

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 1976

## WHAT TO SEE:

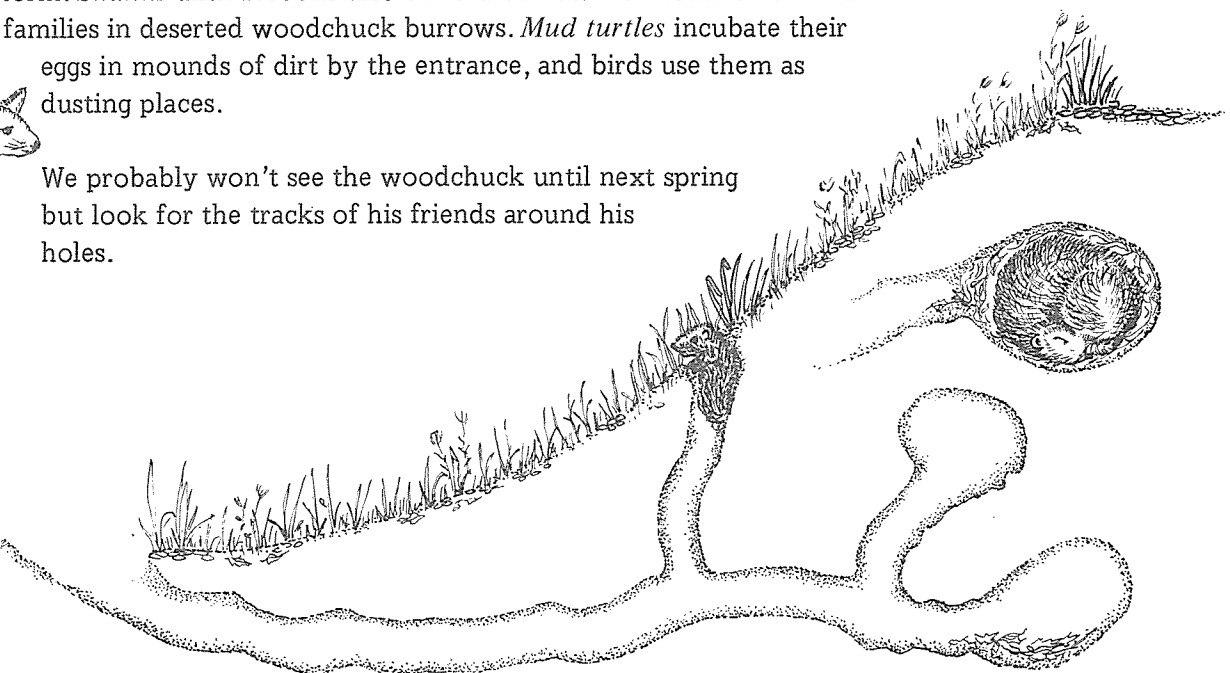
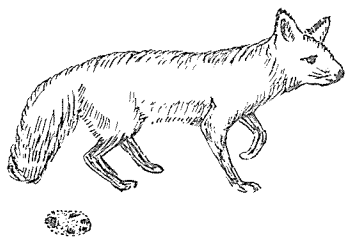
Gardeners who live near the Prairie Path would certainly not cast their votes for the *woodchuck* as the most popular animal. However, if four-footed residents were polled, the woodchuck would top the list. The reasons for both are simple.

Woodchucks are vegetarians; they love clover but will settle for cabbage, corn, or any vegetable growing as long as it's not too far from their burrows. A woodchuck seldom travels more than a hundred yards from the den unless moving to a new territory or seeking a mate.

A true hibernator, he curls up in sleep from November until romance — not the desire to see his shadow — wakes him in late February or early March. A woodchuck burrow has at least two entrances — one well marked by fresh dirt and the other, less obvious, for making a quick exit or to use as a look-out. Underground are two rooms; one is for winter quarters and the other for wastes. Thrown up dirt at the entrance usually denotes house cleaning. The bank of a railroad bed is easy to excavate and a favorite homesite for woodchucks.

It is the woodchuck's burrows that makes him popular with the *cottontail rabbit* seeking shelter from a winter storm. *Skunks* and *raccoons* also use old burrows for homes. Even *red-tailed foxes* raise their families in deserted woodchuck burrows. *Mud turtles* incubate their eggs in mounds of dirt by the entrance, and birds use them as dusting places.

We probably won't see the woodchuck until next spring but look for the tracks of his friends around his holes.



ANNUAL MEETINGSunday, November 7, at 2:00 P.M. Thornhill Building Morton Arboretum

Guest speaker will be Joseph H. Able, City and Regional Planner for DuPage County, Director of Zoning and Secretary of DuPage County Zoning Board of Appeals. He will discuss the future of DuPage County. Also participating in the program will be County Board members: Frank H. Bellinger, President of the DuPage County Forest Preserve; and Robert Raymond, Chairman of the County Planning, Roads, Zoning and Building Committee. It is especially appropriate that the County joins us in this bicentennial year Annual Meeting. 1976 is the tenth anniversary of the Path's official establishment under a lease-agreement with DuPage County. A business meeting, progress report and slides of the year's highlights will precede the speakers. Refreshments and a social hour will conclude the meeting.

