Engage, Educate, Enrich

The Nature Institute's 2015 Year In Review

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

I would like to personally thank our wonderful community for making 2015 a fantastic year for The Nature Institute! In spite of difficult economic times, we were fortunate to have so many amazing and dedicated volunteers, and partnered with some great neighboring businesses to host new programs and events and complete some much needed projects. You have probably seen mention of them in the newspaper or on our website, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

In the past year, we added several new programs including our first annual Ice Cream Social, Trivia Night, Living History Program, Maple Syrup Taping Program, Winter Tree ID and Pruning Workshop, Wreath Making Workshop, and added a Youth and Adult Nature Club. We could not have accomplished all of these amazing things if it were not for our generous community. We are so grateful for all of you! I would like to extend a special "Thank you" to Shivers, Old Bakery Beer Company, Alton History Museum, Maeva's and La Vista, CSA for their continued support and generosity. In the coming



year we are looking forward to many more opportunities to participate with our local businesses to raise the awareness of our natural surroundings.

Now let's talk improvements we have made around here. In the summer of 2015, we completed our new Talahi Lodge play area, added a new boy's restroom, completed the patio on the old skeet range, and put a new roof on the Mississippi Sanctuary office building. In addition, we were blessed by the hard work and dedication of volunteers who worked tirelessly at Heartland Prairie, tore down our dilapidated old barn, put a new roof on our apiary building, and got our new greenhouse up and running.

We have many new opportunities on our horizon and we are looking to you to help us. "How can I help?" you may ask. Well let me tell you. As I mentioned in the 2014 Year in Review, we would still like to update our Talahi Lodge with a new roof, build a centralized maintenance shed, purchase a new tractor, and purchase a multi passenger vehicle to allow the elderly and disabled to be able to enjoy our beautiful trails and scenic river views. All of these projects take time and money. We are always thankful for volunteers and donations.

I am amazed at the passion and fondness our friends have for The Nature Institute. Everywhere I go I hear about how people in the community have such affection for TNI. All generations alike love to come here to learn, hike, enjoy the scenery, and get inspired with our many programs and events. We love to have you visit. You are welcome anytime!

As we continue in 2016, my immediate goals are to develop new sources of funding for The Nature Institute, encourage creative educational programming, continue to build better partnerships in the community, and preserve and restore our natural surroundings. I encourage and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

I hope this report will give you an in-depth look into what we are doing here. I am fortunate to be joined by a fabulous team and an inspiring community. Together we can get to know each other and explore challenges that can make a difference. We invite you to become an active member of The Nature Institute. Please give generously to help us with our mission. We want to make our community a better place for everyone. In closing, I am encouraged by a quote from one of my heroes, *"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" – Helen Keller.*

Angela Moan, Executive Director



The Nature Institute works to foster an awareness and appreciation of the natural world through preservation, restoration, and education.

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We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their hard work throughout the year. Special gratitude is given to these previous volunteer directors for assisting in 2015: Mike Siemer and Sue Weber.

*Board of Directors and Staff lists are current as of June 2016

On the cover: Photo provided by Christie Kegg, Shiloh, IL White tailed deer at Heartland Prairie, located on the North side of Gordon Moore Park in Alton, IL. The 60 acre Heartland Prairie, owned by the City of Alton, is managed and maintained by TNI staff and a group of dedicated volunteers.

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ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

ONE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION EVENT AT A TIME by Patricia Brown

2015 was a big year for education at The Nature Institute. We tried out some new programs and added to the old favorites. We saw nearly 2000 kids and over 900 adults attend our programs and learn about nature and how they can positively impact it. Some of the highlights include adding more educational elements to the Enchanted Forest, trying a living history program, and starting some new adult programming.

