Since this is my last column as president of the Bur Oak Land Trust, I want to extend a hearty thank-you for your continued support of our growing organization. I have enjoyed my time as president, learned much about myself and how land trusts operate, and made many wonderful friends. As head cheerleader, I have a plea to make to all of you: get involved! The trust needs your expertise, talents, and skills.

If you are interested in working on a property or learning about land restoration, the Property Land Stewardship Committee is for you. These hard-working volunteers do all the stewardship on our properties. This committee is lucky because Seth Somerville, our property stewardship specialist, organizes hundreds of volunteer hours on the properties. If you want to help out on a property—garlic mustard is always with us—e-mail Seth@buroaklandtrust.org.

Want to meet people who care about protecting natural places? You might be interested in the Land Acquisition and Protection Committee. These folks work with landowners who are considering donating their land or protecting it with a conservation easement. Walking choice properties, actively participating in land protection, what fun!

If you have a desire to see the trust continue its operational excellence, consider the Governance and Auditing Committee. This committee makes sure the trust is well organized, crafts policies to manage its day-to-day business, and oversees its annual financial review.

Do you have a penchant for numbers? Then the Finance Committee wants you. Sometimes people forget that nonprofits need to make money, too, but how we spend it supports the protection of land. We need folks to help guide the development of our budget to keep us on track financially.

Perhaps you know others who should support our organization? Then the Development Committee is for you. Members raise awareness of our organization and fundraise so we can continue to protect land in perpetuity. Social media, e-mail, direct mail, and phone calls are all tools of this committee.

Maybe you enjoy reading Heritage or have an interest in exhibits, marketing, blogs, websites, or meeting with new folks outside of Johnson County. If so, the Publicity Committee may be just right for you. Its members promote the trust’s image and visibility.

Do you like Under a Cider Moon . . . A Celebration of Autumn? The Cider Moon Planning Committee needs new members. All our events—the annual meeting and alumni dinner, Family Day, Prairie Preview, the concert at Belgum Grove, and the Nancy Seiberling Circle dinner—are organized by staff and ad-hoc committees. We welcome your participation and ideas.

I will remain an active member of the Property Land Stewardship Committee. Perhaps I’ll see you on the fire line at O’Mara-Newport Woods or pulling garlic mustard at Pappy Dickens Preserve this summer!
Executive Director’s Report by Tammy Wright

HAPPY NEW YEAR, Bur Oak Land Trust supporters! I can hardly believe that I celebrated my tenth year with the trust in June.

In 2015, we acquired our ninth property, bringing our total acres owned to more than 300. Thanks to Janice and Richard Horak, we closed on our fourteenth conservation easement, for a grand total of more than 650 protected acres, no small accomplishment and no small undertaking. All this keeps our property stewards and Property Stewardship Specialist Seth Somerville very busy. Whether you work outside on our properties, volunteer in the office, or work for us from home, please know that I am so grateful for everything you do.

Under a Cider Moon was a huge success. Whether you donated an item, attended the event, or helped put it all together (or all of the above), I can’t thank you enough. If you have an idea for enhancing the tenth annual Cider Moon, on October 21, 2016, please get in touch with me.

I was privileged once again to represent you at Rally 2015, the National Land Conservation Conference in Sacramento in October, a great event packed with field trips, seminars, and workshops.

Last but definitely not least, the 2015 Bur Oak Land Trust Conservation Award honors Lorie Reins-Schweer. Lorie served as a board member for twelve years. Her passion and enthusiasm for our mission were infectious. She freely contributed her intelligence and energy to advance the trust, particularly in the area of financial management. Congratulations and many thanks, Lorie!

Property Steward’s Report by Seth Somerville

IN 1993, I REMEMBER my parents loading up the station wagon and telling my sister and me it was time to head for higher ground. The first major flood of my conscious memory was on.

My mother, Mary Somerville, dedicated herself to “making Clear Creek clear again.” She spent the last of her formidable years trying to ensure that the next generation would have clean water. When she passed away, the Clear Creek Watershed Enhancement Board lost its founder. Time also sent other people to new careers and new projects. CCWEB’s wheels were spinning, and its members were searching for a new strategy. Compelled to test the water (so to speak) in the hope that Mom’s dream would not fade, I was fortunate to be elected chair of CCWEB.

It warms my heart to be part of a group my mother started. A dedicated volunteer board seeking to improve one of our most important resources: water. Now partnering with the Clear Creek Watershed Coalition, CCWEB actively supports a comprehensive approach to locally led management in the Clear Creek watershed.

