



Blue Jay

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

Summer 1994

## *What to look for . . . Bluebirds.*

Bluebirds have been sighted this year not far from the Illinois Prairie Path in the savanna areas of the Lincoln Marsh in Wheaton. They are also seen where meadow meets forest in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve near Wayne.

Called the "blue robin" by some, the eastern bluebird is a thrush like the robin with a brighter orangy-red breast. Where the robin is mostly brownish-gray, the male bluebird's head, back, wings and tail are a true sky-blue and his belly is white; the female is similar but paler. This beautiful songbird's habitat is farmlands, orchards and open woodlands where it can find cavities fairly close to the ground to nest in. The bluebird is sometimes confused with the indigo bunting, which is smaller and a more metallic all-over shade of blue, with no hint of white or red, and likes a similar habitat of brushy pastures and woodland edges.

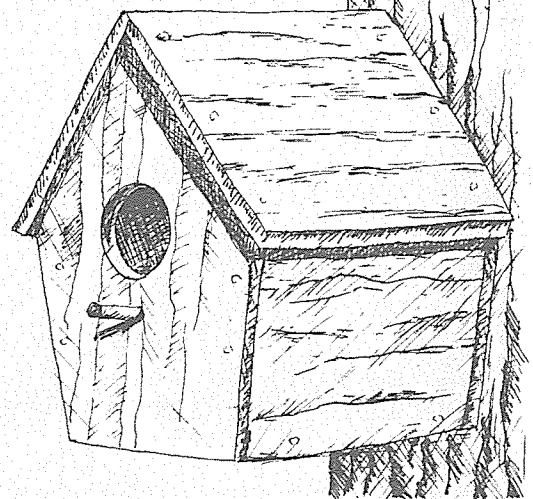
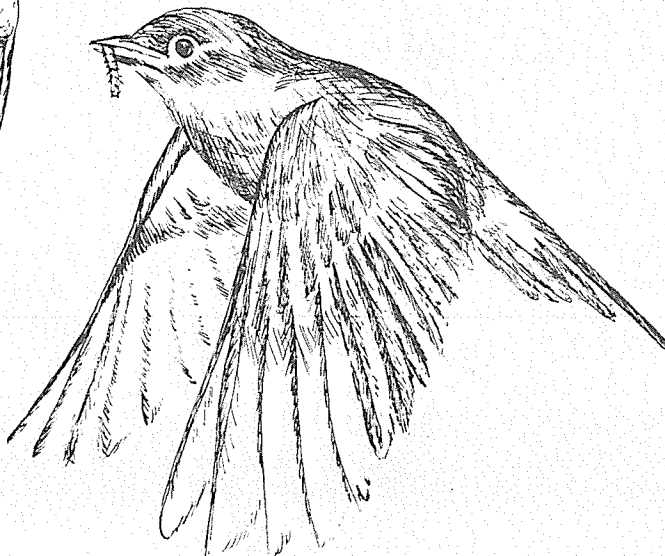
Although DuPage County's bluebirds have been in decline for many years due to destruction of habitat and increasing competition for nesting cavities from alien invaders like house sparrows and starlings, the gentle songsters today seem to be making a comeback. Bluebird houses built by members of the DuPage Audubon Society and other environmental groups have been installed along the Illinois Prairie Path, in the Morton Arboretum, and in several forest preserves. These houses are helping to replace the cavities in fence posts and in dead or low-growing trees that once were homes for bluebirds.

As a result more of the birds are now being seen. Many more houses are still needed, however, to restore the bluebird to its pre-settlement numbers.

Happiness is catching a glimpse of a feathery bit of blue sky flitting through the trees along the Prairie Path. Keep your eyes open!



Indigo  
Bunting



Bluebirds

# REPORTS ON SPRING CLEANUPS

In January The Illinois Prairie Path board of directors decided to coordinate the annual cleanup with the various municipalities along the Path, most of which have accepted responsibility for keeping clean the Path and its right-of-way within their corporate boundaries. We decided, therefore, to ask the villages to choose the dates for their individual cleanups, preferably around April 22, the official Earth Day.

