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Johnson County Heritage Trust
 P.O. Box 2523
 Iowa City, IA 52244-2523

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 Iowa City, IA 52244-2523

Johnson County Heritage Trust Presents Prairie Preview XXIV

Prairie Preview XXIV will be held on Tuesday, March 20, 2007, at 6:30 p.m. This year's speaker, Dick Baker, will give a presentation entitled "Private conservation and restoration--why am I so busy when I'm supposed to be retired?" Dick bought a house and 125 acres in Cedar County seven years ago--- he will talk about the joys and problems he and his wife, Deb, have experienced in trying to reconstruct a prairie, create wetland habitat, restore a savanna, and control erosion.

The Prairie Preview program includes information and displays from local environmental organizations and agencies. Refreshments will be provided. If you would like further information please call Tammy Richardson at (319)857-4741.

Prairie Preview XXIV will take place at Montgomery Hall, 4-H Fairgrounds, 4265 Oak Crest Hill Road S. E., (Old Highway 218 South), Iowa City.

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Newsletter of the Johnson County Heritage Trust

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Update on Propane Prairie

JCHT has signed a purchase agreement with Richard Barta for approximately one acre of land at Propane Prairie. The land still needs to be rezoned, and the final lines drawn, but it looks as if JCHT has stepped forward to preserve one of Johnson County's last remnant prairies!!! A hearty thanks to all those who have donated to the purchase of this piece of land-- donations are still needed and welcome. JCHT is putting together a property management committee to draw up a plan for managing our newest acquisition.

Casey Kohrt



Propane Prairie photo by R. Sjolund.

Letter from your President

These are exciting times for the Johnson County Heritage Trust. We are actively engaged in all aspects of our mission: to preserve our natural heritage through identification, acquisition and management of land with significant environmental value.

Our Land Acquisition Committee is evaluating and pursuing a number of parcels. We continue to respond to donors and members who offer or suggest land with significant environmental value. We are also creating and analyzing maps of our county to locate land of interest so that we can be more proactive in our efforts to preserve our natural heritage.

Our acquisition of Propane Prairie (suggestions for a new name are encouraged....) and the Massey timber is progressing. I am grateful to the many people who have spent many hours contributing to these initiatives. And I thank all the members and friends who have contributed to our targeted capital campaign to purchase Propane Prairie. There is still time to contribute.

Our Property Managers continue actively to monitor and manage our five properties. Of particular note is the work of Don Bolin on Big Grove and Wayne Petersen on Belgum Grove, explained more fully in the accompanying article. Wayne has prepared a plan to turn this property into a showcase reconstructed prairie with significant wetland features. This project (actually a series of projects) will take time (about ten years) and money (+/- \$75,000). But, in the end, we will have a property that will be a beautiful and diverse restoration of our native ecosystems.

Tammy Richardson, our part-time Administrator, continues to bring structure and energy to JCHT. She attends our board meetings and nearly all our committee meetings. She prepares excellent minutes including reminders of the action items we committed to complete. The Board completed her evaluation recently and gave her high marks for her contributions over

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Letter From President

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her first year with JCHT. Look for news of an exciting new event next fall currently being planned by Tammy and the Membership and Events Committee.

I will close with a thank you to all our renewing members and our many new members. You provide the inspiration, guidance and resources for the Board of JCHT to carry out our important work. As always, I welcome your comments and active participation.

Sincerely,

Dick Schwab

The Birds of Big Grove

When I was a boy, my mother once told me, "In order to see you must also listen." I've always remembered her saying that, especially because her advice usually ran more along the lines of, "You get down from there before you get killed!"

When I became property manager of JCHT's Big Grove, I brought my mother's good advice with me—and listening has revealed many interesting birds that I otherwise would not have discovered, due to the thickness of the foliage. I was still standing in the parking lot when I heard my first bird at Big Grove, the thrilling sound of a scarlet tanager singing *Hurry - Blurry - Flurry - Jury* in the old growth woods just to the east. Arguably our most beautiful songbird, the tanager is threatened everywhere because it needs extensive tracts of woodland to breed, and it is a great satisfaction to find it in one of our preserves. At least two pairs of tanagers nested in Big Grove this year. If you follow their call into the woods and search the high canopy, you will be rewarded by seeing the male moving like a bright flame through the tree tops.

While you are in the woods searching for the tanager, you will almost surely hear one of the chattiest of our songbirds, the red-eyed vireo. It is often called the preacher bird because of the persistence and insistence of its repetitive song: *Look up! See me? Over here. This way! Look up!* If you are lucky, you may also hear the yellow-throated vireo singing its burry *Three-all Three-eight!* All of the vireos are more often heard than seen, as they are constantly moving through the high canopy, pausing only briefly to sing. Also often heard, usually deeper in the woods, is the distinctive decrescendo drumming of the pileated woodpecker, sounding like an orchestral percussionist. It is a great treat to hear its loud and raucous call, like the cackle of an axe murderer.

A little later in the summer, other woodland birds join the songfest. The eastern towhee calls *Drink - your - tea - a-a-a* (the last part trilled), and the eastern wood pewee plaintively whistles *Pee - a - wee*. Also frequently heard are the oven bird singing *TEAcher - TEAcher - TEAcher!* and one of our more exotic-looking birds, the great crested flycatcher, with its loud, whistled *Wheep! Wheep! Wheep!* It is a startling call in the quiet woods -- it sounds like someone whistling loudly between their fingers to get your attention. Both of these birds tend to be hidden, the flycatcher high in the canopy and the oven bird in low brush.

