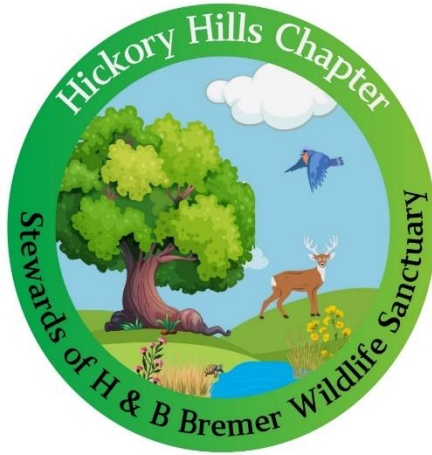




Hickory Hills Highlights

Hickory Hills Chapter - Illinois Audubon Society

Stewards of H & B Wildlife Sanctuary

Hillsboro, Illinois

Fall 2025

The H & B Bremer Sanctuary was donated by Helen and Betty Bremer to the Illinois Audubon Society piece by piece until the entire 203-acre property was finalized in 1977. The Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society was founded in 1980 and is responsible for caring for the property. Volunteers meet on Tuesday and Thursday mornings to maintain the property for the benefit of the plants and animals that call the sanctuary home. All activities are guided by the management plan composed by the Bremer Board and approved by the Illinois Audubon Society's Board of Directors. We continually welcome members of the chapter and of the society to join us at the barn to help with our daily and seasonal chores as well as the special events that take place periodically. New volunteers are always welcome.

One of the highlights of the summer season is the bluebird census that is compiled annually on our bluebird trail. Some years the bluebird trail produces many fledglings, and other years it does not. There are many variables that play into the census—some are known, and others can only be speculated. Spring weather plays a large role as well as predation by raccoons, snakes, and sometimes insects like black flies that bite a hatchling's nasal cavity, which may swell closed and suffocate them. House wrens are also known to overtake boxes and eggs, which are found pecked on the ground below the next box. A big thank you to volunteer Nancy Redman for assembling the information about the 2025 bluebird data at Bremer Sanctuary and for managing the bluebird trail.

Bird species	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Rate	Banded
Bluebird	216	164	146	68%	143 nestlings
Tree swallow	74	65	53	72%	53 nestlings
House wren	150	125	122	81%	none
Chickadee	23	19	18	78%	none

Comments

We had 50 bird boxes this season. All 50 were used by one or more of the above species. Eastern Bluebirds used 31 boxes, Tree Swallows used 16 boxes, House Wrens used 17 boxes, and the Black-capped Chickadees used 3 boxes. Twelve boxes were used by 2 different species, and two boxes were used by 3 species during the same breeding season. Twenty boxes were exclusively used by Eastern Bluebirds. Besides the nestlings, seven adult birds were also banded during the year.

A Note from the Bremer Board. Please be aware that we do not have the ability to take any injured animals or orphans. If you find any young animals without a parent, be patient as the parent is probably in the area. For injured animals, feel free to contact Tree House Wildlife Center, Inc. in Dow, Illinois at (618) 466-2990. No one at Bremer is qualified to treat them.

There always seems to be something going on at Bremer Sanctuary. Besides the typical workdays every Tuesday and Thursday mornings, cars from different states can be found at the barn parking lot on any given day, a major attraction being the trails that are maintained by our volunteers. We have seen folks enjoy their lunches at the picnic tables under the pavilion, and others just stop by to enjoy the natural world. To encourage a variety of people to visit the sanctuary, we have programs for all ages. This summer the University of Illinois Extension conducted two kids' programs, and several adult programs open to the public were held in the barn.

This summer Bremer Lane was oiled and chipped, and a new CRP contract was signed for 11 acres. Work continued on Sericea control in our prairies. After a hard frost this fall, we will begin honeysuckle control. We will also prepare the land for prescribed burns that we plan to conduct during the dormant season. Data for the bluebird trail is listed, and there are nature stories in this newsletter. If any of these activities appeal to you, contact us and tell us of your interests. Read on and learn more.

