
The JURICA NATURE MUSEUM Newsletter

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Education News

Spring was busy with many school field trips to the Jurica Nature Museum. In May we had more than 900 visitors, a record for us. We had 25 classes visit on the 22 available days in May! Many of the classes who visit in the spring use their visit as a culminating activity in their study of ecosystems or animals. Students like to share how visiting the museum fits in with what they are studying in school. Many of the teachers have been to the museum in previous years and they were quite impressed with the improvements to our Illinois display.

The museum again participated in the Kane-DuPage Regional Museum Association Passport to Adventure summer program. This was the 15th year for this program and there were 58 museums participating. We had 108 children from 62 families in 20 towns visit the museum to complete a special activity sheet and have their passports stamped. Many were first time visitors to the museum and the University. Our student worker, Suzy Bartoz, was an enthusiastic greeter, and when not busy with visitors she completed much work on the animals for the Web page catalog. (See www.ben.edu/museum)

The museum worked last spring with the education honor society, Kappa Delta Pi, for their first Scholastic book sale fundraiser. Education major students planned activities for children to do in the museum while their parents shopped at the book sale. We were also invited to put books on a rack for people to buy for the museum. Different families purchased 15 books for the museum. Some of the books have been added to Discovery Boxes and others will be put in the museum for children to read when they visit. Kappa Delta Pi also gave us a voucher for more books. Because of the success of this first joint venture, Kappa Delta Pi is planning an event of activities about nocturnal animals in the museum on October 24. Any funds raised will go to a partner elementary school in Chicago for books to supplement their curriculum.

Mary Mickus participated in two professional development workshops this year. Teaching critical thinking skills in a non-formal environment was the topic of the first workshop. The workshop was developed in response to a survey of Illinois teachers who placed critical thinking at the top of their list of skills they need to develop. Mickus was on the planning committee for this workshop that was sponsored by Chicago Wilderness. Two former teachers who have been involved in research about critical thinking and have presented workshops around the country were invited to work with 25 non-formal educators. Participants left with an understanding of the language and basic skills needed to help teachers. Museum activity sheets are being changed to reflect these skills where appropriate.

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Students pass around a hawk.



School group takes a look at the wigwam.

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The other workshop that Mickus attended was about program evaluation. A consultant presented different kinds of evaluation that informal educators might want to use. Participants shared their evaluation tools and got valuable feedback from both the consultant and others in the fields. We learned about setting measurable goals and how to determine what information is useful in evaluating programs. Most of the participants are concerned because students are at our sites for only about 90 minutes and we want to give the best information for each group in that time. We also discussed how to measure attracting a new audience.

In addition to attending professional development workshops, Mickus worked with seven other professionals from the Forest Preserve of DuPage County, Spring Valley Nature Center, Brookfield Zoo and Fermi Lab to present the second Reading Connections workshop for teachers.

Twenty-seven elementary and middle school teachers were presented with many different strategies for teaching science through literature. The teachers read a book by Jean Craighead George and participated in a series of activities based on the book that will enhance their science teaching. Critical thinking strategies were introduced and teachers also had a chance to talk about the scientific process and its implications. Since there was a waiting list for this workshop, plans are already underway for a 2007 version of the workshop.

For more information or to schedule a tour, please call (630) 829-6546 or e-mail mmickus@ben.edu.

We hope you will visit soon!

Collection Spotlight: Illinois Wetlands

Many of the animals of the Illinois wetlands exhibit can be seen here on campus near Lake St. Benedict, also known as “the slough.” There are muskrats, turtles, frogs and many birds. In fact, there is a group of avid birdwatchers on campus who often share any unusual sightings. They recently spotted a black-crowned night heron, which is on the threatened or endangered list in Illinois. Their list includes 33 other species from the small pine siskin to the great horned owl.

Our display features muskrats, a beaver, ducks, a pair of great white herons and many other small animals. One version of the student activity sheet includes a question that has the students looking for

frogs, a turtle and a crayfish, all hidden in the vegetation. They are also asked to develop a food chain for the wetlands based on the many plants and animals they can see. A few of the classes who visit the museum have time for a campus tour, and we try to point out plants and animals that are in the museum and on campus. The red-tailed hawk that many visitors touch is a common bird in the area. This connection of the animals in the museum to the animals in their yards or parks is valuable for the students. We suggest they try to spot different animals on the bus or car drive back to school so that they develop observation skills.



Mallard Duck



Tree Swallow

CURATOR'S CORNER

Mary Mickus, education coordinator, is the force behind this Newsletter, pushing me to write this column while she puts the rest of it together.

