

Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Fall 2023

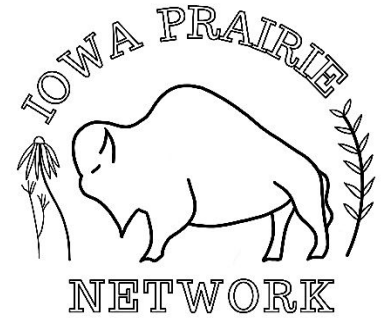
Daryl Smith awarded the North American Prairie Lifetime Achievement Award

by Laura Fischer Walter

IPN members can be proud that one of our own, Dr. Daryl Smith, received the North American Prairie Lifetime Achievement Award at the North American Prairie Conference held in Altoona in June 2023, and we should be grateful that he chose IPN to receive the \$1000 monetary gift associated with the award. Daryl was first introduced to prairies while studying for his master's degree in South Dakota in the early 1960s. When you cite the fact that Iowa has only a tenth of a percent of its original prairie remaining, you're not only referencing a paper Daryl authored; you're also helping explain how a young man could grow up in Iowa without knowing prairie. His life's work has been to ensure that the generations that follow don't have to leave our state to become prairie enthusiasts.

Daryl has devoted a lifetime to studying prairies, protecting prairies, educating others about prairies, and doing the physical and mental work of planting and caring for prairies in Iowa. Daryl joined the Biology Department at the University of Northern Iowa in 1967. Fifty years ago, in 1973, Daryl planted one of the earliest prairie reconstructions in Iowa on the UNI campus, the 8-acre planting known today as the Daryl Smith Prairie Preserve. He played an essential role in getting the State of Iowa to adopt, in 1988, Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management for state and federal highway rights-of-way and establishing a position at UNI to coordinate the efforts of voluntary county roadside programs. Together, these programs have seeded over 50,000 acres of native prairie vegetation along Iowa's roadways and helped stimulate the growth of a robust, diverse Iowa native seed market. Daryl founded the Iowa Ecotype Project in 1990 to make locally adapted, genetically diverse native seed more available and affordable for roadsides and other plantings. UNI's Native Roadside Vegetation Center was established at UNI in 1999 and was renamed the Tallgrass Prairie Center in 2006, to better reflect its mission and activities. Daryl was the center's director until 2013.

Daryl has published scientific papers and technical articles, coauthored The Tallgrass Prairie Center Guide to Prairie Restoration, and was executive director and co-producer of the award-winning documentary, America's Lost Landscape. He served many years on the IPN Board, organized numerous IPN events, and directed the 12th and 22nd North American Prairie Conference. He has given presentations, guided prairie hikes, and led prescribed burns. He even initiated a new religious tradition at his church in Cedar Falls: burning the St. Luke's Episcopal prairie on Easter Sunday. His greatest legacy, however, lives in the hearts, minds, and actions of all the people he has taught, mentored, and inspired over a lifetime in prairie. When you see Daryl at the next IPN event, please offer him your thanks and congratulations.



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Daryl Smith In His Natural Habitat

We Need You!

The Iowa Prairie Network is seeking volunteers to help plan the IPN winter seminar. This annual day-long event features speakers and vendors. Volunteers will help organize, set up, and break down the event. Interested parties should contact

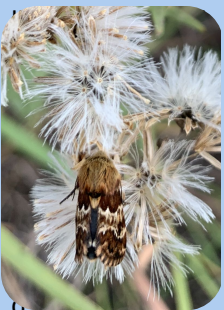
MinerLaura2@Gmail.Com

The Northern Flower Moth at Folsom Point by Tabitha Panas

I almost didn't take the photo. I have my phone out in a prairie way too much as it is – taking photos of pretty sunsets and skylines, documenting plant species, using an app to identify something, checking where I am on the map, checking how far I have walked, reading the email that just popped up... and the list goes on. I had just ascended the steepest slope and was beginning catch my breath atop the grassy peaks, taking in the view of the floodplain and the Omaha skyline. I love Folsom Point Preserve with all my heart, and it kind of breaks my heart at the same time.

