



Sauk-Calumet Group

August 2020 Newsletter Volume 39, Issue 2

Honu in Hawaii

By Christy Mazrimas-Ott



Laniakea Beach, Oahu

Before the pandemic caused lockdowns back in March, Gregg and I just made it home from Hawaii where we spent 11 days on the Big Island (Hawaii) & Oahu. On all our trips we love to be out in nature and looking for wildlife. A big highlight of our trip was seeing the endangered Hawaiian green sea turtle also known as Honu on both islands. The hawksbill (Honu'ea) and the leatherback are the two other native Hawaiian turtle species, but the Hawaiian green is the most common turtle in Hawaii.

The Hawaiian green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is the largest hard-shelled turtle in the world reaching up to 4 feet long and up to 300 pounds. Honu do not have teeth but a serrated lower jaw. Their diet consists of algae and seagrasses which turn their fat layer green, hence the name. Due to their large size and lungs being 2/3 the size of their carapace Honu can stay underwater for a long time, five hours is the longest on record. They can swim short bursts of 20mph. They have excellent eyesight underwater but nearsighted on land. Their life span is 70-80 plus years.



Laniakea Beach, Oahu

Honu do not become sexually mature until they are 20 with some not breeding until reaching 40. This is when you can finally distinguish the sexes- males have thicker longer tails than females. Once females breed, they can do so every 2 years. 90% of the females will swim from the Hawaiian Islands 600 miles west to the French Frigate Shoals to lay their eggs. This journey can take over 2 months since the females will stop and eat seaweed along the way at different islands. Once they arrive the females get as far away from the water as possible and dig a nest chamber in the sand where 75-100 eggs are laid with up to 6 nest chambers in one season. Eggs hatch in 2 months and the sex is temperature dependent, the cooler sand means more males.

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Why Volunteers Do Restoration Work

By Patrick Coffey



Here is some teasel by the overpass by I-57. The highway department usually cuts the grass along the Interstates in early August, just when teasel is in seed, spreading it all along the highways and into natural areas. Teasel can take over a prairie.

I am part of a group of volunteers doing conservation work on a portion of the Old Plank Road Trail in Matteson (a Rails-to-Trails site that local Sauk-Calumet Group members played a large role in protecting). As we are working out there, people using the trail will sometimes ask us questions about what we are doing. Some will stop to thank us and cheer us on. While others seem perplexed that we are doing anything out there at all. By my (admittedly amateur) account there are several reasons why natural areas should not just be left alone - they need to be managed.

History

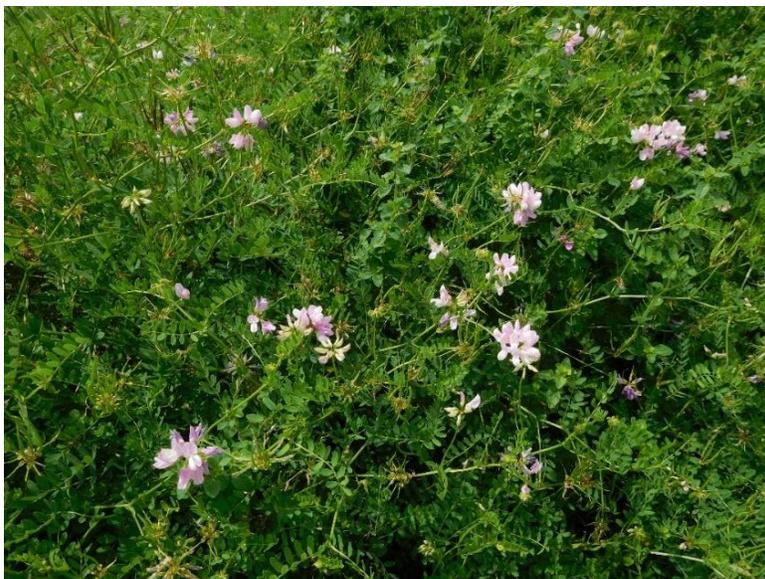
One reason we do restoration work is *history*. We want people to know what our region looked like and what lived here before Europeans came and irrevocably altered it. The best way to do that is to set aside areas that are good examples of that past. What did the world look like apart from my civilization's influence on it? How can I gauge my, and my culture's, own impact? A restored site can be a good answer to that question. Some can argue against "history" and entertain all kinds of philosophical notions about "wildness", but in some ways, we need reminders more than ever of what our influence has been on the planet. We need to see the "other" for what it genuinely is or was. At one time, tallgrass prairies were the dominant habitat here in the Midwest. We need to know that. We should never forget what that must have looked like. When we preserve areas, we are engaging directly with our own national, natural, historical heritage.