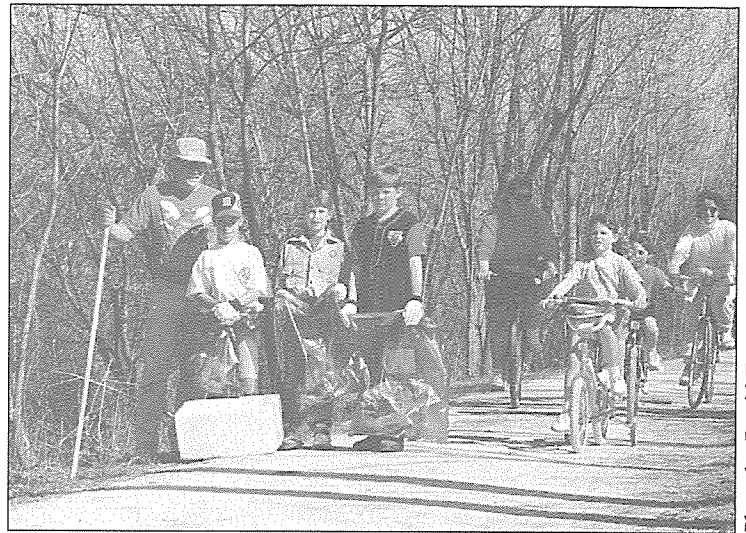
The reason for a mid-April cleanup date is that the leaves are not fully out until the first week in May and thus the winter's accumulation of trash is still highly visible.

Glen Ellyn and Warrenville chose April 16, a clear, cool, breezy day. Jean Mooring reports that the Glen Ellyn Public Works Department provided two employees plus a six-wheeler truck and a front-end loader to help the volunteers, more than twenty of whom from senior citizens to toddlers, turned out. Joe Carlton, Jim Wear and Jean headed west from Prairie Path Park toward the Wheaton city limits in Jean's car followed by the village truck. In less than two hours the three volunteers and two



*Standing in front of Glen Ellyn village truck overflowing with IPP debris are Joe Rein, Eric Hendrickson, Jean Mooring (with insulator top) and Jim Wear. Photo by Joe Carlton.*

village employees filled up the truck once and got a good start on a second load. Items picked up included waterlogged railroad tie ends, broken concrete, logs, sections of Com Ed utility poles, lumber scraps, bricks, brush, and a twelve-foot-long piece of steel guard rail. One treasure was found: the rusty square iron top section of an authentic 3-piece C.A. & E.R.R. Co. electric insulator with the inscription still legible after more than thirty years. Meanwhile the other volunteers, including a group of energetic Cub Scouts from Pack 141, Den 11, fanned out in both directions from the park and picked up



*Photo by David Tate*

*Wheaton Boy Scout Troop 2258 worked on IPP Elgin Branch cleanup. From left: Greg Ridge, Ben Uvodich, Bryan Routenberg and Derek Ridge.*

cans, bottles, food wrappers, broken glass and every scrap of litter in sight west to the Mayflower Storage and east as far as Hill Avenue. Their reward was discovering the skull of a small animal, possibly a raccoon or possum, which may by now have found its way to a school science class. "Our best cleanup ever," said Jean.

Warrenville's cleanup went well too, according to IPP board member Bob Rawls. Volunteers included the Ku-Du 4H Club, the Walker family, Rev. Dale Williams of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kari Jansen, and the Rawls family — eighteen in all. They cleaned the Aurora Branch from Winfield Road to Rte. 59, filled about twenty 30-gallon garbage bags, and collected an assortment of bigger junk, including sections of a pool table, pieces of sheet metal, and some sports car wheels. Bob says he is putting together a second group to cover the IPP west from Rte. 59 to the Kane County line, "Phase II" of the cleanup. Call him at 393-6720.

Earth Day weekend provided more nice weather for two more cleanups. Joan Hamill reports that members of the Wayne-DuPage Hunt joined Girl Scouts from Wayne, fourteen volunteers in all, and covered the IPP Elgin Branch from North Avenue to Dunham Road. They took home with them the trash collected and disposed of it with their household garbage. "The Path always looks pretty clean in the Wayne area," said Joan.