Butterfly or Moth? by Jerry Prater

Bremer steward and Master Naturalist Ray Luebbert presented an interesting program for a small but enthusiastic public group on Saturday, August 16, discussing many questions of these fascinating creatures.

Opening his program with identification, Ray explained an easy and quick way to distinguish the two by careful attention to the antennae. Butterflies have what is called a "clubbed" antenna tip while moths have tiny sensory hairs along the margins of their antenna. A second distinguishing feature is their posture when resting. Butterflies hold their wings upright above their bodies while moths relax their wings laying them flat along their bodies. In general, butterflies tend to be more colorful. But color varies in both groups.



Speaking specifically about the monarch butterfly, Ray revealed that monarchs will migrate nearly 3,000 miles to their wintering ground in northern Mexico, as they congregate with hundreds of thousands of their "cousins." The long return trip may take as many as four generations to reach their summer ranges. Illinois monarchs can be seen as early as March but more likely in May. Their black and orange markings make them one of the most recognized species of butterfly. Be careful, however, not to confuse them with their mimic, the viceroy that has similar colors.

Like other butterflies and moths, a monarch life goes through multiple stages—from a tiny egg laid on the underside of a milkweed leaf to the caterpillar stage then snuggled in a chrysalis and eventually to emerge as a colorful adult.

Monarchs can be found in every Illinois county and have been voted as the official insect of Illinois.

U of I Extension Summer Programs for Kids at Bremer Sanctuary - Ray Luebbert

Two children's summer activities sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension office were conducted by Beth Groves in July and August. With help from the Bremer Crew, "Web of Life" and "Outdoor Cooking" programs occurred on the grounds of the sanctuary.



Beth, a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist, started the *Web of Life* program by explaining to the kids how everything on our plant is interconnected and had related craft activities for the kids. A scavenger hunt and wagon ride added to the fun of the day.

Then, aided by the Bremer Crew, Hickory Hills president Jim Hefley took the kids on a hike down to Cress Creek, waded into the creek, and gathered water samples that were taken to the barn and studied. Using the new microscope, the kids were able to examine all kinds of critters and see them on the big screen. While in the stem room, they also had a chance to view the many nature displays.



At the August program, Beth led the Outdoor Cooking for Kids program. She began the event by reminding the kids that hand washing was the first step. Beth described the way the kids should wash their hands and then demonstrated it to them. A second reminder was never to start a fire unless an adult is present.

She then told the kids about the options that they had to cook. The choices were blackberry cobbler, popcorn, or chicken nachos. Aluminum foil was available if popcorn or nachos was the choice. Popcorn and nachos were the main choice for the kids. They wrapped either the popcorn or the nachos and placed them on a grill over the open fire. The kids were able to do this on their own.



Beth made a blackberry cobbler with the assistance of Bremer member Jim Hefley. The cobbler was made in an old-fashioned iron kettle that was placed over the open fire. Although the cobbler took a while to bake, it was worth the wait. It was scrumptious! The kids also enjoyed their snack. Both the kids and their parents had a great time at the Outdoor Cooking program at Bremer Sanctuary.



Thanks to Beth, Jim, and the Bremer Crew for helping to conduct great summer programs for kids at Bremer Sanctuary this summer.

Update on the Bremer Herp Study

Last spring the Illinois Audubon Society commissioned a herpetology study for Bremer Sanctuary. The results of that study, which surveyed reptiles and amphibians found at the sanctuary, were sent to us recently. Seven frog, three turtle, and four snake species were found on the property. The study commended the Bremer Sanctuary board on the management plan that we use on our prairies and woodlands. The herpetologist feels there is great potential to find more reptiles and amphibians by continuing the management plan that we have been following for more than two decades.

H & B BREMER SANCTUARY EVENTS - SUMMER 2025 by Jerry Prater

In late spring, workers arrived with a loaded truck that became a thirty by eighteen shelter for the wagon and its attachments. In a few hours, two and a half men (the half being the supervisor) spread out a truckload of metal, raised it into shape, and completed construction. Removing the wagon from the equipment shed opens more usable workspace for the mowers and other equipment.



Spring also brought the "Painted Ladies" art group back to the pavilion. Made up of mainly retired art teachers, the group captured the beauty of the west prairie in spring bloom. More sessions followed later during the summer.

