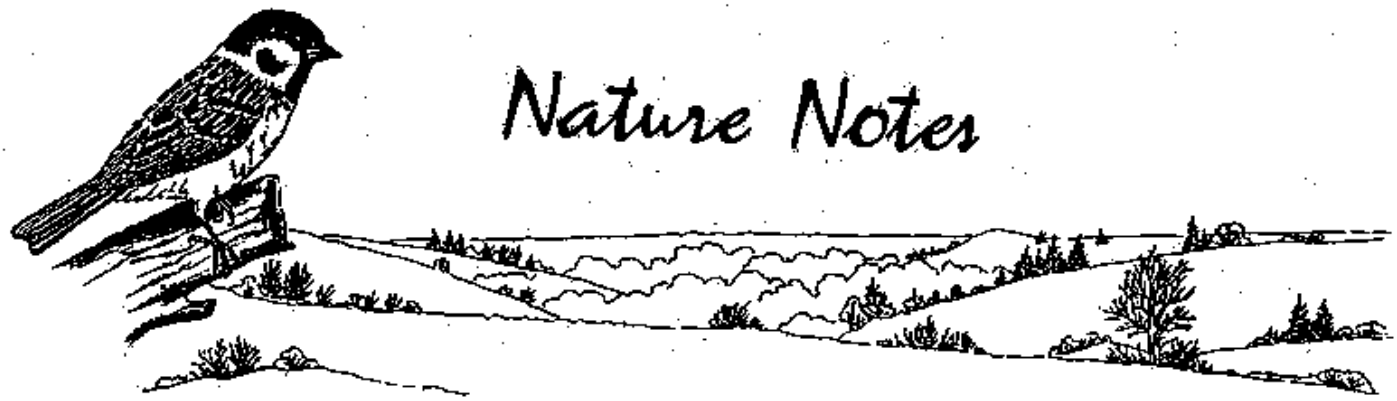

Nature Notes

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER - Ann Earley

Our final general program meeting of 2007 was something different this year---a members' "show and tell" evening. Members brought a wide variety of slides, photos, stories, and objects to see, hear, and admire. Geographic areas covered included those near (Forest Park, the LaBarque Creek watershed) and far (South America, Africa), and many points in between. Topic areas touched on all facets of the natural world and explored many aspects of ornithology, botany, and entomology. Thanks to all who participated in this year's program and shared their experiences with fellow WGNSS members. We may schedule a similar members' program evening in the future, so keep that in mind as you plan your nature adventures in 2008!

Although the weather was not conducive to outdoor activities, WGNSS members enjoyed celebrating the holidays on December 2 at the Forest Park Visitor and Education Center. Besides the good food, socializing, and holiday atmosphere, attendees were able to admire Paul Bauer's bird photographs, purchase a signed copy of Jim Jackson's new book, and win attendance prizes donated by St. Louis Audubon, Sue Gustafson, Torrey Berger, and Ann Earley. Thank you to Anne McCormack for her assistance in coordinating this event.

There will be no general program meeting in January, but WGNSS members will not want to miss two special speakers and program topics planned for February. These events will be held on the evening of Friday, February 8, and on the afternoon of Sunday, February 24. Further details about these events may be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Mark your calendars, and don't miss being there!

WGNSS members are welcome to attend the Society's board meetings, held on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. However, the board will not be meeting on its regular meeting night in January (January 2) but will instead resume the normal meeting schedule with the February 6 meeting date. Board meetings will be held at Powder Valley Nature Center once again in 2008. Members are encouraged to volunteer to serve on the board or on its various committees. WGNSS needs your skills, talents, and abilities! Please contact me if you would like more information about these volunteer opportunities.