Enchanted Forest is one of the staples of TNI programming. Families come out to enjoy the forest at night on a short hike while learning about nocturnal animals. This year we added an activity that demonstrated eye shine in nocturnal animals. Children went into a tent and shined a flashlight on some "animals". The animals, nothing more than stuffed ones, had reflective eyes that are similar to what color their eyes would be in real life. The kids loved looking for animals in the dark. We also added another day to Enchanted forest which we themed for older children and families. Saturday night was Evil Forest and participants were allowed to roam a specified area on their own. The area was filled with volunteers dressed in costumes and tons of scary props. Both nights were a big success for us and as always, a lot of fun.

In November, we piloted a new program Living History: A Walk through Time. The purpose of this program was to teach people about the history of the Godfrey/Alton area. We had volunteers and experts come out and teach about specific time periods while in costume in 1st person narratives. The plan was for participants to walk the trails and "come upon" these characters and interact with them but unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate this year. If you remember, November 21st was FREEZING and guite the winter wonderland. So we modified our original plan and had the characters take turns sharing their information to the audience in the lodge. Some of our participants included Brian Fox Ellis teaching about John James Audubon and Prince Maximillian, Brad and Elizabeth from Lewis and Clark State Historic Site, Larry Reid shared his knowledge of John Olin, Steve Bollini came out dressed as a fur trader, Jim and John Hall and Vern LeClaire shared about the beginnings of The Nature Institute and the Alton Museum of Art and History joined us with displays of artifacts and old pictures. Ramona and myself became characters as well. Ramona shared about the Underground Railroad and how local families took part and Patti became Aune Nelson, our Discovery Day Camp benefactor. Despite the

(Top) Scene from the 2016 Riverbend Earth Day Festival. Over 65 vendors were present, including local environmental education organizations and artisans.
 (Bottom left) Serengeti Steve made an appearance for the second year in a row to show some critters to the crowd.
 (Bottom right) Eddie Agah, TNI Astronomy Association guide, gives guests a safe glimpse of the sun above.









Discovery Day Campers learned in their outdoor education classroom. Each year, TNI sees campers ranging in age from pre-k through high school.

THE BEES ARE ALIVE!

Jim Cranmer has been working diligently for two years helping to reestablish our bee hives. In 2014/2015, the bees were diagnosed with European Foulbrood. It is a bacterial disease that effects honey bee larvae before the capped stage. The causative bacteria, Melissococcus plutonius, is ingested by honey bee larvae after which the bacterium competes for food inside the larvae. If the bacteria out-competes the larva, the larva will die before the cell is capped.

Jim treated the hives for this and wax worm infestation. As the year went on, the bees responded favorably. We hope to have a nice colony in 2016. If this works out, we may have our first harvest of local TNI honey late 2016.

GREENHOUSE GANG

In November of 2015, Scouts from Pack 3073 learned how to stratify native prairie plant seeds. "To stratify" is to place the seeds in different soil mediums with different moisture levels and place in a refrigerator for certain amount of time to simulate winter. Gene Sands, friend of TNI, collected over 20 different species of seed from Heartland Prairie. In the winter of 2016, the seeds will be planted in the greenhouse for growing and selling at a later date.

weather, this program was a success and we plan to have it again next year. Look for it in September. Maybe the weather will cooperate more with us.

The last set of programs I want to highlight are aimed at adults that want to get close to nature. We began an Adult Nature Club in September and invited everyone to come out on the last Monday of each month to learn and discuss sustainability. Some of the speakers we have seen include, Crystal Stevens from LaVista Community Supported Agriculture Farm, Virginia Woulfe-Beile from the Piasa Palisades Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Courtney Solum from Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge as well as many more. They all talked about their organization, how it effects the natural world, and what sustainability looks like in their resource.

Another fun program we had was a native wreath workshop. Angela Puskar, a floral designer, came out and helped a group decorate a live evergreen wreath to hang for their holiday celebrations. This program was very well received and everyone looks forward to doing it again next year. Who knows, maybe we can get crafty with nature every season.

