started the next generation of prop box plants for 2025. Emphasis was placed on milkweed species, such as swamp milkweed, whorled milkweed, and Sullivan's milkweed, to cater to monarch butterflies.



Picture by Dan Sears  
The first round of plants ready to drop off around the prairie before the volunteers arrive



Picture by Laura McCormick  
Volunteers doing the good work



Picture by Laura McCormick  
Volunteers doing the good work



Picture by Sue Delost  
Joyce Wang and Ria Altynska-Ross planting some great blue lobelia

*"A world of grass and flowers stretched around me, rising and falling in gentle undulations, as if an enchanter had struck the ocean swell and it was at rest forever." -Eliza Steelet*

**Featured IPN Connection**



Celebrating 25 Years as a Voice for Grouse Conservation!  
 Our mission is conservation of North America's grouse and their habitats through science, policy, partnerships, and management.

Are you interested in an Iowa Prairie Network prairie walk near you?!

Reach out to an IPN Board member in your region and we would be happy to help plan an event!

Find regions and board members in the About Us tab on the website!

Have a story you'd like to tell in the newsletter?

Contact  
[IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@gmail.com](mailto:IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@gmail.com)

**Membership Corner**

IPN has nearly 200 members who share an enthusiasm for prairies! Join the fun today!

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Circle one: home - work - cell

Membership Levels & Dues (check one):

- Student ..... **Free** - please provide a valid school email address or ID
- Intern ..... \$ 10       Family ..... \$ 30
- Individual ..... \$ 20       Organization..... \$100

Newsletter Options (check one):

- Prefer to receive newsletters via e-mail at the address listed above ..... \$0
- Prefer to receive printed newsletters via mail ..... add \$5

*IPN is an IRS approved 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization*

Please make checks payable to:

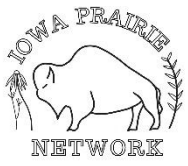
Iowa Prairie Network  
 C/O Treasurer A.J. McBride P.O. Box 1624 Iowa City, IA 52244  
 The membership form can also be downloaded from our website – click "Join Us"  
*You can join online or give an additional gift with PayPal*

Don't forget to **RENEW** your membership! [www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org). **Thank you!**

The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together with those who wanted to learn, to form a network of advocacy for Iowa's natural heritage.

**Upcoming Events – check the IPN Calendar for details, updates and more events! [www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org)**

<b>Feb</b>	<b>15 21</b>	<b>IPN Winter Seminar</b> – Ames High School, Ames, 8:30-5:15 PM <b>Iowa Women in Natural Resources Conference</b> - Spirit Lake, 9:00-3:00 PM
<b>March</b>	<b>1 8</b>	<b>"Native Day" Event</b> - Orange City, 10:00-3:00 PM <b>INPS Work Day</b> – Polk City Cemetery, Polk City, 1:00-3:00 PM



**Iowa Prairie Network, Inc.**  
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**IPN's Mission: To Learn About, Teach About, Enjoy, and Protect Iowa's Prairie Heritage**

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