Aesthetics

Another reason for doing restoration work is what can simply be called *aesthetics*. For those "in the know" a small patch of prairie with half a dozen different species all blooming at the same time - gold and blue and pink and purple - is a beautiful thing. But it is not just flowers, it can even be insects. For instance, the Hine's Emerald dragonfly is one of the rarest dragonflies in the world, and it lives about 30 miles from my house. Tiny little gems of life, small and incredibly fragile, these insects are in their own way quite beautiful. Nature's original beauty should be protected. Admittedly, aggressive, invasive species can also be beautiful. Purple loosestrife, for instance, is a beautiful flower in our wetlands. But it is non-native and prolific and takes up space our native plants need, making native species even rarer and more threatened.

The Ecosystem

One of the more popular reasons in our public discussions right now for restoration work is what is called *ecosystem benefits*. Making more wetlands, for instance, not only helps the animals and plants but it helps us in that it cleans the water, protects against floods, etc. But for me, this is not the only reason to protect nature. It is the most important reason for those who care a lot about the bottom line, but even they should know, there are still plenty of reasons to restore natural areas, including human health and well-being. Another side of the ecosystem as a reason for doing restoration work is that these small areas where we have nature preserves are often hotspots for many species, endangered as well as more common. Maintained areas tend to do this better, and for more species, than non-maintained areas. They usually have more species of plants, and then those plants can sustain many other kinds of living things. Even our small preserves can act like island archipelagos for many species. Take them away, or do not protect the native habitat there, and slowly piece by piece the whole system can be affected. We do not know what the consequences will be when we start losing many of these species to extinction. At some point, we are protecting ourselves from ecosystem breakdown when we restore natural areas.



Crown vetch is about 2-2.5 feet tall. It reproduces both by roots and by seed, making it difficult to eradicate. It also can take over a prairie.

Biodiversity

Most people do not know it, but native habitats usually harbor far more species, and rarer species, than disrupted areas do. Gensburg Prairie, a prime high-quality original prairie, in Markham, IL, harbors hundreds of insect species on top of the maybe 250 plant species that are there. Gensburg Prairie is a high-quality site, but other prairies can also garner some amazing results. One thing we have been doing on the Old Plank Road Trail is cutting an invasive weed called, teasel. Google it. Teasel is an aggressive, non-native species. It can virtually take over a prairie. It creates large stands of itself, not allowing any other plants to grow at all. Teasel does have some allies, though. Some bumblebees seem to love teasel, and there are a few kinds of beetles that like it, too. Now, the area we are trying to save has about 200 native plant species in prairie remnants along the trail. If the teasel takes over, as well as crown vetch and sweet clover, some of the other aggressive non-native species that behave similarly, all of that will be lost. The reason we know this is because it is happened on other prairies that have not received care. A site can be totally overgrown with several invasives and lose all its native biodiversity. Once that happens, a site is pretty much beyond hope. That is the gist of what conservationists are talking about when they talk about the need for management or restoration. We are protecting what is there from invasive species, and we are favoring native species over non-native ones to enhance biodiversity. I teach chess to kids at the library where I work. One of the first things I tell them is that if they trade pieces with their opponent, they should get something equal or better than the piece they will be losing. If they lose a pawn but get a queen, that is a good thing. But if they lose a queen and get only a pawn, that is not so good. At Old Plank, if we lose 200 species of prairie plants and hundreds of native insects, some of which are quite rare, but in return, we only get half a dozen non-native invasive plants and some common insects, that's not a good trade. No one can say that that would be a rational thing to do.

