

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

WINTER 1976

WINTER AND SURVIVAL ALONG THE PRAIRIE PATH

Brush, thickets, brambles and tangles along the Path offer a green screen for privacy in the summer. They create diverse textures and colors, shade and coolness as we walk or ride along; however, it is in the winter that these become truly important.

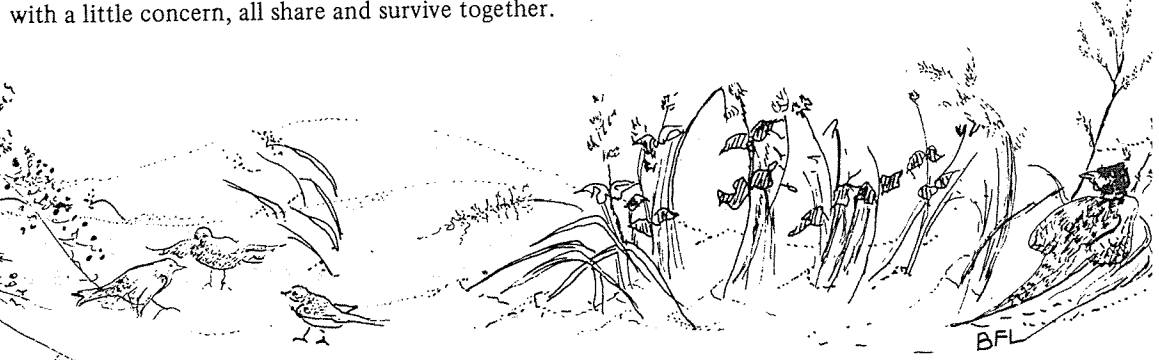
There is no constantly available food supply for wild creatures, so they live under a seasonal threat of starvation. Winter, especially late winter, is a time of hardship because it is a critical period for food supply. The supply of both insect and plant food decreases markedly as weather grows colder. Insect supply suffers most, and wildlife species turn more and more to plant foods. Both plant and insect eaters must search more intensely and over wider areas to find food.

Plants with persistent seeds, fruits or other edible parts, carried high enough so they are above the snow, become valuable sources of food. Vines such as *poison ivy*, *Virginia creeper*, and *green brier* have seeds eaten by the downy woodpecker, flickers, robins, chick-a-dees and other birds. Other fruits and seeds obtainable above the snow line are the *haws* of the hawthorn, *crab apples*, *silky dogwood* and *junipers*. In some areas along the Path, acorns and the seeds within pine cones are eaten by both mammals and birds. *Sumac*, which usually doesn't provide choice food for wildlife, is eagerly gathered as a source of winter substance; seeds, bark and twigs are eaten. Arched canes of *raspberries* and *blackberries* that create wickets peaking above the snow show the sharp diagonal cut of the rabbit's harvest. Buds of the *willow*, *apple* and the remaining seeds of the *ash* are all eaten.

Even the weeds that cause us problems during their growth and pollen season have their use in harsh winter. *Burdock*, various *pigweeds* or *amaranthus*, *ragweed* or *ambrosia* (isn't it nice to know there is some purpose in its existence), some native *sunflowers*, and the *goosefoots* or *chenopodiums* remain persistent upon the dried stalks late into winter and are gathered by birds and rodents. When the snow melts, the leaves of *plantain* are a favorite food of the rabbit.

In areas where prairie grasses still persist, the goldfinches can be seen clinging to the stalks of *big blue stem* rejoicing in their feast. All areas of the Path give shelter and food in varying degrees.

In certain sections of the Path, citizens have removed plant cover so that human users of the Path will be "safe". But they have decreased the survival potential for the wildlife who not only "use", but live on, the Path. We share the world with other citizens and must recognize their needs. This commitment is made more important by the fact that these inhabitants cannot speak or represent their needs or rights. The continuous hedgerows formed on the sides of the Path represent survival for wildlife in an increasingly urban environment, as well as providing multi-uses for our human populations. We can, with a little concern, all share and survive together.



ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Illinois Prairie Path was held at the Morton Arboretum on November 2, 1975. Mrs. Ann Carlson was elected as a new member of our Board of Directors. Louise Headen, Elizabeth Holmes, Lillian Lasch, Mary Lencioni and Keith Olson were re-elected for terms ending in 1978. Dr. Robert F. Betz presented an illustrated lecture on "Prairie Preservation and Restoration", showing prairies once degraded being restored through burning and selective weeding. Afterwards, the 120 persons attending enjoyed informal talk plus delicious home-made apple cider and nut breads served by Mrs. Vi Kolze and members of the Warrenville Friends of the Path.

