

Journal of the Webster Groves Nature Study Society
May 2013, Vol. 85, No. 5
First Issue November 1929

President's Corner

Rich Thoma

A celebration of all that WGNSS has accomplished in the past year will take place with a banquet on May 1. Hopefully you have gotten your reservations in for this event. This year's banquet features **Eric Rutkow**, author of *American Canopy*, as the honorary speaker for the evening. Eric will be presenting a unique perspective on how trees have shaped American history. Those that have a copy of American Canopy are welcome to bring them and get them autographed. For those that do not have a copy and wish to acquire one, WGNSS will have books for sale on the night of the banquet. Congratulations to **Nels Holmberg** who will be receiving the WGNSS Lifetime Achievement Award at the banquet. Nels certainly epitomizes the ideal of a true naturalist and citizen scientist and is a person all in WGNSS can admire. Be sure to look for the Nels' biography found in this issue of *Nature Notes*. Also at the banquet, we will be honoring this year's scholarship winners, **Justin Zweck** (Bo Koster Scholarship), **Paul Le** (Mickey Scudder Scholarship) and **Nathan Harness** (Menke Scholarship). Each scholarship winner will be presenting a brief description of their research project at the banquet.

Spring has really taken hold in Missouri and wildflowers are everywhere. Insects have begun to emerge and are taking advantage of the nectar and pollen offered by these flowers. And of course, where would spring be without the birds singing and nesting. Now is the time to get outdoors and see the beauty of the natural world all around us. In the month of May, WGNSS is offering many opportunities to do just that and to see some fantastic sites. Be sure to mark your calendars for one or more of the many botany walks or birding trips. For the birders, they "Go Where the Birds Are." The botanists do the same, only they "Go Where the Wildflowers Are." Also in May, the Entomology Group is offering something special with a field trip to the sand prairies of southeastern Missouri. Sand prairies are a rare habitat hosting many specialized insects. Many specialized plants are also found in these habitats too. More details about all the field trips WGNSS has to offer may be found in this issue of *Nature Notes*.

Please let me offer a welcome to new WGNSS members, **Emily Howald**, **Bob** and **Gail Buss**, **Casey Galvin**, **Richard Abbott**, **Ben Solomon**, **Douglas Hommert**, and **Francisco Linan**, who joined after the first of the year. When you are at a WGNSS meeting or on one of the many WGNSS field trips and see someone new, be sure to introduce yourself and make our new members feel welcome. If you are new to WGNSS, let me encourage you to get involved and take advantage with as many of our activities as possible.

Please note that if you happened to miss the WGNSS Photo Contest Judging Night in April, you may still find all the photos that were entered on our website, www.wgnss.org. The winning

will serve as a spiritual draw—a reason to return to this place again regardless of what success I might have at finding insects in the coming months.

Nels Holmberg is the 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner

George Van Brunt

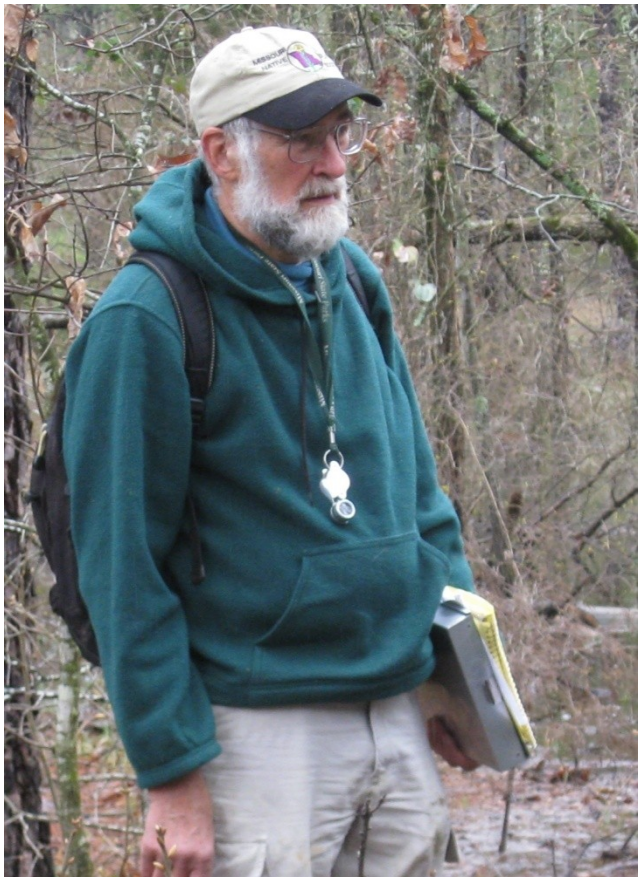
Nels Holmberg, WGNSS member since 1996, retired in 1998 so that he could accompany Fr. Sullivan on his weekly botany walks and learn to identify Missouri plants. In the time since then, Nels has become quite an expert at plant identification, especially identification of bryophytes. We are not giving him this award for his expertise in plant identification, but for what he has done with his expertise.