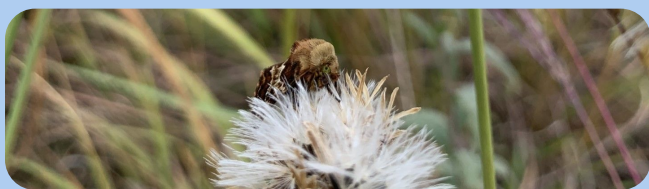
I look out over the floodplain, and I imagine what these prairies have seen from this high-up view. They witnessed thousands of years of marshy Missouri River floodplain, a river that was once shallow, wide and free, occasionally escaping the path she created for herself, spilling over and sometimes stretching all the way to touch the foothills below me. Flocks of waterfowl filling the sky, flying to the right in the spring and flying to the left in the fall, like waves. Herds of bison and elk. Sunny days and snowy days. Thousands of years of Native Americans from different tribes and with different cultures.

And about 200 years ago, what is a blink of an eye in geologic time, things drastically changed. Drain tile dried up the floodplain and the wetlands full of life made way for one or two species of mass-produced row crop. The sunset, once unimpeded, is obscured by the city of Omaha's skyline, the powerplant smokestacks and their never-ceasing streams of steam, and the Google plant. I am unsure what goes on there, but I do know that Google's factory is so close to this prairie that mechanical noises and industrial sounds can be heard from where I stand.



Oftentimes, I am the only other person out there on these prairie peaks. I walk along the ridgetops and look down at the entirety of Omaha and Council Bluffs. I am looking at a million people, almost everyone I know is down there in my view

somewhere, yet I am alone up here. I like hiking in solitude, but it feels lonely. I wish this beautiful and resilient prairie was more popular, more widely appreciated amongst the average person.



These are some of my thoughts that day and thoughts that often play on repeat from the ridgetop. While these old hits played, I spotted a stunning looking moth along the trail. She had bright green eyes, and a beautiful soft brown and white pattern. She was resting on the fluffy seeds of some kind of boneset that had yet to drift away in the wind. I hesitated to get my phone out.

Why do I feel the impulse to document everything I come across with a photo on my iPhone? But I am great at making excuses to justify anything I want to do, and I remembered the insect symposium on day 1 of the North American Prairie



Conference. I remembered Jessica Petersen, Minnesota DNR entomologist, saying, "we don't know what's out there because we aren't looking."

Fast forward to the next day where I decide to look back to the photos I had taken to investigate into what this moth might be. Apps can be very helpful for identification and iPhone has a feature where it will identify plants and animals right from the camera app with the click of a button.

It's important to do independent research, though. The first photo of my moth that I tried to identify, the app identified as a golden eagle. To be fair, I can see the similarity in color and texture between the two species. But I knew a golden eagle couldn't be right, on account of this animal was only about an inch big and it was some kind of moth. The second result returned as a Northern Flower Moth (*Schinia septentrionalis*).

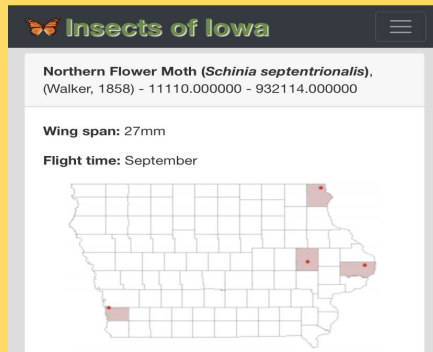
I felt like I had won the lottery when Jim Durbin of Insects of Iowa Webpage emailed me back to confirm my speculation. Jim said that he only has 11 records of this moth, including mine. I was so tickled to have found such a sweet being out on the prairie that day.

I have shared the story of this moth I found with almost everyone I know now, and people ask me if this moth is invasive or new, essentially getting at "why is it rare?" My prairie friends know, though, that this moth has likely been here thousands of years, hanging on mostly out of sight of man, with population declines due to the catastrophic change of land use.