These new programs are great, but don't worry the oldies are still the goodies. Some old favorites that were held included; Breakfast with the Easter Bunny, Owl Prowl, Foraging for Fungi, Songs of Frogs and Toads, and many others. We are always adding new programs, working with new experts, and learning right along with you. We look forward to 2016 being great and taking the education at TNI forward.

ASTRONOMY REPORT

by Eddie Agha, TNI Astronomy Assoc. guide

The Nature Institute Astronomy Association (TNIAA) is a club created to foster an interest in astronomy and the sciences in general. We meet once a month (third Thursday) and talk about what has been happening in the world of astronomy and other sciences. After this, weather being conducive, we go out to the Skeet Range and actually view constellations, galaxies, specific star pairs, the planets, and our nearest satellite, the moon. These meetings are free and open to the public. However, guests can pay \$5, which allows them to also become members of the Astronomical League, the parent organization of all astronomy clubs in the United States.

Meeting attendees include all ages ranging from 6 years old to their great grandparents. Average monthly attendance is around 12 members. Aside from these monthly meetings, we are also involved in several outreach events throughout the year. We reached a total of 608 additional people through these extra programs.

In addition, we started the Library Loaner Scope Program and entered into a mutually beneficial partnership with The Hayner Public Library District. We placed 5 telescopes at Hayner, 3 of these were from private donations. The Library Scope Loaner Program has exceeded expectations with a consistent backlog of around 6 people (that's 6 people waiting to check out a scope because all of them are checked out!) at each of the two locations. We have performed two outreach events with Hayner Library where TNI was represented. The numbers from these two events are NOT included in the totals above.

2015 was an exciting year for astronomy! We discovered a minor planet, viewed a new supernova, started the Library Loaner Program in Alton, viewed TWO lunar eclipses, launched the Citizen Funded Light Sail Project, the New Horizons Spacecraft reached Pluto and established an orbit (The data is incredible!), satellite Philae landed on comet Cherri-Jeri, we held the first International SUNday event and Cassini spacecraft made some new and interesting discoveries about Saturn's rings and found water on Enceladus, one of Saturn's moons! And that's just the short list!

(Right) 2016 Discovery Day Campers safely viewing the sun with the help of Astronomy Association Guide, Eddie Agha.



2,757 field trip students at The Nature Institute



ENRICHING OUR SOIL

PRESERVING LAND, ACRE BY ACRE

by Timothy Schofield

Wow! This past year went by really quick! The start of 2015 seems like only yesterday! The Stewardship Crew, Scott Logan and Amanda Carter, has been extremely busy this past year.

TNI's big stewardship push was the completion of a Federal WHIP grant. The grant was first received in 2009. The many projects of the grant included prescribed fire, planting of prairie, forest stand enhancement, and invasive control. The last prescribed burns were conducted in the fall of 2015 and the crew finished invasive control in December of 2015. The final areas of work were the two eastern parts of the Olin Nature Preserve. The best example of this work can be seen on both sides of the trail to Beaver Falls. The invasive reduction has opened up the forest floor to sunlight. These openings allow native plants to reestablish themselves instead of bush honeysuckle. Spice bush, paw paws, and spring ephemerals are just a few of the native plants that take advantage of the invasive removal. The native oak-hickory forest reproduction was the biggest benefactor of the prescribed burns. We are seeing many hickory and oak saplings in places that have been devoid of regeneration for over the last few decades.

Many of our regular hikers have noticed the prairie plantings from the previous year at the Mississippi Sanctuary and Cypress Pond area. In 2016, we should reap the benefits of our mowing and controlling of weeds in these three areas. We have spent countless hours weeding, pulling, and cutting down the invasive plants within these spots and, although the musk thistle is pretty, it doesn't belong in an IL native prairie. One benefit of the prairie plantings at Cypress pond is the filtering and slowing down of rainwater runoff. The prairie is an excellent erosion control method that helps keep the silt out of the pond, and also filter the pesticides, oil, and other chemicals from getting into the pond.