BICENTENNIAL PROGRAM

The Illinois Prairie Path (one of 200 organizations) has been included in the nationwide "Horizons on Display" Bicentennial Program -- a joint project of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. Purpose of "Horizons on Display" is to highlight for other communities various achievements that represent successful efforts to deal with community needs.

SPECIAL OFFER TO TEACHERS

Have you considered using the Path as an outdoor classroom? Ann Carlson has prepared seasonal suggestion sheets on using the IPP in this manner. For further information and assistance, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Mrs. Ann Carlson, 1105 Modaff Street, Naperville, Il. - 60540. (Tel. 399-9210)

PATH SURVEY

Gene McArdle has completed a report on the surveys of Path usage taken this past summer. A summary shows that the Path is used by people from 64 Illinois communities. The greatest usage was by bicyclists, but it was also popular for hiking, jogging, picnicking, scouting and educational activities. Almost 5000 persons were counted during 75 (non-consecutive) hours of survey time; of this number 700 filled out our questionnaire. Our thanks to all the volunteers who assisted in this valuable project.

CONSTRUCTION STOPPED ON ROCK ISLAND BIKE TRAIL

Sen. Bloom and Rep. Mudd of Peoria introduced legislation to cut \$300,000 from the Illinois Department of Conservation's budget, to prevent completion of the Rock Island Trail. This 27.5 mile section of an abandoned line of the Rock Island Railroad, between Alta and Toulon in Peoria County, was being developed by the State. Highly vocal protest from 20 land owners along the right-of-way convinced the State legislature that this work must stop. However, conversion of rails to trails is "a natural", and many of us realize that abandoned rights-of-way are among the few resources available to conserve open space, recreational land and wildlife cover. To express your own views on this matter, write to your representative or senator at: State House, Springfield, Il. - 62706.

RETURNABLE BOTTLE BILL

House Bill 1838 will require a deposit on all bottles to insure their return. This bill is needed to cut down on the volume of trash, to conserve energy in the manufacture of new containers, and to reduce the drain on non-renewable natural resources.

Because one of our biggest and most persistent problems on the Path is discarded junk, the Board of Directors of the Illinois Prairie Path has passed a resolution to support HB1838. If you agree with us, you may write (before Feb. 11) to: House Environment Committee, State Capitol Bldg., Springfield, Il. - 62701.

PATH TO BE FEATURED AT "OIKOS"

On April 3rd, the Morton Arboretum will again sponsor the OIKOS Conference. The theme this year will be "Reading the Landscape: a Tribute to May Theilgaard Watts." We are proud to report that participating in the program will be Path Secretary Eugene Lewis (Prairie Path as realization of Mrs. Watts' "dream"), and our former Vice-President, Helen Turner (Mrs. Watts as teacher and naturalist). For details of this event, please call the Arboretum -- 968-0074.

PROJECTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

-: Cheers! for our President, Paul Mooring, who engineered the steps now in place over the C&NW Railroad tracks just west of Prince Crossing Road. Built by volunteers (including the Moorings), the steps are a splendid improvement at this formerly difficult crossing.

-: Future improvements placed on a priority list by the Board of Directors include completion of surfacing and grading of certain areas of the path, installation of automobile barriers, and construction of a bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River at Warrenville.

-: Annual dues and donations are still our only sources of income. We are deeply grateful to the municipalities along the right-of-way which have allocated sizeable amounts of money to maintain the Path within their city limits. However, our annual expenses must cover surface maintenance elsewhere, signs, patches, printing and postage, insurance and (small) headquarters overhead.

To meet these growing expenses, will you help us to attract new members to our Path organization by passing along the enclosed card to a friend? Thank you.

WARNING! SNOWMOBILES ON THE LOOSE

Today (Jan. 23) as we go to press, the CHICAGO TRIBUNE features a photograph of two monster snowmobiles blasting their way - "with throaty whine" - down our Prairie Path. They are in violation of Path regulation: "NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES." This rule is supported by statute in DuPage County and by specific provision in the State lease with Kane County.

Snowmobiles are illegal on the Path. They endanger every Path hiker, rider and cross-country skier.

We have worked hard for 12 years to provide for the public a recreational area free from the danger and noise of cars, motorcycles and (now) snowmobiles.

Will you spread the word that the TRIBUNE picture was not an invitation? Any snowmobile seen on the Path will be reported to the Sheriff's Police.

Board of Directors
Illinois Prairie Path