No matter how embarrassed I was, Mom always picked up litter, whether in a parking lot or a park. I thought it was weird. Now every time I see litter—mostly pop bottles, often precariously close to a storm water inlet—I think of her and pick them up. Next time you see a pop bottle working its way downstream, pick it up. Just as I work with the Bur Oak Land Trust to steward the land, I will continue to advocate for our water, too.

Mary also volunteered for the Bur Oak Land Trust back in its early years. She was dedicated to leaving a place better than it was when she found it. Volunteering for the trust is a good way to do this. Please get in touch with me if you would like to follow her example.
Janice and Richard Horak met at UI as undergraduate French majors. Janice was from Mason City; Richard grew up on his family’s 1875 farm just six miles north of where he lives now. They met again while living in France after graduation, married, and returned to Iowa City, where Janice went to library school. Once she became a reference librarian, the couple started looking for land, and in April 1971, on Janice’s birthday, they became the owners of eighty peaceful, rolling acres outside of Shueyville.

In 1842, when Jefferson Township was organized, Richard and Janice’s land was almost entirely wooded; an 1859 survey notes bur, white, red, and black oaks as well as hickory, and surveys in the 1930s reveal that the land was still timbered. West Hoosier Creek crosses one corner. A frame building from the former Western College, moved two miles to the site before 1907, was home to the original landowners—Alta Fordice and her brother, Linton—and became home to the second landowners, Janice and Richard and their two sons, Nicholas and Daniel.

Richard initially grew corn, oats, and hay in rotation. After three years of barely breaking even, he noticed that Cedar Rapids’ only nursery was selling trees for thirty dollars each. He started ordering trees that people asked for, and in 1975 he phased out traditional farming and turned to tree farming full-time, planting 2,250 evergreens in the first year.

Today it’s impossible to say how many trees populate the now-eighty-three acres of Wildwood Farm. A strip of Norway pines stands guard to the north; to the south, a gallery of red pines leans permanently toward the sun. Richard and Janice seem to know and appreciate every inch of their land, and its familiar features are enhanced by such names as the Black Forest, Logging Trail, Apple Valley, Fern Valley, Alma’s Three Acres, Primrose Path, Gladys Glade, Poison Ivy Corner (ask Richard), Twin Oaks Corner, Barb’s Big Oak, and the impressive Starsweeper, one of three enormous white oaks east of the house.

Only one subdivision bordered the Horaks’ acres in 1971. Today, thanks to population pressure from Iowa City and Cedar Rapids, Wildwood Farm is surrounded by a growing number of housing developments. Worried by and indeed resisting this increased urbanization, mourning the death of Daniel, and thinking beyond retirement, Richard and Janice began to plan for the future. On October 28, 2015, Richard’s birthday, their conservation easement with the Bur Oak Land Trust was recorded, and Wildwood Farm became the trust’s fourteenth easement. In Richard’s words, “The more we got into it, the more logical it was. It was the right thing to do, and we’re glad we did it.”

The Horaks have a strong sense of time—both evanescent and enduring—and of the continuity of years and generations. Finding a projectile point ten feet from her back door made Janice visualize the Native Americans who had lived on these acres and the people who will live there in the years ahead. From this came a heightened awareness of the value of stewardship, and she asked, “What can I do to preserve this land?” Leaving a legacy, not of material wealth but of well-conserved acres, became primary. “We know that the work that we do in our lifetimes passes away. My library patrons used materials and services and moved on, and the trees and shrubs that Richard planted and grew also have limited lifetimes. Likewise our family members. We all die. But the land lives on. Our family’s legacy is to preserve and protect this precious land. Richard, Nicholas, Daniel, and I have loved this farm.”

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Wildwood Farm Becomes the Trust’s Fourteenth Conservation Easement

Upcoming Events

Prairie Preview XXXIII  Connie Mutel, Celebration Farm, Thursday, March 10
Annual Meeting  Park Lodge at Terry Trueblood Recreation Area, Friday, April 22
Family Day  Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, Sunday, May 22

Ornate box turtle and ferns at Wildwood Farm.
Photos by Mark Madsen.
FOUR YEARS AGO, I started to write a book that I hoped would pull people into learning and caring about climate change. That book, *A Sugar Creek Chronicle: Observing Climate Change from a Midwestern Woodland*, will be the topic of my talk at Prairie Preview on March 10. To draw readers into this challenging subject, I interlaced the science of climate change with stories of my own life and journal entries about our native oak woodland. The following excerpts are pieced together from a few sections of my book.