With the increase in rainfall and severe storms, the crew have been very busy cleaning up our trails and damaged areas. The number of large trees falling has increased over the last two years. Due to our properties' preserve status, we can only completely clear what has obstructed the trails. Three experienced chainsaw hands, a tractor, and a chain can have our trails cleaned up in no time at all.

The Nature Institute has increasingly become the place to come and get information about stewardship. In 2015, we have been asked to help and advise landowners from Jacksonville, IL to Waterloo, IL. Even some business owners here in town have been looking into planting native flowers to help the honey bee and monarch population. TNI also had a native lover from Colorado seek advice. The questions can vary every day: "What type of snake is this?" "Is it poisonous?" (*No, it's not poisonous, but it is venomous!*) "What tree is this?" "Is this poison ivy?" (*It is Virginia creeper. I guess you are lucky it wasn't poison ivy!*) Any questions from serious landowners are wonderful, but how to plant a prairie, types of plants to use in their landscaping, and/or what the process entails is what our stewardship department knows best.

The crew accomplishes many tasks in a year. A few of these are: trash pickup along trails, Levis Lane, and the River Road. We also updated various signage around TNI property, constructed and repaired projects, mowed, worked on restoration projects, and conducted other plantings. All of these miscellaneous tasks may not sound glamourous, but they save our organization time and resources. It's all about getting back to the basics. So, as with all previous years, we move on to the next year. One that will bring us more ideas and more excitement.

(Left) Photo capturing the first fall of Olin Nature Preserve's Beaver Falls. Find it by traveling the green trail. (Below) Irises that were planted by the late Aune Nelson behind what it now the TNI office building in the Mississippi Sanctuary. These flowers aren't native to IL, but the spirit of Aune lives on.





(Above) Common water snake at Cypress Pond. Photo by Ramona Puskar

As the weather gets warmer, I am seeing more pictures of snakes on my Facebook newsfeed. Many of the comments following those pictures include sentences like, "the only good snake is a dead snake" and, "kill it!" or something to that effect. I understand that snakes are not the most well liked creatures and everyone has their own reason for disliking them, but most of the time it is our own ignorance that creates fear of animals, especially snakes. This post will hopefully help to dispel some of the fear by lending some information about snakes and giving us an understanding of their place in the world.

Let's first discuss venomous snakes. There are only four species of snakes that use venom to subdue their prey in Illinois. They include the copperhead, timber rattlesnake, massasauga rattlesnake, and cottonmouth. Three of those species have been vouchered after 1980 by the Illinois Natural History Survey in Madison County. The cottonmouth is only found in extreme southern Illinois. These snakes for the most part are rarely seen and definitely are not "out to get you." The massasauga is endangered, the timber rattlesnake is threatened and the copperhead faces decline from habitat destruction. Copperheads are most abundant but rarely seen.

The rest of the snakes in Illinois are non-venomous. They can and will bite, but as long as you are smart and give them their deserved space, you have nothing to fear. All snakes are carnivores. They eat only meat and are great at controlling the population of rodents. If you think about it snakes have some of the most amazing abilities. Imagine trying to eat a hamburger and not having hands or even arms to get it into your mouth. Snakes are able to kill and swallow whole prey without the help of claws, arms, legs or feet. AMAZING!!! They are ambush predators. Snakes sit in wait for an animal to get close enough to quickly strike and subdue. Most of our snakes are constrictors. They hold their prey in their mouth, then wrap the rest of their body around the animal and squeeze until it suffocates. This is a dangerous way of hunting because most animals they hunt have sharp claws, beaks or teeth. Many snakes get scratched up and bitten, especially when they misjudge the size of the animal. Our venomous snakes have adapted so that they don't have to fight with an animal to subdue it. They have more of a hands off approach. They quickly strike their prey of choice and inject a little venom that will kill that animal quickly and make it easier and safer to eat.