An I.T. specialist (and retired police officer) visited the sanctuary with a proposal to upgrade our security cameras. As a result, the new cameras inside and out enhance a visual record of the coming and goings around the barn entrance.



Several school groups enjoyed summer outings offered by Bremer stewards. Short hikes, scavenger hunts, wagon rides, crafts, and aquatic investigations kept the kids busy on their adventures. President and retired aquatic biologist, Jim Hefley took the opportunity to show off our new microscope, which can project images from the tabletop to the large flatscreen TV for better viewing by the budding scientists.

The entrance road got a badly needed upgrade. Due to limitations imposed by easements, the work began at the Bremer cemetery and continued to the barn. Our contractor graded and crowned the roadbed, improving drainage and solving the pothole problem. Oiling and chipping put the final touches on our new road.



The bluebird trail is composed of 50 boxes. Our birding specialist has reported an increase in nesting activity and banded 143 nestling bluebirds this year. In total, 202 birds were banded at Bremer Sanctuary this year.

On the restoration front, our contract-worker continues to fight invasives in our prairies and woodlands. The big three include Sericea in the prairie and Bush Honeysuckle and Autumn Olive everywhere! We are hoping for a great burn season to catch up on our prescribed fire activities, which help control the invasive species. The Illinois

Audubon Society, the owner of Bremer Sanctuary, has recently signed a contract to put nearly 11 acres back into the CRP program. The site is the field in the northwest corner of our grasslands. As a result, the field was sprayed in September with a drone. Plans are for the field to be burned this fall and sprayed again next year before it is seeded with wildflowers next fall.



Bremer Volunteers at Work this Summer



Although hunting is not allowed at Bremer Sanctuary, adjacent neighbors actively hunt. To be safe we recommend wearing highly visible apparel during the firearm season on the following dates.

November 21 – 23

December 4 – 7

December 12 – 14

January 1 – 4

January 16 – 18

Archery season runs from October 1 through January 18, 2026. We recommend being highly aware of your surroundings and wearing brightly colored clothing. Please be courteous to all hunters.



The September Prairie at Bremer Sanctuary by Ken Schaal

Bremer Sanctuary is home to more than 75 acres of restored prairie. Some are more diverse than others, but the one most frequently visited is the West Prairie - the one next to the barn. Many of the images were taken at this prairie in September. To the pollinators, wildflowers are the most important part of the prairie.



Owl Prowl by Don Krefft

On Saturday, October 4, there was a nice crowd, estimated at 75 people, for the annual H & B Bremer Sanctuary Owl Prowl. To the delight of those in attendance, Marcie from Treehouse Wildlife Center in Dow, Illinois, brought four owls to the event. Two of the owls, a Barred Owl and a Screech Owl, are visually handicapped and permanent residents of Treehouse. The other two owls, sibling Great Horned Owls, were



raised at Treehouse and released at the end of our Owl Prowl program. What a thrill to see the owls flying off into their new home! A contest was held to name the released owls. By proclamation the winners were *Ozzie* and *Hooti*. *Ozzie* was named by Hunter Helfrich, and *Hooti* was named by Barrett Miller and Riley Beaty. It was a fun program on a pleasant autumn evening.

Sedge Wrens in Autumn: Nesting Activities in Illinois' Prairies

As autumn sweeps across the prairies of Illinois, a tiny, elusive bird becomes an intriguing subject for amateur naturalists, the Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus stellaris*). Unlike many migratory birds that leave their breeding grounds in late summer, Sedge Wrens often arrive in Illinois during late summer and early autumn, and sometimes nest in our prairie as late as September. This unusual timing makes their nesting behavior a fascinating spectacle amid the golden grasses and crisp air of the prairie. They have been



seen and heard at Bremer Sanctuary in the past, including late this summer. However, it is hard to know if they nested and fledged any young here this fall.

The Sedge Wrens favor wet meadows and prairie habitats with abundant sedges and grasses, which are common at the sanctuary. Cleverly concealed low among dense vegetation, their nests are dome-shaped structures woven from fine grasses and sedge blades. Males often build several "dummy"

nests, which many wrens tend to do, to attract females and to confuse predators. The true nest—carefully lined with softer material—becomes a haven for eggs and, eventually, for nestlings.