David Tate, our new board member from Winfield, organized the Earth Day cleanup on the entire five-mile section of the Elgin Branch between Jewell Road and Rte. 59. That section looks fine, he reports, with one deplorable exception: the area of the path behind the Oliver Square Shopping Center. This center is located in the City of West Chicago at the intersection of North Avenue and Rte. 59. On behalf of The IPP board of directors David writes,

"This relatively small area of the Path continues to be the most litter-plagued section along the entire 55-mile trail. We want our 1200 members and more than 300,000 annual users to know that our board of directors considers this situation unacceptable. We will continue to make phone calls, take pictures, and write letters not only to those responsible for containing this wind-blown trash but also to those responsible for the enforcement of local ordinances. As a result of our requests the shopping center's manager, Mid-America Asset Management, Inc., coordinated a cleanup of this area on March 31, 1994. Unfortunately this cleanup proved to be only a quick fix to a long-term problem. Due to the winds which naturally funnel through this shopping center around the unprotected dumpsters, within days after the March 31st cleanup, the Path was again trashed by Kmart coupon flyers, Dominick's grocery bags, McDonald's wrappers, etc. We believe that the long-term solution to this wind-blown trash problem at the Oliver Square Shopping Center is chain link cages around and over the dumpsters and an eight-foot chain link fence at the property line. We also think it is time to ask the State's Attorney to enforce the law."

And then on April 30 the rains came! This date was chosen for the cleanup in Wheaton but it was such a cold, drizzly miserable day that only a few hardy souls showed up. "A lot of doughnuts were wasted," sighed Ray

Photo by David Tate



*Litter carpets ground behind Oliver Square Shopping Center.*

Holdsworth of the Wheaton Environmental Improvement Commission. However, there were some bright points of light amid the gloom: A group of five individuals cleaned from Hill Avenue, Wheaton, east to Glen Ellyn and picked up much Com Ed debris including cable and spools from a recent pole replacement project; members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church turned out and worked hard on the section between Washington and the prairie remnant at President Street; Cub Scout Pack

317 cleaned from Lincoln to Jewell through the Lincoln Marsh for the third year; and Mrs. Sue Soojas Nehrlich, a biology teacher at Hubble Middle School, had about seven students working from Roosevelt to Orchard for the fourth year (They got ten points' credit toward their biology grade!) Girl Scout troops expressed interest in working at a later date. "All in all the Path in Wheaton generally looks good," concluded Ray.

In Lombard, according to Dick Wilson, 200 people turned out on April 30 in spite of the bad weather for "Take Pride in Lombard Day", including lots of Cub Scouts and Brownies. They cleaned up the Prairie Path and other park areas around the village.

There were spring cleanups on other sections of the Path but no details available at press time. Volunteer mini-cleanups continue throughout the year because on the Illinois Prairie Path every day is Earth Day.

## SURPRISING NEWS FROM NAPERVILLE

On March 23, 1994 a Warranty Deed was recorded in which the Grantor, the May Theilgaard Watts Society, an Illinois not-for-profit corporation, conveyed to Christopher and Karen Marposon of Glastonbury, Connecticut the May T. Watts house and land at 227 East Jefferson, Naperville. A Declaration of Restrictions was also recorded, which requires that the property shall be used only for a private dwelling house, that it shall not be re-subdivided into more than one building lot, and that additions or alterations are not precluded as long as they preserve and maintain the current architectural style of the house and garage, called "improvements" and use materials similar in appearance and function unless excessively damaged by fire, or until the May Watts Society is dissolved, or until the expiration of 50 years from the date when the Declaration was recorded. The profit realized from the sale is being held in trust by the May Watts Society as a scholarship fund in memory of Mrs. Watts.

The many friends and admirers of May Watts, founder of the Illinois Prairie Path, are disappointed by this unexpected sale. We believed that the very successful Garden Walk last year indicated great support for the restoration of the May Watts property among the citizens of Naperville and the surrounding communities. However, the board of directors of the May Watts Society apparently decided it no longer wanted to shoulder responsibility for developing the property as a natural history museum and teaching center; hence, the sale.