Nels has conducted an extensive sampling regimen on 147 acres of the Dana Brown Woods section of Shaw Nature Reserve to develop a plant list and observe changes due to prescribed burning and invasive species control programs. This work resulted in a list of 565 vascular plant species that is part of the biodiversity database for SNR. His data on vegetation changes are being analyzed in concert with another ecologist/statistician and will result in one or more publications in a restoration ecology journal in coming years.

Nels began collecting specimens for the Missouri Botanical Garden herbarium in 1998. Currently his official count is 2,930 but, due to a backlog, the actual count is close to 4,000 specimens. Included in the 4,000 specimens are nine bryophyte state records, seven from Missouri, one from Oklahoma, and one from Illinois, and nearly 400 county bryophyte records. This work has resulted five publications co-authored with the late Carl Darigo and John Atwood.

Nels is conducting or has conducted bryophyte surveys at Meramec State Park, Morris State Park, Onondaga Cave State Park, Hickory Canyon Natural Area, Taum Sauk Mountain State Park, and Hawn State Park. He has also conducted numerous plant surveys for the Missouri Department of Conservation and other public and private entities.





Photos by Rex Hill.

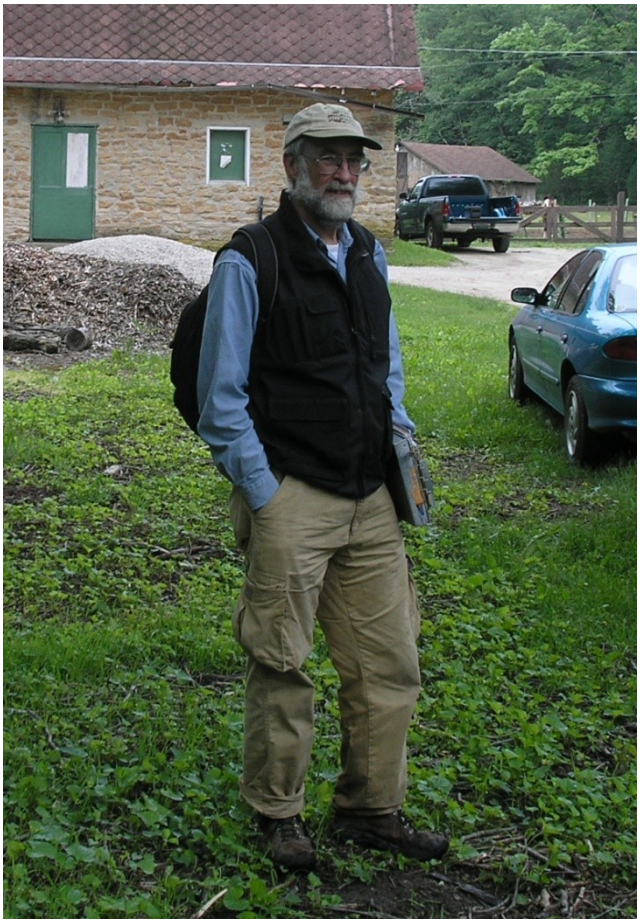


Photo by Rex Hill.

Nels has performed extensive plant surveys on both public and private land in the 13 square mile LaBarque Creek watershed. He also initiated, organized and participated in snail surveys with the late Ron Oesch. His work in the LaBarque Creek watershed included surveys on Don Robinson's 843 acre property. Don Robinson was always very interested in the work that Nels was doing there and Nels repeatedly informed him of the wonderful biodiversity his property supported. With this information and encouragement from others including Doug Ladd and Peter Raven, Don Robinson willed his property to become the new Don Robinson State Park. Nels has followed up on his work there by contributing ideas to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for their Management Plan for the park.

For the past 12 years, Nels has been the Missouri Native Plant Society coordinator for the Master Naturalist Certificate Program at Meramec Community College and, as such, participated in the design and implementation of that program and set up 32 courses, 15 of which he taught or co-taught. Each course involves classroom work and a field trip. He also conducts field botany trips in support of the Horticultural Program at Meramec. Nels sometimes leads the WGNSS Monday Botany Walks and has been a frequent contributor to *Nature Notes* Botany Field Trip reports. From time to time he arrives at the Monday Botany Field Trip with people we haven't met before, people he has gotten interested in "seeing what botany is all about." Sometimes these people return and sometimes they don't.



Photo by Peggy LeFarth.

Nature Study Societies were promoted by the Smithsonian Institution in the 1920s for the purpose of involving ordinary citizens in scientific projects. Nels Holmberg, an outstanding citizen scientist, embodies this ideal.

2013 Scholarship and Grant Winners

Emily Christensen

This year the Education Committee congratulates the three winners of our scholarships and our grant. Our new grant is the Bo Koster Grant for Nature Study. This grant is to support the fieldwork of a college student in natural history.

The first year's winner of the new Bo Koster Grant for Nature Study is **Justin Zweck**, a PhD student at St. Louis University. The main objective of his research is to study the reproductive biology of *Asclepias meadii*, a threatened species, at a healthy Ozark glade population on Profitt Mountain. He will be trying to determine what factors contribute to the success of this population. His research