As 2007 draws to a close, I want to thank all of the dedicated volunteers who have made our WGNSS activities possible during this past year. Whether you have presented a

IN MEMORIAM - ALBERT SEPPI AND JOHN P. McCAMMON

Albert Seppi

Albert A. Seppi, 82, of Belleville, Ill., died Nov . 18, 2007, while playing tennis. Albert was born Sept. 24, 1925 in St. Louis, Mo. At age one, he moved to Belleville, Ill, where he attended public schools and graduated from Belleville Township High School. Pearl Harbor sent Albert onto the U.S. Marine Corps. After he left the Marine Corps he earned a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's College in Winona , Minn. After college he operated the Seppi Real Estate and Appraisal Co. He joined WGNSS in 1973. He enjoyed bird watching and photographing flowers, He is survived by his wife Betty, three children, and three grandchildren. Memorials may be sent to the Missouri Botanical Garden or to Memorial Hospital, Executive Director, Memorial Foundation, Inc., 4501 North Park Dr., Belleville, IL 62223.

John P. McCammon

Jphn Purdue McCammom died Dec. 1, 2007. He is survived by two daughters, two grandchildren and a sister. A memorial service was held at The Ethical Society of St. Louis on Dec. 6. Memorial contributions may be made to the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, 705 Olive St., Suite 614, St. Louis, 63101 or to the charity of your choice. John joined WGNSS in 1999.

TIGER BEETLE HUNTING IN NEBRASKA – Richard S. Thoma and Ted MacRae

The Nebraska Sandhills are the largest sand dune formation in the United States. They are found in the central region of Nebraska and cover more than one quarter of the state. The sand is thought to have been brought into the area by water and blown into dunes by wind at the end of the last glacial cycle, approximately 10,000 years ago. Over time prairie vegetation has anchored the dunes offering a unique habitat found nowhere else on earth. In early October 2007, Ted MacRae and Richard Thoma traveled to this unique region. The primary goal for the trip was to find species of tiger beetle endemic to the region. It was also a chance for the authors to explore and see for the first time the sandhill prairie and its wildlife.

It's a long drive to central Nebraska, and we only had a long weekend in which to do the trip. In order to maximize our opportunities to sample as many tiger beetle habitats as possible, we consulted a number of different resources. The USGS website (http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/insects/tigb/index.htm) was very useful. A list of the tiger beetle species and county locations where they might be found was obtained from "The Tiger Beetles of Nebraska" website (http://www.lopers.net/student_org/NebraskaInverts/tbeetles/home.htm). Google Maps (http://maps.google.com/) provided detailed driving directions to all the sites we planned to visit. We also received sage advice from resident tiger beetle experts Steve Spomer and Matthew Brust (University of Nebraska, Lincoln). They recommended several specific locations in Nebraska for us to explore during our trip.

Before reaching the sandhills, we stopped at a few other places in Nebraska. The first

stop for the trip was the Lincoln Community Wetlands area a few miles north of Lincoln, Nebraska. This is the only salt marsh in Nebraska and is home to several species of tiger beetle, including the federally endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela nevadica lincolniana*). We were not there to look for this tiger beetle and did not expect to see it, as the adults are active only during the summer months; however, there are several other fall-active species that we did hope to find. The marsh is surrounded by encroaching development with only two hundred acres remaining. Typically, one must go through great efforts, long hikes, and harsh environments to reach rare places. Not here! We parked in an Arby's fast food parking lot and within a few feet were in the marsh. At this stop, weather conditions were not ideal for hunting tiger beetles. The ground was wet and muddy from rain the previous night, and there were strong winds blowing across the marsh. We searched primarily on the exposed salt pans and found amongst Saltwort (*Salicornia rubra*) and marsh grasses two species of tiger beetle, White-cloaked Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela togata*) and Crimson Salt Flat Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela fulgida*). Both are common denizens of salt flats throughout the prairie states. On this trip we saw less than five of each species. Although both species as adults are active in the fall, we may have been on the tail end of the adult activity period. The previous evening's rain may also been a factor as to why so few were seen.