So the real question you are asking...if I am not seeing venomous snakes, what snakes am I seeing? There are a variety of common snakes that we see on TNI property and I will tell you about a few of them. One of the most common and well known snakes in our area is the Garter Snake. Many people also lump the

western ribbon snake in with garter snakes. These snakes are medium sized, and live in forests and edge habitats, commonly near water. Ribbon snakes are more common around permanent water sources. They can also be found in vacant lots. These snakes eat fish, amphibians, young birds, and many different kind of invertebrates. They are eaten by lots of things as well.

Another snake that is quite common and most people have seen is the black rat snake. These are large snakes with a variable dark colored pattern; some appear to be completely black. They live in a variety of forest, shrub and edge habitats, and are common around farm buildings and abandoned houses. They are often spotted sunning in trees. They feed on rodents, birds and their eggs, and other small mammals. Large adults have few predators, but young snakes will be eaten by carnivorous mammals and birds of prey.

Water snakes are also very common. They are most likely to be confused with their venomous cousins. We have three species common to Madison County. They include the plain bellied water snake, diamondback water snake, and common water snake. They are all large bodied snakes and they spend most of their time in and around bodies of water. They eat fish and amphibians and are eaten by large shore birds and other snakes. Water snakes will bite when handled and will musk and void their feces as well.

Eastern Hognose Snakes are common and, in my opinion, one of the more interesting snakes in our area. They have an upturned scale on the tip of nose, which give them their name and they are dramatic. Hognose snakes will act aggressive when encountered and then will play dead. When acting aggressive they will flatten their head and neck, hiss, and feign strikes (striking to the side rather than biting). If that doesn't deter the attacker, the snake will release feces and musk, then roll onto its back with its mouth open so that it appears to have died. Hognose snakes eat mostly frogs and amphibians and have specially adapted fangs to do so. When a toad gets caught, it will puff up to make it harder to swallow. The hognose uses its rear fangs to "pop" the toad and then swallow it.

So the moral of the story is...you should not be terrified of snakes. They are doing you a great service by eating mice and rats that plague your house and they do it in a very interesting way. Everyone should have a healthy respect for snakes and all animals for that matter. Every animal that has teeth (yes, even humans) will bite when handled improperly. Being scared of an animal does not make it ok to kill and when you are scared of something, you should demystify it by learning more about it. That is my challenge to you. Learn more rather than continue in your unnecessary fear. Enjoy TNI's trails and remember to tag your pictures : #NatureInstitute!

This narrative is part of an ongoing education blog. Want to read more blogs from TNI staff members, including stewardship? Head to www.TheNatureInstitute.org now!

450 Acres cleared and ridded of invasive species by our stewardship crew. Native trees and plants were planted in their place.

2016 UPCOMING EVENTS

Below is a sneak peak for the remainder of this year's events. Some events may be added or deleted. Be sure to check out our website for further details!

AUGUST

8/4– Ice Cream Social
8/6– Heartland Prairie Restoration Day
8/9– Heartland Prairie Walk
8/18– Moonlight Hike
8/18– Astronomy Association Meeting
8/20– Volunteer Workday
8/29– Adult Nature Club

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

10/1– Foraging for Fungi

10/6– Discovery Nature Club

9/3– Heartland Prairie Restoration Day
9/8– Discovery Nature Club
9/10– Walk through Time: Living History
9/13– Heartland Prairie Walk
9/14– Knee High Naturalist
9/15– Astronomy Association Meeting
9/16– Moonlight Hike
9/17– Volunteer Workday
9/17– Mississippi Earthtones Festival
9/22– Fall Equinox Sunrise Hike
9/26– Adult Nature Club
9/27– Heartland Prairie Walk

