



Nature Notes

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President's Corner

Ted C. MacRae, Newsletter Editor

As winter advances to its deepest point, I am struck by the dichotomy of the season as it relates to the natural world. On one hand, it is a time of quiet solitude. Gone is the raucous cacophony of activity that begins in spring and continues unabated through summer—the urgent songs of birds in breeding plumage; the explosion of color that blankets the woodland floors, moves up into the canopy, and spreads like wildfire across the landscape; the buzz of unseen cicadas that drone incessantly as the dog days of summer linger, their nighttime pause replaced by the rasping calls of katydids; and the frantic caching of small mammals as they race against dwindling days and dropping temperatures trying to ensure food stores sufficient to last through the approaching winter. The earth, and its non-human inhabitants, seems to enter a deep sleep, peering out groggily and briefly only on the rare day when bright sun and mild temps invite exploration.

On the other hand, winter is also a time of gatherings. Witness the congregations of winter birds in the area's wetlands as they feed and fish in waters too frigid for any other of nature's activities. Unseen gatherings happen as well inside mammal burrows as nest mates snuggle for warmth. Even insects find sustenance in the company of others, congregating under the loose bark of dead trees or remaining massed as eggs,

awaiting the first warm days of spring to rise them from their slumber and spark the business of life.

There is a winter dichotomy in nature enthusiasts as well paralleling the natural world that they hold so dear. The bustle of field activity is largely replaced by quiet study and reflection, of time

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passed in the privacy of their homes. Specimens collected during the previous season need to be processed. Field notes must be collated and catalogued. If nothing else, mind and body need a break from summer's peripatetic intensity as plans for the next season grow and take shape in the mind. No good naturalist, however, can thrive in complete solitude during the winter, for it is during this time that the discoveries of the previous season are shared with others. Naturalists not only learn from themselves, they learn also from other naturalists. Our gatherings reinvigorate our passion for nature study, and it is during the winter that we most often find the time available for such.

WGNSS, as a nature study organization, caters to these needs with a full array of winter activities designed to stoke the flames of interest in nature study. Members interested in our avian fauna may wish to join the **Bird Group** on one of their regular, bi-weekly outings. Plants may go dormant during winter, but they are still present and exhibiting characters not typically noticed during the bustle of summer. Consider join the **Botany Group** on one of their weekly outings as they study these often overlooked means for identification. Insects largely remain hidden during the winter, but the **Entomology Group**, largely dispersed by individual pursuit during summer, comes together for monthly meetings during the winter to see talks by some of the area's most dedicated entomologists. If reading about nature is your preference, why not join one of the monthly **Natural History Book Club** meetings to share your thoughts on the featured book of the month. Lastly, don't forget about the **WGNSS-St. Louis Audubon Society Winter Party** that will be held on January 31st at the Audubon Center in Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary—details can be found in this issue of *Nature Notes*.



December General Meeting: "Missouri Glades"

Richard Thoma

Well known to almost everyone in WGNSS, **Paul Nelson**, Mark Twain National Forest Ecologist (retired) and past Missouri Department of Natural

Resources Natural Areas Coordinator, spoke at the December General Meeting. With over 50 people attending, Paul drew the largest WGNSS crowd for the year. Paul spent the evening talking about the work he has done for the past six years, mapping "Missouri Glades". The idea to inventory glades actually was brought to Paul's attention at a Cedar Glades Symposium in 1982 at the School of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, Missouri. At the conference, speakers were combining various bird conservation plans, state wildlife action plans, U.S. Forest Service regional maps, species of concern checklists and other data to build broad strategies to best preserve and protect the natural communities of Missouri. Paul's idea was to expand upon these initial maps to produce at least an order of magnitude more detail to better inventory Missouri habitats.

So what is a glade? Paul pointed out that there are many different opinions on what makes up a glade. There is, however, broad consensus on three important factors: 1) glade soils are thin with shallow bedrock; 2) because the soils are thin and rocky, plants are drought adapted, and finally 3) glades are essentially treeless, though they are typically surrounded by woodland. Examples of animals found on glades include Indigo Buntings, Summer Tanagers, Roadrunners, lichen grasshoppers, tarantulas and collared lizards. Glades are found primarily in the Ozark Highlands and southwestern Missouri White River drainage, and there are multiple kinds of glades based primarily on the type of bedrock. Paul lists six different glade habitats in Missouri—igneous and dolomite glades are the most common, while limestone, chert, sandstone and shale glades are considered rare in Missouri. Each is a unique habitat, often hosting a community of plants and animals found no where else.

Modern technologies have made detailed habitat mapping possible. For maps with the best special imagery, Paul relied on Google Maps at the highest resolution. Overlaid on Google Maps were a variety of other maps, including topographic maps, natural area maps, and almost any other map Paul could find. The maps were combined with the Missouri Natural Heritage database (now residing with the Missouri Department of Conservation) and other plant and animal inventories. This was followed by field verification. It took Paul about