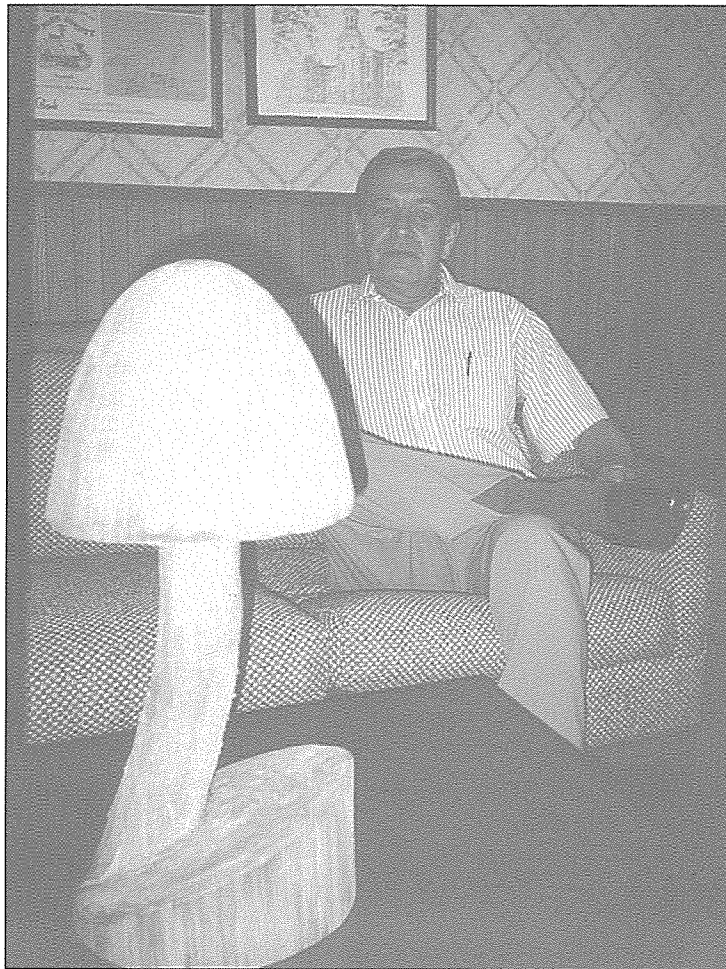
We understand that the new owners are interested in preserving this historic home, and we hope that they will wish to restore the garden as well. Certainly a wealth of material about Mrs. Watts and her house and garden is available to them in the May Watts archives at the Morton Arboretum.

# MUSHROOM MYSTERY SOLVED!

Identified at last, the Prairie Path chainsaw sculptor turns out to be not one but two talented artists: Steve Lee of Wheaton and Gene Schug of West Chicago. Serendipity and a little detective work by Jean "Sleuth" Mooring have finally cracked the case.

The story began about 1989 when the first charming wood mushrooms carved from tree stumps sprouted along the Illinois Prairie Path Elgin Branch in the Northwoods area. They gladdened Path users' hearts for several months until they disappeared suddenly. Mushroom poachers were suspected but never apprehended. No one knew (or would admit) who the sculptor was either although this information was requested in two IPP *Newsletters* for Summer, 1992, and Fall, 1993. Meanwhile the lovable fungi continued to appear, and then disappear, sporadically along the Path as the mystery deepened. Some observers did note, however, that the sculptures seemed to show up every time the DuPage County tree-pruning crew had finished its work, the latest one having materialized this April on the IPP Geneva Spur.

The breakthrough finally came on May 2 when Jean went to the office of Joe Knippen, director of the Wheaton Public Works Department, to discuss the proposed re-routing of the Prairie Path north of the old county courthouse (now National-Louis University). There on the coffee table was a beautiful wooden mushroom sculpture. Sensing a glimmer of light at last,



*The final clue: Lee sculpture with owner Joe Knippen.*

Jean remarked casually, "That looks like one of our Prairie Path mushrooms." "Actually", replied the director with a knowing smile, "It was made for me by the brother of one of our public works employees. He works for the county highway maintenance crew and his name is Steve Lee." As the truth shone bright and clear, Jean laughed and said, "I guess we've found our shy sculptor. Now we can close this case."