We next made two stops in Sherman County (central Nebraska) where dirt and gravel roads have made deep cuts in the clay soil. We probably would never have found either site without the help of Matt Brust. Neither looked like a promising habitat, yet both produced an abundance of tiger beetles. Altogether we found four species of tiger beetle at these sites, Denver Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela denverensis*), Splendid Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela splendida*), Clay Bank Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela limbalis*), and Sidewalk Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela punctulata*). The first three species are closely related to each other and are distinguished by subtle differences in color and markings. This particular region is located within a hybridization zone for these species, and as a result, the individuals we saw exhibited an interesting array of overlapping characters. A common factor at both sites was a vertical clay bank. Tiger beetles are considered very quick fliers and can be difficult to catch. Many beetles at these sites were initially seen on the road bed. As we attempted to catch them, the beetles would try to escape to the clay bank. After striking the clay bank, the beetle would then tumble down the wall getting lost somewhere in the debris. It was a very effective way to escape. Interestingly, though tiger beetles were abundant, we observed far fewer other insects at these two sites. The unanswered question for the trip was what the tiger beetles were eating?

The next day of the trip was devoted to exploring the sand hills of Nebraska at Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area in Loup County (north central Nebraska). For the most part, the sandhills of Nebraska are protected from erosion by prairie vegetation. At Calamus, however, the lake shore has been exposed by strong winds coming off the lake. The edge of the lake is surrounded by open sand beach. From the shore, the view was similar to looking out over an ocean bay. We saw birds at Calamus more often associated with oceans, including Osprey, White Pelicans and Gulls. The only difference from a true ocean shore was that at Calamus, waves breaking on the shore were small. Behind the beach, winds have eroded away the dunes, exposing steep sand blowouts. This sandy habitat was home to several species of tiger beetles, all different from those found on clay soils the previous day. Five species of tiger beetle, including Big Sand Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela formosa*), Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela hirticolis*), Blowout Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela limbata*), Common Shore Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela repanda*), and Smooth Tiger

Beetle (*Cicindela scutellaris*) were found on the beaches and dunes at Calamus. Unlike those found on clay soils, this group of tiger beetles appeared to partition the habitat. The Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle was the most common and could be found anywhere from shore to dune. This species was the first to emerge as the sun warmed the sand. Thousands of crescent shaped sand burrows built by the Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle were found everywhere on the beach. Common Shore Tiger Beetles were found in the same general area as the Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle but were much less common. The Blowout Tiger Beetle was found at the base and lower portions of exposed dunes. This western species is at its easternmost limit of distribution at Calamus, where it prefers the windiest sites on active dunes. Higher up on the dunes, Big Sand Tiger Beetles and Smooth Tiger Beetles were found, while further away from the beach, in the prairie scrub, Smooth Tiger Beetles made their homes.

In addition to tiger beetles, we found an assortment of other insects at Calamus. The dunes trapped many insects blown in by the high winds. Grasshoppers, bees, wasps, and other beetles were all collected along the lakeshore of Calamus Reservoir. Many of these insects might be food for the abundant tiger beetles crawling all over the dunes. An unidentified noctuid caterpillar, possibly blown off the prairie vegetation from above was common in the lower part of the dune. The caterpillar invariably was found struggling up the dune as if trying to get back to the vegetation from which it fell. Keys and help from others will be needed to identify these other insects. One moth species, a Buck Moth (*Hemileuca maia*), was easy to identify but difficult to catch. Adults of this beautiful day-flying species were active on this fall day.

Altogether, we found eleven species of tiger beetle on this trip. This is 1/3 of all the tiger beetles recorded from Nebraska. This was a very successful trip. We would have had to travel to far western Nebraska to find the two or three other fall species not found on this trip. A repeat trip, sometime over the summer months will be required to encounter the several summer tiger beetles species known from Nebraska.

WGNSS/NABA JOINT EVENT – Dennis Bozzay

Sunday February 24, 2008, 2 PM - Don Corrigan, editor of the *Webster-Kirkwood Times* and professor at Webster University, will discuss his latest book, *Show Me...Natural Wonders*: A Guide to Scenic Treasures in the Missouri Region. The event will take place at Grafica Fine Art Gallery, an art studio located at 7884 Big Bend, two blocks east of Murdoch Ave.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Jan. 1 – Orchard Farm, Tuesday, Jan. 1. Contact Randy Korotev at rlkorote@artsci.wustl.edu at least two weeks before if you would like to participate.

Jan. 5 – Weldon Springs/Busch. Meet at Busch CA Parking Lot at **8 AM** on Jan. **5** (Saturday). Tom Parmeter, Leader 314-921-6017