Responsibility

Which brings us to another very important reason for doing what we do. If you describe what's happening in the natural world right now as a story, people take a profound place in it no matter how you look at it. At the time when Europeans came to this continent, nature was so robust and prolific that the settlers were astounded. Then we cut the trees and plowed the grasslands. We have, to a large extent, domesticized an entire continent in only a couple of centuries. But our influence on the land has not stopped with logging or agriculture. We are still in the process of mining mountaintops, introducing destructive non-native species, polluting the waterways, broadcasting pesticides, etc. We have not stopped altering the natural world in profound and ubiquitous ways. What that looks like on a local level naturally centers on the parks and preserves, the last places left for many living things. Our introduced species, like buckthorn or teasel, purple loosestrife or reed canary grass, are still playing havoc with our communities' natural areas. We are the ones who have done this. We are the ones who, in the end, are responsible. It is just not the case that nature can always adapt. We are the ones with the brains, it is up to us to do something. In most cases, people live quite near these preserves and even use them occasionally. Yet we still do not know what's even out there. The species, I mean. We should find out, take an interest, and even go out on a Saturday and do some work - cutting brush, or pulling weeds, whatever it is that's needed. In the south region of Chicago at the beginning of the 21st century, that is what you do to take responsibility for nature.

Natural Values

And that brings us pretty close to my last (but not least) reason we should do restoration work. Along with all the above reasons, the reason we do restoration work is that living things have value. They have value far above what value we can give to them. They have value far above what they can do for us. They have intrinsic value, much like art, you could say. If you can say, "Art for its own sake," you can certainly say, "Life for its own sake." If you think about our planet and its living things, traveling through the vastness of space and time, in the end, you have to realize how much that life must mean. The value life has, it can be said, especially in the aggregate, is close to infinite. Now you can anticipate that people's and living things' interests will at times collide. At such a juncture we have to make a judgment. Which is more valuable? The human gain or the living things right to exist? Is a little fish in the river more important or is a large agri-business's quarterly earnings goals more valuable? In that case, I think I would decide for the fish. But there may be times when the case is not so clear. Maybe a road in the mountains is needed to get people to the

hospital when they require emergency care. Of course, there may be other options - but life and death issues may be one time when we may consider giving way to human needs. I think it was Stephen Jay Gould in *Natural History* magazine many years back who proposed the *golden rule* for such matters - the golden rule in reverse almost. If we were in the place of the species involved what would we want people to do? I, for one, think we would want us to try pretty hard to save a species or habitat. Seen from this perspective there might be a lot of things humanity might be doing differently. Which is why we should be giving back. And we can give back by making room for the most threatened species and habitats in our area, making sure that they do not deplete, and making sure that future generations will have them to contemplate and enjoy. And so, for all the reasons above, and finally for the love of nature itself, please support us in this work.

Become a Voter Captain



This election season, we need you to step up and become a Voter Captain. As a voter captain, you'll be responsible for informing 150 environmentalists about our endorsed candidates and making sure they'll vote this year. Our goals this year are ambitious and we need you to help us make sure our state has its greenest legislature to date. You'll be working with the Sierra Club Illinois Chapter volunteers to make sure voters in swing districts are informed when they vote. [Sign up here.](#)

Several Ways to Explore from Home

Click below to see the bison herd at nearby Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

<https://www.earthcam.com/usa/illinois/wilmington/midewin/?cam=bison>

Click below to see brown bears searching for salmon at Brooks Falls in Katmai National Park in Alaska