The story does not end there. Steve, when interviewed, credited his friend and co-worker Gene with making about half of the IPP mushrooms and emphasized that they do their chainsaw carving strictly on their own time, generally during their lunch hour because it takes just a few minutes to make a mushroom. They haven't

made very many lately because mushroom fans keep taking them. They and the rest of the crew enjoy working on the Prairie Path and keeping it looking good.

Editor's Note: The members and friends of The Illinois Prairie Path appreciate the work done by all the county maintenance crew members over the years. This includes Gene Noffsinger, Heavy Equipment Crew Leader, who did the first IPP surfacing project for the county about twenty-five years ago, and Jim Galto, Maintenance Manager, who first worked on the Path for the Glen Ellyn Public Works Department in the early '70s. Our thanks to all!

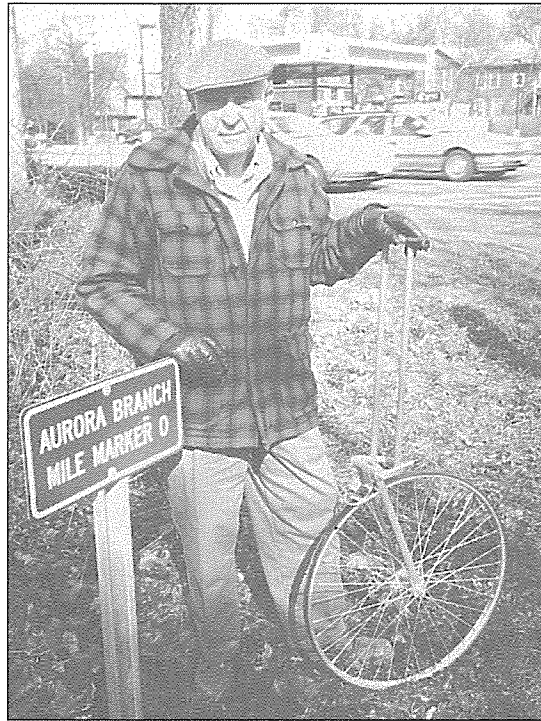
A final note: Mushrooms can be made to order from your own materials. Call Steve at 668-4904.



# MILE MARKER MIXUP

Users of the IPP Aurora Branch are confused. Where does the Aurora Branch begin? How long is it? Why don't the shiny new metal mile markers correspond to the measurements on our standard IPP map?

People started asking these questions last fall when a Boy Scout troop, reportedly advised by a staff member at the DuPage County Division of Transportation, installed the brown-and-white signs starting with the zero marker just south of Roosevelt Road. Apparently nobody told the boys that there already was a zero mile marker where the three branches of the right-of-way meet two blocks north at Volunteer Park. This is the site of the old Wheaton Yards, the historical center of the former Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway since the turn of the century and of the



*Paul Mooring with questionable "Aurora Branch Mile Marker 0" 2,093 feet south of center of Illinois Prairie Path.*

present-day Illinois Prairie Path since the path began in 1963.

No one at the county thought to consult with The Illinois Prairie Path before this totally avoidable error was made. No one on our board of directors knows why it was done either although one member's guess is that perhaps a group of joggers wanted to set up a marked jogging trail and persuaded the county that it would be convenient for them not to have to cross Roosevelt. Whatever the reason, the two-block section of the Aurora Branch north of Roosevelt on the west side of Carlton is now in limbo. Our expensive new full-color IPP map which is about to be printed will seem to be obsolete as soon as it comes off the presses unless the mile markers are placed to conform with reality. The IPP board hopes

for a satisfactory resolution of this matter soon.

## QUICK UPDATES FROM ALL OVER

**...Warrenville.** Connie Schmidt says the fundraiser for the power line fight was very successful and netted \$6,000. Additional donations are still needed to pay legal fees and may be sent to: Friends of the Prairie Path Legal Fund, P.O. Box 4413, Wheaton, IL 60189-4413. The Illinois Commerce Commission hearings are scheduled to begin again in August.