Northern Flower Moth *(Continued from page 2)*

There is not an extensive amount of information on this species online, but I have found asters as their host plant, specifically smooth blue, aromatic, and silky aster.

Adults are only active in the fall, typically the month of September like their species name *Schinia septentrionalis* would imply.



I hope you enjoy my photo of this moth. I am very proud to add a record to the western part of the state. I have never really added a record anywhere, so please allow me to be excited. This is my claim to fame here! Next time you are out in a prairie, take the photo. And remember that we have some amazing resources to answer our insect questions – BugGuide.net and Insects of Iowa are two wonderful online resources.

Metal Sparrows by Aric Ping

Breathe, step, balance, swing. Cut the brush, cut the vines, cut the vine-covered brush, cut the vine-covered vines. Don't cut that oak. Cut back the vanguard of dark, brushy fingers. Break open the homogeneous woodland shade advancing on the prairie.

Foam plugs my inner ears. Yellow helmet-mounted muffs clamp over the outside. The two-layered ear protection dampens the roar of my brushcutter. A metallic ting-ting-ting-ting flits by left to right then right to left like some metallic doppler-effected sparrow-song. The spinning blade strikes a chord with each multi-stemmed sumac, dogwood, elderberry, prickly ash, coralberry, or honeysuckle it severs.

The mechanical birdsong is joined by the sound of my unignorable pulse. My heart is a drum. Every breath, every grunt, every thought is amplified. It's a small, lonely world. Everything is intimate, everything submerged.

The intern crew and I are working side-slope, creeping along the south face of Three Prairie Ridge, one of the steeper areas of Hitchcock Nature Center. I'm on the lowest contour, furthest along, setting the edge of the area to be cut. Everyone is staggered above me like stairs.

We're each cutting a swath 5-10 ft wide, dropping the brush downslope onto the strip the person before us has already cut. The working conditions are brutal. High temperature, high humidity, no wind, terrible footing. Everything is wet. Everyone is exhausted. Our bodies' water has all gone exterior.

Infinite vines wrap around the brushcutter's drive shaft. Each swing becomes a dragging struggle through sinuous molasses. There's no way around it. The anchor points of the vine's web are unknowable. Only The Flying Spaghetti Monster can fathom where the vines are rooted or how they're bound. All you can do is pull your whirring circular saw blade through the infinite arms again and again and hope that this cut or this cut or this cut will finally be the one that releases their grasp.

Sunshine pours into the fresh cut gaps of the brushy canopy. A diversity of tiny huddled graminoid sprigs are revealed below. Silky wild rye, bottlebrush, canada wild rye, little bluestem, sideoats, and a handful of sedges whom I can't identify peek out. They rub the sleep from their chloroplasts and blink their stomata to greet the glaring sunshine of the cloudless August day.



"Flyover country of our times derives much of its forgettability from being a slate wiped almost clean of its original figures." -Dan Flores

Red-faced, sweat-soaked, plastered with scrapes and bruises, the crew's exterior wear and tear is obvious. But there is another fight; a hidden battle between us and ourselves. Echoing between our ears, blended with the amplified beat of blood and crashing tide of breath is a voice taking pity on you. It's telling you to slow down, to stop, to take a break, to find an excuse, to seek out comfort. It tells you the work is too much, it'll never be done. It wants you to succumb to the shade, walk away, hide in the monotonous shadows. Like Three Prairie's woody encroachment, the voice veers towards monopoly, shouting louder and louder until it is all you can hear. It strangles your mind with its tendrils and overshadows all other thoughts in its shade until there is but a singular voice telling you to give up, that you're alone.

Aldo Leopold said that the downside of an environmental education is that one must live alone in a world of wounds. I'm sure that was true for Aldo, a pioneer in the field of land ethics and conservation biology. He was mostly alone in his view of the world. Today, though, we're not alone.

