

Conservation Corner

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The gifts have been opened – another Christmas has come and gone. As 2018 comes to a close, let's recap the many gifts of nature we have encountered during the year.

We'll begin with our encounters with the plant world. We started off the year with another look at our threatened ash trees as well as apricot, birch, catalpa, and maple trees before ending with the small, Mid-Eastern frankincense and myrrh trees. We also looked at some simple mosses; two brambles, red and black raspberries; one bush, the burning bush; a spring wildflower, Hepatica; a fall wildflower, goldenrods; and a wild edible, common purslane, for good measure. In the aftermath of several late spring snowstorms, we learned about phenology, planting by nature's signs, not the calendar.

Our encounters with the animal world have covered a wide range of invertebrates and vertebrates. The invertebrates included the following: six insects, monarch and swallowtail butterflies, giant water bugs, ladybugs, hummingbird moths, and rattlesnake master borers; one crustacean, long-tailed shrimp; and one annelid, freshwater leeches. We also encountered the five classes of vertebrate animals: four mammals, the American bison, beavers, 13-lined ground squirrels, and gray fox; four birds, snowy owls, American redstarts, eastern screech owls, and great egrets; one fish, the eels; one reptile, the smooth green snake; and one amphibian, the northern leopard frog.

Through the year we also encountered one holiday, Valentine's Day, and took day trips to the Sanford Museum in Cherokee, the Prairie Pedlar near Odebolt, Kalsow Prairie, and the Fall IAN Workshop in Blackhawk County. We traveled back in time to uncover the bison geoglyphs in the Loess Hills and traveled into space with the Parker solar probe. We learned more about moth collecting, the physics behind the flight of dandelion seeds, and the devastating effects of single-use plastics on our environment. We also encountered several events: The Master Gardeners Garden Extravaganza in April, Wiegert School Days and Outdoor Classroom in May, Jr. Naturalist Camp in July, Wiegert Prairie Fall Fest in August, and Halloween Hike in October. We closed the year with wheat weaving and straw tying at the Pocahontas Art Walk in November and the Wreath Workshop and gifts of the wisemen, music, and light in December.

Now it's time for New Year's resolutions. One of my resolutions for 2013 was to write a weekly column for PCCB. Now, as I start to wind down towards retirement this summer, I am wrapping up my last weekly article. I'd like to thank everyone for their ideas, photos, and feedback. Most of all, I'd like to thank everyone for joining us each week as we discover and explore nature. Several years ago, my neighbor told me she read the column each week and was learning so many new things. I thanked her, looked her in the eye, and replied, "Me, too."

I'll close Conservation Corner with these timely words from T.S. Eliot. "For last year's words belong to last year's language, and next year's words await another voice."