**...Villa Park.** Joe Schrantz reports the Carnival will not be held on the Prairie Path this year because the Illinois Pollution Control Board has not ruled yet on the noise issue and there is no time for the sponsors to contract with the Carnival operators. The residents seek a cease-and-desist order to enforce state noise pollution laws.

**...Winfield.** The DuPage County DOT maintenance crew has cleared a passage on the IPP Geneva Spur to allow truck access for construction of the proposed bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River.

**...West Chicago.** The Illinois Department of Transportation has resumed work on the IPP bridge over Rte. 59 on the Elgin Branch. Construction is proceeding on the re-routing of Diversey Parkway and Wiant Road.



*Photo by David Tate*



*Photo by David Tate*

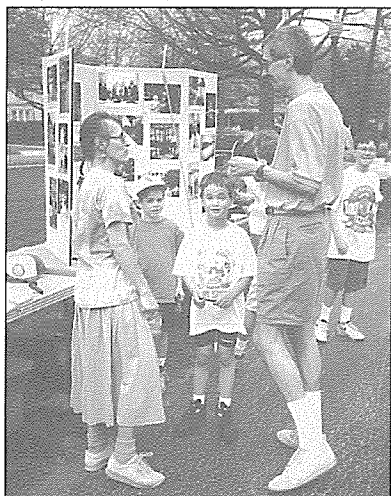
▲  
*With chainsaw and chipper, county highway maintenance crew opens up trail on IPP Geneva Spur.*

◀ *Using Gradall, county highway maintenance crew surfaces trail over new drain pipe at street crossing on IPP Geneva Spur.*

## Quick Updates (continued from page 5)

...**Elmhurst.** Steve Plumb reports that a consortium of fourteen land-owning agencies, such as municipalities, park districts and forest preserve districts, is applying for more than \$5 million in ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) and CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) funding for engineering and/or construction of a bike trail along Salt Creek, which will eventually run south from Busse Woods near Elk Grove Village across the Illinois Prairie Path and on to the Chicago Portage National Historic Site, the Centennial Trail, and the Illinois-Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.

...**Wheaton.** David Tate is leading a membership drive emphasizing the need for volunteers to help with Path work projects on a regular basis.



IPP tabletop display makes debut at Wheaton Eco-Fair. Vice President Susan Wisniewski of Bellwood answers questions.

### ...Glen Ellyn.

To promote our public relations Paul and Jean Mooring have created a new travelling tabletop photographic display, which they have shown at the Glen Ellyn Junior High and Arbor Day/Earth Day Celebration and also at the Wheaton Eco-Fair. They have presented the Prairie Path slide show this year to Daisy Garden Club of Glen Ellyn and to the Villa Park Rotary Club.

## SUMMER ACTIVITIES – rain or shine

### ■ Saturday, June 4

National Trails Day. **Ten Mile Hike on the Illinois Prairie Path**, (Spring Newsletter).

**Information Booth** at Volunteer Park to fill out user surveys, distribute membership applications, and sell IPP maps, T-shirts, hats, badges, etc. 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Other booths are planned during the summer. Volunteers are needed to help. Call David Tate, 682-1449.

### ■ Saturday, June 25

**Forty Mile Loop Bike Ride** on Illinois Prairie Path and Fox River Trail. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Volunteer Park, Wheaton. Lunch stop will be at McDonald's. Bring a lock and please wear a helmet! Leader: Nancy Hesler, 293-1062.

### ■ Saturdays, June 18, July 16, August 20

**Work Days.** Information: Dick Wilson, 299-7882 (8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) and Paul Mooring, 469-4289.

### ■ Sunday, June 19

West Chicago Prairie.

**Birding Trip**, 6:00 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.

Summer residents. Should See Yellow-breasted Chat and Sedge Wren.

**Field Trip**, 9:00 a.m. to Noon. Good displays of Spiderwort, Spiked Lobelia, Blackeyed Susan, Wild White Indigo, Wild Rose, Marsh Phlox and Purple Coneflower. Call Mel Hoff, 393-4715.

### – Jean C. Mooring, Editor –

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