MEMBERS:

It is heart warming to observe that of our original members in 1966, 150 of you are still "card carrying" members in 1976. Thank you for sticking with us. To you and all the others who have joined us over the past ten years we say, we couldn't have done it without you. We hope to see you at the Annual Meeting so we may celebrate together.

THE BRIDGE IS UP -

Now spanning the West Branch of the DuPage River is a sturdy footbridge for our hikers and bicycle riders. The bridge is 115 feet long and six feet wide. It was prefabricated by the Continental Custom Bridge Co. in Minnesota and was shipped in two sections. The longer section is of steel trusses and railings with wood decking. The shorter section is pre-stressed concrete with steel railings. Installation was by the Illinois Construction Corporation of St. Charles. The bridge is a handsome chocolate brown and cost the Prairie Path \$30,000. To avoid anticipated inflation, the Prairie Path Board felt it wise to borrow to finance the bridge. We have a long way to go to catch up financially, but response to our letter appealing for funds has been encouraging. We are delighted to report that, as of today (October 19), more than \$1,000 has been received.

THE SIGNS ARE DOWN -

The ugly billboard signs illegally erected by Foster and Kleiser on the Prairie Path near Route 83 have finally been taken down. After much hassel, pressure from the village of Villa Park and DuPage County Board prevailed and the signs came tumbling down.

THANK YOU AND SYMPATHY - to Rosalie Felske and the Association for Brain Tumor Research. Rosalie and her committee have spent weeks on a project aimed at benefiting both Prairie Path and the Assoc. for Brain Tumor Research. Similar to the various walk-a-thons, sponsored volunteers were to clean the path and they did. Unfortunately support was rather disappointing. Contributions were meager. But that wasn't the really bad part! Close to 70 bags of debris had been gathered in Glen Ellyn and pick-up by truck was delayed because of the Columbus Day Holiday. Perhaps you have guessed. Vandals! The collected debris was widely scattered. It must have been quite hard work to make such a mess.

PATH CHANGES - After ten years there have been notable changes in the character of the Prairie Path. Below are portions of a letter sent to us by Ray Schulenberg of the Morton Arboretum, one of our early enthusiasts and a Path "custodian":

"My segment is a transect only three feet wide across the 100-foot right-of-way a short distance west of Illinois 59 north of West Chicago. Miss Turner asked me to do a plant count there as part of the public participation on the First Annual Prairie Path Day, October 23, 1965. On that day...I made a census of the plants within every three-foot quadrant in the three-foot transect across the right-of-way.

Last year, nine years later on the 23rd of October I made a second count on the identical transect. The changes that occurred in nine years were striking. The area that includes the transect had changed from largely open turf in 1965 to a brushy thicket in 1974. Prairie Plants and other herbaceous plants had largely disappeared under the shade and competition of trees and shrubs. The technique used in making the first count were hardly usable because of the size and density of the woody plants. With much difficulty we made a count as accurately as possible; the main facts are clearly evident without statistics.

As many path-users have observed, what is happening to this transect is happening along most of the length and breadth of the path. What is happening is this: The Illinois Prairie Path is rapidly becoming a brush path, following the natural and predictable course of succession for our climate. Box-elders, honeysuckles, wild black cherries, and other woody plants are replacing whatever prairie had remained.

I'm not saying this is bad, but in my opinion, if any semblance of a prairie aspect is to be preserved on the right-of-way, drastic and massive action is needed soon, including a survey to determine which portions still have remnants of prairie, spring burning of these remnants, and cutting and removal of undesirable woody plants which constitute a threat to such remnants. I am under no illusion that such a management program will or even can be undertaken by volunteer, sparetime workers.

Sincerely yours, Ray Schulenberg"

SAFETY TIPS - IMPORTANT MESSAGE

This is the hunting season. Please take note that the pheasant season opens November 13 and extends to next January 15. You know, of course, that no firearms are allowed on the Path, but we want to alert you to the fact that some of the farm fields on both sides of the Path are leased to hunters especially along the western sections. Wear something red, cap, jacket or bandana!

Bicyclists: Our regulations specify: "Bicycles must be equipped with bells; warnings must be given for hikers and other riders." Experienced trail riders call out "Passing on the left" when coming from behind other riders and hikers. Please observe this courtesy to avoid accidents.

Horseback Riders: Experienced riders, even the most expert, find it only sensible to WALK or STOP their horses when meeting traffic on a trail like the path. Mrs. Watts' original design showed a separate path for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. We wish we could provide this ideal arrangement. In some areas our right-of-way is not wide enough; some villages ban horses, and unfortunately, the cost of constructing a 3-lane path is beyond the reach of our private volunteer organization. To quote a current bumper-sticker: "Courtesy is Contagious". Help make the path a safe place for everyone.