I AM A WALKER. Most days I roam our land and the trails and lanes defining neighboring woods, fields, and creek bottoms, observing their wild occupants and considering processes from long ago that continue today. I have traced our woodland’s expression through several decades, monitoring the sequence of wildflowers emerging in spring, the fading of color in autumn, the breeding birds arriving in May and disappearing with their broods in October.

But I am starting to sense disruptive shifts influencing our woodland’s occupants. The first wildflowers used to bloom like clockwork on April 7. And ticks were a worry primarily in spring months. Now, with winter’s cold dissolving earlier and summer-time’s warmth persisting longer, the early wildflowers might bloom in March, and I sometimes find ticks in November. Meanwhile the well-regulated rains that previously characterized Iowa’s rich growing season are shifting to intense downpours falling earlier and eroding springtime’s bare soils.

Similar symptoms have been documented around the world. The climatic stability that has regulated our landscape for thousands of years seems to be teetering. The changes are too fast to allow nature’s ready adaptation and fast enough to challenge human adaptation. At some point, if we do not restrain our current fossil-fuel emissions, we could trigger tipping points that would make rising temperatures impossible to halt.

Yet *if* is a powerful word. *If* we do not address climate change soon, in a major fashion, the future will likely be shaped by severe and unpredictable weather and all its environmental and societal spinoffs. By contrast, *if* we take strong steps to mitigate greenhouse gas production, we can put the worst climate-change ramifications into remission.

When I walk at dusk, I’ve noticed there’s an instant when moon shadows appear. One minute the ground is smooth and featureless. The next minute, patterns of twigs and branches draw detailed squiggles across the trail, and the darkening skies draw attention to what was there all along: a full moon shooting muted rays of light through the trees.

This is what we need regarding climate change. An “aha” moment, a clarity of understanding and recognition, a willingness to do whatever it takes to control carbon dioxide’s rapid multiplication, a decision by ordinary people and policy makers to make climate change a priority. A time when we say, “Now I see. Now I accept. Now I act.”

The Armadillo Is Here by Lon Drake

Another member of the southeastern flora and fauna is heading our way. First described by John James Audubon in southern Texas in the 1840s, the nine-banded armadillo, *Dasypus novemcinctus*, has been moving steadily northward for more than a century; today it is established in central northern Missouri. In September, Mark Jagnow found one roadkilled in western Johnson County.

This mainly nocturnal animal is not going to be popular with everyone. Like our woodchuck, it is an accomplished digger. Favoring ants and termites, it loves to dig up dinner in gardens and lawns. A slow-moving beast, its final defense against a fast-approaching predator, including those from Detroit, is to leap straight up into the air, which pretty much guarantees impact, and which may be relevant to our story. Tim Thompson, the DNR’s wildlife biologist for our region, relates that another one was found roadkilled a decade ago, also in western Johnson County, but no live ones have been reported here yet. Perhaps the slower ones leap a moment too late, wind up jammed into the undercarriage of a truck heading north, and get delivered to us?

If you find a fresh one, put away your *Roadkill Cookbook*, because although the meat is tasty, your appetite will diminish when you remember that armadillos host the bacteria and the insects that carry, respectively, leprosy and Chagas disease. We probably facilitate their northward march by importing tropical insects like fire ants and Formosan termites. The armadillos may be returning the favor by helping keep them under control.
Last summer, after a picnic in Kent Park, I enjoyed a stimulating conversation with the Johnson County Conservation Board’s two naturalists, Sydney Algreen and Kristen Morrow. Sydney, who joined the staff in 2014, and Kristen, who started work in August, are energetic, experienced, whip-smart conservationists who see environmental education as a key component of ecological well-being. I was especially interested in learning what led them toward their career, what programs they are developing and what challenges they face, and what they think about climate change and its effect on the future.

Interestingly, both used the same words when describing the reasons why they took steps toward a career in conservation: “exploring” and “outside.” Kristen grew up on a farm in northeast Iowa, riding her bike along gravel roads as a kid. In her teens, she became an avid Venture Scout, spending summers backpacking in New Mexico; at sixteen, working on a stream restoration project introduced her to the practical elements of conservation. She started at Iowa State as an engineering major; after she realized that the water under a bridge interested her far more than the bridge itself, she received her degree in environmental science.