10/1- Heartland Prairie Restoration Day

10/11– Heartland Prairie Walk 10/12– Knee High Naturalist 10/14– Enchanted Forest 10/15– Volunteer Workday 10/15– Evil Forest/Full Moon Hike 10/20– Discovery Nature Club 10/20– Astronomy Assoc. Meeting 10/25– Heartland Prairie Walk 10/29– Fall Colors Hike 10/31– Adult Nature Club

NOVEMBER

11/9– Knee High Naturalist
11/10– TNI Trivia Night
11/14– Moonlight Hike
11/17– Astronomy Assoc. Meeting
11/19– Volunteer Workday
11/28– Adult Nature Club
11/29– Nature Creations: Wreath

DECEMBER

12/3– Candy Cane Challenge
12/13– Moonlight Hike
12/14– Knee High Naturalist
12/15– Astronomy Assoc. Meeting
12/26– Adult Nature Club

Become a Member Today, Save Locally

Take an active role in assisting us in our mission of preservation, restoration, and education. When you give to a local conservation and environmental education organization like The Nature Institute, you are doing more than just donating. Your dues assist us in providing our community with healthy habitats for diverse wildlife populations and opportunities for people of all ages to recreate, study and explore the outdoor world.

Generosity, from those like you, is the reason that our natural areas, such as the Olin Nature Preserve, Hutchinson Bird Sanctuary and Heartland Prairie, will be protected for the use and enjoyment of future generations. We could not do it without you.

We are excited to announce new benefits for supporters that renew or start their membership in 2016! New this year are more member rates to TNI hosted events, gifts for you and your family, as well as discounts only offered to current TNI members to these local businesses:

1904 General Store	Old Bakery Beer Co.
Alton Regional CVB gift shop	Olive Oil Market Place
Cahokia Mounds	River Bend Yoga
LuciAnna's Pastries	Senior Services Plus
Mississippi Mud Pottery	Trigger Talent

Lewis & Clark Confluence Tower

With member levels ranging from Individual to Lifetime member, there is something for everyone. To become a part of TNI, fill out this booklet's insert and send it back in to our office! Stand with your fellow TNI family to help us preserve our land for generations to come.



🍙 Grants 🛛 💼 Camp and Program Fees 🛛 🧧 Donations 🛛 🝙 Memberships

Based on a 12 month audit: January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015

(Above) Dogwood budding in front of Talahi Lodge

Operating Expenses B & S 28% \$159,586 25% \$146,665 Education Stewardship 25% \$143,412 \$81,279 Outreach 14% Admin 8% \$45,596 Total:

Buildings and Structures



2015 FINANCIALS

2015 MEMBER & DONORS

Thank you to all of our donors and members in 2015. Because of you, we are able to continue in our mission.

Lifetime Members (\$1,000+) Parmentier, Lee Ann and Joe Paul, Mary Ann and Curt Mississippi Sanctuary Society (\$100+) Abbajay, Stephanie Albers, Dale Alyea, Daniel & Celeste Callahan, Jim & Barb Chartrand, Patrick Cronin, Fred Curry, Steve & Cynthia Damon, Helen Dixon, Craig Florists' Mutual Insurance Co. Fosha, Jon & Sandy Freer Auto Body Long, Rance & Lisa Maggos, Alexander Maggos, Mark & Meladee Maher, Brad Murphy, Stacy & Tina Sampson, Maurine Siemer, Mike & Betty Stinson, Lewis & Cynthia Taul, Edward & Gabrielle Taylor, Jan & Michael Weiner, Jennifer Wilson, Karen Woody, Carol Family Members (\$50+) Albrecht. Jen Allen, Terry & Linda Altenbernd, DeeDee and Chris Anderson, Emily Anderson, Ryan & Shannon Audubon Society- Great Rivers Belchik. Jennifer and Brian Boley, Lauren Bosoluke, Marcy Bowen, Andy Caughran, Tim & Kimberly Cope, Jim & Mary

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Volunteers

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4,630

Hours donated

Thank you!



The Nature Institute works to foster an awareness and appreciation of the natural world through preservation, restoration, and education.

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