In reflecting on what to write, it seems that the word "retirement" is being used more and more by Mary and me. But I still am looking ahead to "what's next," and also reflecting on where we began.

The move to Birck Hall from Scholl Hall was a big step. Should we stay in Scholl where we were comfortably established after 10 years of hard work in setting up the museum, or should we take everything apart and move long with the rest of the natural sciences and set up a museum again?

In Birck Hall, the University administration, especially Dr. Carroll, gave the Museum the ideal location in the middle of Birck and directly across from Kindlon. I was given free reign to set up the museum as I wanted, and I am grateful for that opportunity. Ernst Gramatzki, the museum designer, taught me that exhibits should be colorful and generate curiosity. Tim Marin of the Chemistry department recently complemented us that the Museum is well organized and arranged.

This past year was a "watershed" for us a "major dividing point." We had more visitors than ever. In May we had more than 900 visitors, most of them school children. The total number of visitors for the school year was more than 5,300 people. We were awarded a major grant from The DuPage Community Foundation to renovate our museum prairie (not to be confused with Dr. Kamin's Jurica Tallgrass Prairie by Lake St. Benedict). Another major gift from Dr. and Mrs.

Paul Springer enabled us to renovate the wetland in the Northern Illinois Diorama right next to the prairie. Now we need to find funds to renovate the woodland and the alpine area.

Another grant from the Illinois Museum Association and several railroad foundations helped us to begin on an exhibit featuring Illinois coal. In August 2007, we will receive the Pancotto Trophy Animal Collection of 58 pieces appraised at \$2.3 million. This collection will give us some animals that we do not have, such as lions for the African Savanna diorama. But it also creates a space problem as to where to put the rest of the collection. Some wall mounts can be put in the corridors around the museum, and the Administration is giving us part of Birck 219 for a display area. The other part will be used for seminar and small group meetings. We estimate the cost of accepting this collection to be between \$10,000 and \$15,000, and we are hoping to find grant money and donors to make this new space a reality.

At the Homecoming reunions held on campus September 23, I was most pleased with the compliments given from alumni who remember the Scholl museum and now see what we have done with the museum here in Birck Hall. With that visible encouragement and hopefully with financial contributions from alumni and friends supporting our work, the Jurica Nature Museum should continue to have a major role in science education at Benedictine University.

Fr. Theodore Suchy, O.S.B.
Curator, Jurica Nature Museum

Visit us on the Web at www.ben.edu/museum



Jurica Tallgrass Prairie News from Larry Kamin Ph.D.

The Jurica Tallgrass Prairie is definitely in fall mode. I just visited the prairie and found six species of asters in full bloom (white, blue and purple). The swamp milkweeds have their pods split open with seeds drifting in the wind. A few plants are flopping over onto the brick pathway but mostly it was easy to walk the 3-foot wide brick path. My plants at home are really flopping over because of all the recent rain (most for any month for the last two-and-a-half years). The nodding onions, sneezeweeds and many sunflowers are in seed now, but the grasses are in autumnal color. One clump of big bluestem grass was over 7 feet tall and the normally 5-foot high Indian grass was close to 7 feet. The little bluestem is about 4 feet high and reddish-purple.

The grass lawn around the project had plenty of standing water but the prairie was only wet. I saw no standing water. There's a lesson there to reduce flooding in basements. The one prickly pear cactus is doing fine even with all the rain. The dropseed was in flower/fruit so I grabbed a bunch of grains off one stalk and squeezed hard and sure enough out

came the scent of hot buttered popcorn. The tallest prairie dock was around 9 feet tall; I have a couple at home that were 12 feet tall this year but they are all flopping down because of the rain.

Burning will be in either February or March as I have an Environmental Protection Agency burn permit that extends to April 2007. Last year there were dozens of tall mulletail weeds, but we burned in early April (2006) and this year I saw no such weeds. I recently purchased an 8.1 megapixel digital camera. The hope is to have a "plant of the week" posted on my Web site starting next spring. If you want to have home prairie plants, many species can still be put in right now. Check with the Natural Gardens in St. Charles as frequently they have a half-off sale. Planting of the Jurica Tallgrass Prairie was in 2004, but every square inch is filled with prairie. Planting plants from pots, although more expensive in the short run, gives immediate results unlike using seeds and hoping, burning and waiting for several years. Until spring.

Best regards,
Larry Kamin,
Director, Jurica Tallgrass Prairie



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