If you walk through the meadow just south of the parking lot you will hear quite a number of birds calling, as the wood's edge is a particularly rich area for songbirds. In the early spring, you will usually hear the sweet whistled *Peter - Peter - Peter* of the tufted titmouse, while on summer afternoons you will almost always hear indigo buntings singing *Fire Fire, Where Where, Here Here, See - It See-It*.

If the sun is sinking below the west ridge as you walk back to the parking lot on a warm, still summer evening, pause one more time before you get in your car and listen carefully... you may be rewarded by hearing our finest singer, the wood thrush. From deep in the woods you will hear it croon its bittersweet, flute-like farewell to the fading day, like taps: *Day-is-done, Lee-o-lay, Day-is-done*. As dusk settles over Big Grove, the other woodland birds gradually become quiet, as if they are listening to the sweet, last lament of the wood thrush, singing on alone: *Day-is-done, Lee-o-lay, Day-is-done*.

Don Bolin

Reconstructing Belgum Grove

JCHT is developing plans to reconstruct prairie on 20 acres of old pasture ground at Belgum Grove. About 10 acres of old cropland have already been planted to prairie. This new undertaking will convert most of the existing cool-season grasslands to prairie. Mowed turf trails will be maintained to provide access throughout the prairie and to serve as firebreaks.

JCHT also plans the following major initiative for Belgum Grove. An old grade-stabilization structure, located on the draw that drains from the south property line north to Dirty Face Creek, is damaged and at risk of blowing out. If it were to go, a gully would rapidly cut up through the drainage into our neighbor's property to the south. JCHT intends to rebuild the structure and to add a water feature that will blend deep-water and shallow-water areas to create a bluegill/bass pond with shallow-water wetland habitat around the shoreline. Because we lack control over the large drainage area above us, design of the system will be challenging.

Our goal is to begin structure repair and prairie reconstruction in 2007. We have applied for a grant from the Johnson County Community Foundation and are investigating other grant opportunities. We will likely need to engage in future fundraising to supplement any grant funding we are able to secure.

Cooperation on this project will help it to succeed. As the project moves ahead, we will be communicating with our neighbor to the south, who also plans to convert a large area of bromegrass to prairie starting in 2007. In the future we will have a good-sized area of reconstructed prairie between the two properties.

Further work at Belgum Grove will also include repair of a stream crossing and stabilization of stream banks. Old interior fencing will be removed. Understory removal and fire management will stimulate oak regeneration and savanna-like habitat on the east boundary along Dirty Face Creek. It is our hope that, over the course of the next few years, Belgum Grove will become a model of native ecosystem reconstruction!

Wayne Petersen



Propane Prairie photo by R. Sjolund.

Letter from a New Member

Harry Graves, whom I greatly admire, recommended the JCHT to me this past spring. I sought information on the Internet, found the rather elegant JCHT website, and used a link to become a volunteer. Tammy Richardson contacted me soon thereafter with useful information and I had opportunities to work twice at Big Grove and once at Shimek Ravine. I enjoyed patrolling for and/or uprooting garlic mustard and also helping with a burn. During these events, (Dick Schwab), Connie Mutel, Amy Bouska, Terry Daum, and others were quite accommodating to me as a novice helper. Connie took time at two events to teach me some botany. Soon, I joined the JCHT as a member.

When I attended the Family Day at Turkey Creek, Connie surprised me by providing me with a personal tour of the property and again teaching me some botany and geology. That event was a special informational and aesthetic treat for me considering her wealth of knowledge and the beauty of the property. We pulled some garlic mustard together along the creek, yet my lack of boots disabled me from being much help.

The importance of the opportunity to purchase Propane Prairie was well explained at a recent membership meeting, and I particularly recall some information provided by (Dick Schwab) and Casey Kohrt. I am glad to be able to participate with the JCHT in this acquisition.



Propane Prairie photo by R. Sjolund.

Capital Campaign Update—Thank you! Thank You! Thank You!

Thank you for your contributions to the capital campaign to date. As of publishing date we have received \$136,937.30 from 60 individuals and businesses. Gifts ranged in size from \$25.00 to \$24,000. **Thank you** for enabling us to make some important and necessary improvements to our properties. For example, at Hora Woods, we have made important efforts in vegetation management. On our other properties, we have used funds to manage and eliminate invasive species. In addition, some designated funds from the Capital Campaign have enabled us to leverage the skills and energies of Tammy Richardson, our Administrator. **Thank you** for helping us successfully to complete the campaign.

If you have not yet had a chance to fulfill your pledge or to participate in the Capital Campaign there is still time before December 31st! Please contact Tammy Richardson at info@jcht.org; (319) 857-4741; or see form on back page.

Dick Schwab

Hunting on JCHT Properties - Request for Input from Members

The Board has made a provisional decision to allow hunting on JCHT properties (except for Shimek Ravine). This is a difficult issue, as not everyone is comfortable with hunting for a variety of reasons. The Board considered that, as hunting is likely to take place, it would be in the best interests of our properties and our members to regulate it. We have made the following decisions for this year:

- Hunting will be restricted exclusively to members who have the approval of the assigned property manager. Signs with hunting policies will be posted, and an indemnity and hold harmless agreement will be required of hunters. The agreement not only discusses risks involved in hunting, but also restricts usage of the properties to preserve and prevent damage to natural features.
- Hunting will be allowed for deer only.

We are considering other alternatives and would appreciate input from members regarding our policies. For example, if hunting is to be allowed, would members appreciate restrictions on the times (e.g., only before 10 a.m.) in which other members can hunt? Please contact Lorie Reins-Schweer with your comments.

Lorie Reins-Schweer