"Wooooooh!" I shout at the top of my lungs. The high pitched yell finds its way through my nearest crewmate's ear protection. She looks at me half startled as her mind again expands beyond the echo chamber of her thoughts. I point to my wrist, indicating its time for a break. She nods, turns toward the next crewmate, lets out her own "Wooooooh!" and gestures the break time message down the line.

Minutes later we're all gathered together taking seats on top of recently cut brush, chugging water. Everyone is quiet for a time, still reawakening to the outside world. I look at the crew, taking note of body language, guessing at each of their levels of mental and physical fatigue. They all seem to be doing alright. Tired, for sure, but alright. I can't help but notice this is the most diverse crew of interns we've had. Three men, three women. Ages 18-31. Some college grads, some preparing for college. Some experienced hands, some completely new to conservation.

Everyone stays quiet, minds and bodies still acclimating. I plop a lime green hydration tab into my water bottle. It starts to fizz. "Electro-lytes?!" I ask in mock outrage. "As hard as I'm working, I'm going to need some electro-heavyies!" The dumb joke garners some chuckles and several smiling eye rolls. A conversation about each of our vine cutting strategies emerges. We give names to the techniques, there's 'The Helicopter,' 'The Metaldetector,' and 'The Blender.' After discussing the pros and cons of each we agree that a variety of methods is the best approach. We chat a bit more before each returning to our lines to continue the work, revitalized by commiseration and collaboration.

Ear protection back on, brushcutter whirring once more, my mind wanders. I begin thinking about the crew's different strategies, our different backgrounds, our different personalities, our different perspectives. I'm reminded of the prairie. Her persistence is predicated upon diversity, and so is ours. Alone, our world of wounds can seem unbearable, irreparable. Together, we grow resilient.

The Prairie is My Church by Cait Coughey

the prairie is my church
she is mine and i am hers
i go to her to weep and mourn
to cry the tears of ecological grief
she is the only place i can hear myself
and without her
i too
am lost



thank you
i needed this
i am letting go

i found myself in a divorce
i am trying to find myself
i lost it all
my mother is dying
i am in a life transition



where can we go
to turn the cultural volume down
as it screams at us
a news bulletin of species demise
here

where we can hear
the still small voice
inside

the prairie is my church
and with her
i know myself
walking lightly on the land



IOWA NATURE SUMMIT 2023

Nov 16-17, 2023

Drake University Olmsted Center

Donations from Fred and Charlotte Hubbell and Bob and Kay Riley have been used to create the "Hubbell-Riley Iowa Nature Summit Scholarship Fund – for students, under-represented groups, or individuals for whom the registration fee may be an issue. Application information is available on www.iowaNature.org

Are you interested in joining the Iowa Prairie Network Board of Directors?!

IPN currently has a vacancy for one at-large board member

Duties include:

- Attend and participate in quarterly board meetings (usually zoom)
- Join and participate in at least one standing committee
- Stay current on IPN communications and deadlines
- Organize and support prairie hikes and events
- Network and become familiar with prairie advocacy and conservation organizations

To nominate yourself or others, contact IowaPrairieNetwork@gmail.com and provide a brief summary of the candidate!

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 Edward M. Sibley, Treas. 4015 Sergeant Road, Sioux City, IA 51106
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. **Thank you!**

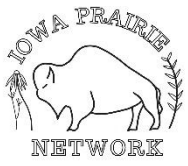
The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together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

Fall 2023 Events

Please be advised: Scheduling of events is subject to change. Check the IPN Calendar for continued updates. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Upcoming Events – check the IPN Calendar for details, updates and more events! www.iowaprairienetwork.org

October	11	Seed Collection at Smokey Hills – Moorehead, 4:30-6:30 PM
	14	TNC Volunteer Prairie Planting – Kossuth County, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
	18	Seed Collection - Green Hills WMA, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
	21	Trick or Seed - Judson Prairie, Guthrie County, 2:00-4:00 PM
	23	Seed Collection - Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek, 5:00-7:00 PM
November	16-17	Iowa Nature Summit - Olmsted Center, Drake University, 8:00 AM



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



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