During autumn, attentive naturalists may observe males singing persistently to defend territories and attract mates. The Sedge Wren's song is a rapid, dry "chap-chap-chap," easily overlooked amidst rustling prairie winds. Once paired, females lay a clutch of 5-8 eggs. Both parents remain vigilant, guarding their nestlings from predators such as snakes and small mammals.

As temperatures cool and days shorten, fledglings leave the nest and learn to navigate the prairie. Some may linger if warm weather persists, while others continue their migration southward to the gulf coast or into northeastern Mexico. The Sedge Wren's flexible nesting schedule is thought to be an adaptation to fluctuating prairie conditions, offering a rare opportunity for autumn birdwatchers to witness nesting activity when most other species have departed.

Seeing Sedge Wrens at Bremer Sanctuary in autumn is a rewarding experience—reminding us of the subtle wonders hidden in our prairies, even as the season draws to a close.

Bremer Summer Wildflower Walk - by Don Krefft



Naturalists met at the H & B Bremer Sanctuary on the morning of July 19th for the annual Summer Wildflower Walk. Bremer volunteer Ken Schaal led the group on a tour of the East Prairie. Along the way Ken mentioned the large amount of plant diversity that was in bloom. Some of the plants that were blooming included Compass plant, several species of Mountain Mint, lots of Bee Balm, and the colorful red Royal Catchfly.

Even a single orange Butterfly Milkweed was still in bloom! He pointed out a tall group of Cup Plants that contained water in each leaf node. The tour was cut short by a huge, booming thunderstorm, but everyone returned safely to the barn and enjoyed coffee, donuts, homemade cookies, and conversation.



Annual Open House & Potluck - November 10, 2025

The annual fall open house of the Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society will be held on Sunday, November 9, beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the Bremer Sanctuary barn. First up will be the program, where Brian “Fox” Ellis will portray Meriwether Lewis. Following the program and a brief meeting, a potluck meal will be served. The event is free and open to the public. Bring a dish to share.

Birds Along the Trail - The Ornithology of Lewis and Clark

The Corps of Discovery was first and foremost a scientific expedition sent out by Thomas Jefferson to “observe the animals of the country,” and the men collected more than 100 species of birds; more than 50 were new to science. With quotes from the journals and his own ornithological field notes, storyteller Brian “Fox” Ellis brings to life an important chapter of American natural history through exciting stories and hands-on science based on his biography, *Meriwether Lewis and the Corps of Discovery* (Fox Tales 2020).



Remaining 2025 Calander of Events

November 9, 5:00 p.m. - Annual Open House and Potluck. **IAS’s own Brian “Fox” Ellis as Meriwether Lewis in the program before the potluck.**

January 1, 2026 - Annual New Year’s Day Walk. More details will be published later.

‘Birds along the Trail’

Storyteller **Brian “Fox” Ellis** portrays Meriwether Lewis in a dynamic performance that engages listeners in scientific inquiry and natural history. Come spend an hour in the studio of one of America’s greatest naturalists and wildlife artist. November 9 at 5:00 p.m. at the barn.

When attending events, please dress appropriately. Trails are open from dawn until dusk every day.

Donations are always welcome.

Hickory Hills Chapter Board of Directors and Officers

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Jerome Epplin – Restoration

Jim Hefley - Chapter President, Restoration

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Don Krefft - IAS Chapter Rep, Treasurer, Restoration

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Photo credits in this issue go to Riley Beaty, Don Krefft, Ray Luebbert, Nancy Redman, Ken Schaal, and Steve Shyroch.



Trail Map is available above.



If you are enjoying this newsletter, you are either an Illinois Audubon Society member (dues reminder are sent directly from the IAS) or you are a “Friend of Bremer”, in which case the annual dues of \$10.00 are due in January and can be mailed to: Hickory Hills Chapter PO Box 395, Hillsboro IL 62049. However, you may join at anytime.



You can join or renew online at illinoisaudubon.org or scan QR Code.