<https://explore.org/livecams/brown-bears/brown-bear-salmon-cam-brooks-falls>

Click below for a Park Ranger Virtual Tour of Mt. Baldy in the Indiana Dunes National Park

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=A090B802-B2A9-1890-A1CA70677C292366>

Click below for a Park Ranger Wildflower Tour at the Heron Rookery in the Indiana Dunes National Park

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=5F09B9BF-C482-211B-3903B61C44715830>

Click below to see two Shedd Aquarium penguins visit the Field Museum

<https://youtu.be/wMjnTILSwT8>

Zookeeper Chats at Brookfield Zoo



Sauk -Calumet member Christy Mazrimas-Ott is a zookeeper at Brookfield Zoo. She is posing with Lisa, an Amur Leopard that is behind the viewing window in this picture. During the Coronavirus lockdown earlier this year, the zookeepers still had to feed and care for all the animals even though the zoo was closed to the public. In order to make the zoo animals available during the closure, they released a series of Zookeeper Chat videos online. You can watch them by clicking the links below. Brookfield Zoo is now open but you must register online before visiting the zoo. You can click this link to register <https://www.czs.org/Brookfield-ZOO/Home.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ct6AZEdt2d0&feature=youtu.be> Lions - Brutus & Titus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jhlInvqRyik&feature=youtu.be> River Otters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WJ-WPOCeic&feature=youtu.be> Amur Leopard

VOTING BY MAIL IN COOK COUNTY ILLINOIS

By Kathy VanKampen

Every Illinois Registered Voter Can Vote by Mail in the Upcoming November 3rd, 2020 election. Here are the steps you need to take:

Request your vote by mail application online at [IllinoisVotes2020.com](https://www.IllinoisVotes2020.com).

You will need to provide a Driver's License number, or State Identification number, or the last 4 numbers of your Social Security number, the address where you want your ballot sent, and your email address. If you do not have one of the above forms of identification, you will not be able to complete a vote by mail application online unless you update your voter registration by calling [312.603.0946](tel:312.603.0946).

Or, if you prefer to apply on paper, you may download, print, and sign a mail ballot application and send it to the Cook County Clerk's Office at:

COOK COUNTY CLERK ATTN: MAIL VOTING UNIT
69 WEST WASHINGTON ST, ROOM 500
CHICAGO, IL. 60602-3030

The Cook County Clerk has noted that voting by mail will be very popular this year, so you are encouraged to request a mail-in ballot as soon as you are able. Once the Cook County Clerk receives your application for a Mail in Ballot you will receive your ballot in the mail with instructions.

Join Us for Local Action on Climate Change

By Dorelle Ackerman, Janet Musil, and Sharon White



Dorelle (on the right) and Sharon White (second from left) at 2019 Climate Lobby Day

In recent months we have seen the resilience of people. In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, with unimaginable loss of life, economic challenges, and disruption of everyone's life, we see neighbors exhibiting acts of kindness, courageous essential workers, and unprecedented government action (some both beneficial and bipartisan). One lesson of COVID is that, when faced with a crisis, we do what needs to be done. Australian Wildfires, Hurricane Harvey, Sea level rise, midwestern floods, melting glaciers.... the list goes on. Are these reasons for depression, hopelessness, or live it up while you can because we are screwed? We think not. The future is not yet written and, not negating the vastness of the problem, we have an opportunity to act NOW and solve this. We have the solutions; do we have the will? Paul Hawkins would say "is it game over or game on?" and Buckminster Fuller is quoted as saying "Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done."

Our story began when, Dorelle, after doing presentations on climate change found herself getting discouraged by the size of the problem and the lack of federal leadership. Hope was needed but not "cross your fingers and pray" hope; instead, realistic hope based on grounded optimism. She needed a posse to believe what she was learning at pachamama.org and Jan and Sharon answered her call. Sharon, as someone wanting to answer the call of Pope Francis to care for the earth and Jan, who shared with Dorelle the joy and tranquility of paddling the clear springs of Florida knowing they are threatened by salt water intrusion and phosphate pollution. Together, we learned about the challenges (climate, threats to democracy and the wealth divide to name three that all intersect with sustainability) but also the solutions as outlined at drawdown.org. We will share these with the Sauk Calumet Sierra Club when meetings reconvene this fall.