Sydney grew up in a small town in central Iowa and enjoyed the same unrestricted access to the outdoors as Kristen had; her grandparents farmed nearby, and her school had a relationship with the Dallas County Conservation Agency that provided a consistent introduction to environmental issues. She majored in forestry at Iowa State, knowing that “forestry” in Iowa would mean an emphasis on tallgrass prairie.

Fortunately for Johnson County residents, Sydney and Kristen want to initiate programs that will interest and involve people of all ages and backgrounds, and they want to bring these programs to the eleven other parks owned by the conservation board. More than just instructing, they want to give people the tools to enable them to enjoy plants and animals and the entire outdoors themselves.

Field trips to identify birds and butterflies, a pollinator program, native seed collecting, owl prows, tutorials on invasive species and prairie restoration, the Picnic in the Park series, speaking to summer camp and scout groups at Kent Park, programs that focus on early pioneers—all these and more are in the works, particularly when the results of the interpretive master plan now underway have been analyzed. Kent Park’s new bird blind is a major enhancement to programming.

The naturalists want to develop even more programs that involve children and teenagers, programs that will inspire a new generation of citizen-scientists. They know that their programs are competing with millions of school and social and sports activities, but they also know how effective a vigilant and educated public can be when it comes to making a difference.

And what about the future? What about climate change and mass extinctions and rising ocean levels? Close to home, what about Iowa’s water and air pollution and vanishing topsoil? Kristen says, “As a conservationist, you can get down about lots of things—climate change, habitat loss, extreme weather events—but if you’re not hopeful, then your work is meaningless.” And Sydney: “You need to find reasons to keep moving forward. Yes, maybe monarchs won’t be able to overwinter in Mexico much longer, but as long as you can help monarchs or any other plant or animal survive, why wouldn’t you?” Both naturalists note that the people they encounter daily seem to care more about the environment and about preserving habitat than ever, and they say that the students they talk with are savvier about conservation issues than they were. These things give them hope, and their enthusiasm and dedication are compelling.
**Althea Sherman’s Chimney Swift Tower**
by Linda and Robert Scarth

**Famous for her** cantankerous wit, her vicious battle against house wrens, and her artistic talent, self-taught ornithologist Althea Sherman (1853–1943) spent most of her life on the family homestead near National, Iowa. In 1915, carpenters under her direction built a tower on her Acre of Birds intended to attract chimney swifts. Nine feet square and twenty-eight feet tall, it had a fourteen-foot inner chimney with peepholes and windows that allowed Sherman to watch the birds’ activity.

The first nest was built in 1918, and over the next eighteen years, Sherman climbed thousands of steps to the top of her tower and filled hundreds of pages with meticulous observations. Restored in 2013 by the Johnson County Songbird Project and the Cedar County Historical Society, the tower hosted the first nest at its new location at the Bickett-Rate Memorial Preserve near Tipton in 2014.

We were fortunate enough to photograph nesting activity in 2014 and 2015. As you can imagine, there was little room for tripods and cameras plus two photographers. Some days it was challenging to keep sweat from dripping onto our cameras. Most days the wind in the treetops meant we could not record the chicks’ changing vocalizations. The only light was the dim illumination from the chimney hole. We used small LED flashlights to focus and make our images. Sometimes we could use a flash after the LEDs helped us focus.

The first nest, discovered in early August just before the chicks hatched, was probably a second for adults whose previous nest had failed. We visited every other day until the five youngsters fledged in September. Those fledglings had only a short time to gain strength and fat reserves for the long migration to the forests of eastern Peru and neighboring countries.

The 2015 nest was begun in May with the first eggs in early June. This couple was not as skilled as last year’s, and they lost an egg off the edge of the nest before the cup was complete. We did not visit as often during the nest building and incubation but came every other day as hatch day approached.

Chimney swift chicks develop quickly, and by late July the three had fledged. One egg did not hatch and was pushed off when the three youngsters more than filled the tiny nest. The family, and perhaps friends, used the tower as a night and bad weather roost well into late summer.

From our photographs, we think that one of the 2014 adults (probably the male) came back to the chimney with a new young female in 2015. He seemed to be more tolerant of our presence, as both parents had been in 2014. The other adult and her chicks were a bit more skittish. Last year’s chicks liked to watch our camera lenses through the peepholes and little window. When this year’s group started to fly within the chimney, they sometimes went to the walls below the peepholes and window when our lenses were present. For the complete archive, see http://scarthphoto.com/wp/chimney-swift-archive.
Protect, preserve, restore . . . it’s all about the trust.

Please share this copy of *Heritage* with your friends and family!