Movements, which is what is needed, begin by local actions by citizens and at a critical point, the government will follow. We have seen this with Black Lives Matter becoming mainstream and attitudes in our local community toward BLM changing almost overnight. We are now a local chapter known as "The Pachamama Alliance, Chicagoland Co-Hearts" and we are committed to two goals. First, to present and train other local activists about the Drawdown solutions and second, to bring community level Drawdown solutions to our schools, churches, industry and/or government. With your help, we will do it.

Sierra Club has a long history of activism so it is natural to ask you to email us at PachamamaCoHearts@gmail.com to learn more and join us in the planning. And in the spirit of hope and grounded optimism consider this an opportunity to "define the next few thousand years in the next few" (paraphrasing sir David Attenborough). Our first local training workshop will begin this fall. Please join us.

See fall program schedule: Dorelle, Janet, and Sharon are speaking at our Oct 12 meeting!

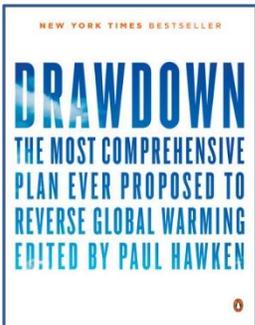
Sauk Calumet Sierra Club Group Meetings Schedule

Meetings are held at 7:15 pm on the second Monday of every month with the exception of June, July and August. All meetings are free and open both to Sierra Club members and to the public. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **the fall programs will be online using Zoom instead of meeting in the Frankfort library.** An email will be sent the week before each meeting, asking you to RSVP. A second email will be sent to those who plan to come, with the instructions and connection information for a Zoom conference, which you can access from a computer, tablet, or smart phone.



September 14 An Update on Legislative, Campaign, and Sierra Club Environmental Issues

Ann Baskerville, Sierra Club's Will County Conservation Organizer, will bring us up to date on Will County warehouse issues and what's happening this fall with the Clean Energy Jobs bill and other legislative issues and with the fall elections.



October 12 Local Action on Climate Change!

Dorelle Ackerman, Janet Musil, and Sharon White will talk about a new citizens' action group based on the International Pachamama model, with the goal of implementing climate change solutions as inspired by environmentalist Paul Hawken's book, Drawdown. Recognizing the power of working together, they are hopeful that the solutions presented can inspire us to implement these in our homes and communities.



November 9 Conservation at Home!

Laurie Martin from the University of Illinois Extension South Suburban Master Gardener Program will discuss how we can make earth-conscious choices to make our yards environmentally friendly for native trees, flowers, and wildlife.



December 14 Recycling!

Will County Recycling Specialist Marta Keane will discuss the history of recycling in Illinois, the current state of recycling "whats" and "wheres," and will address questions about items that are hard to recycle.



January 11 Members' Slide Night

Calling all members! Please share a PowerPoint file or picture file of your latest outdoor experience, be it a grand adventure on the other side of the world or the beautiful butterflies of your own backyard. Email lois.lauer@illinois.sierraclub.org if you plan to share slides at the meeting.

Letters to the Editor:

Letters on content within the Sauk-Calumet newsletter should be sent to the editor at:

sc-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org

Please include your full name and address and reference the article on which you are commenting.

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The Sierra Club from the national level down to the local groups does so many positive things to help protect our planet. So, let us get out there and enjoy our beautiful world. Click below for Sierra Club Illinois outings.



Remember to check our Sauk-Calumet Group website for current information and news updates on issues relevant to Illinois.

[Click here for our website.](#)

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<https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubSaukCalumet/>

to find us on Facebook.