

December 2015 . Maintenance and safety checks of buildings and grounds, seasonal mowing, firewood cutting splitting and stacking, storm clean-up, shelter house and toilet cleaning, litter pick-up and disposal, road grading, trail maintenance, equipment maintenance, scheduling shelter rentals and collecting shelter and camping fees, drinking water sampling . Shelter houses and Lodge are used every weekend by scouts, families and other groups. Natural Resource Center Educational Staff teaching school groups at Russell Woods and making classroom visits. PDRMA Risk Management and Loss Control review and preserve safety in progress for 2014 /2015 compliance.

Forest Preserve staff and volunteer land stewards are working on clearing the former Afton Tree Nursery area. In the 1970's, 6" tree seedlings purchased from IDNR were planted in rows and later transplanted into picnic and habitat areas at Afton. In the early development days at Afton there were no trees on site. Some of the trees that were not transplanted are still in the old tree nursery area (in photo below).



Local Artist and birder
 Peter Olson and his
 "January Birds" art print....
 All of these birds are in
 our Forest Preserves

European Starlings on a wire.

Rock Pigeons flying.



Largely unknown to each other in the breeding season, Larks, Bunting and Longspurs are thick as thieves in winter. They can be seen along plowed rural roadsides after snowstorms.

OWLS

are most visible in winter, occasionally active during the day.

Great Horned, Barred and Screech Owls are here all year; Snowy, Saw-whet, Long-eared and Short-eared Owls are scarce winter visitors.



Like Snow Geese, Eastern Screech Owls come in two color morphs: red & grey.



Great Horned Owl
 Northern Saw-whet Owl
 Barred Owl

Canada and the smaller Cackling geese are now recognized as two distinct species.



On rare occasions, large flocks of Canada Geese are pinheaded by Snows and/or Ross' Geese



Bald Eagles congregate along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in winter.

Snow Bunting

Horned Lark

Lapland Longspur

Black wingtips

"Blue" Snow Geese are color morphs, not a separate species.

Ross' Geese are smaller, with a stubbier bill

31" long 80" wingspan

Forest Preserve maintenance man Bob Knuuttila has added some interesting sculptures of wildlife with his chainsaw wood carvings on tree stumps in the forest preserves....here is one of his owls at Russell Woods



Among the bird world's most skillful fliers, Cooper's Hawks are common woodland hawks that tear through cluttered tree canopies in high speed pursuit of other birds. You're most likely to see one prowling above a forest edge or field using just a few stiff wing beats followed by a glide. With their smaller lookalike, the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawks make for famously tricky identifications. Both species are sometimes unwanted guests at in town bird feeders, looking for an easy meal (but not one of sunflower seeds)



This photo was taken
of a Coopers Hawk on
Alma St. in Sycamore

And winter finally arrivesAfton forest preserve above and Nehring forest preserve below



December 2015 Southern Preserves Maintenance Work List

Josh Clark

- Continued cleaning up maintenance yard at Afton
- Replaced stove pipes at Shabbona in Shelters 2 and 3
- Installed posts for gates at Afton and Sannauk
- Removed "lean to" shed at Afton that stored rough cut mower to open up space around machine shed
- Continued cleaning up future plant nursey area at Afton
- Sanded and painted garbage barrels at Afton
- Built and painted new screen frames to replace old flip up shutter on shelter 2 at Shabbona (install early spring)
- Burned brush piles at Afton
- Assisted AI with seed weighing
- Developing 2016 maintenance plan list for southern preserves
- Built and painted new info sign for Shabbona (install in early spring)
- Built bird nesting boxes
- Repaired old steps to shop at Afton and installed handrail
- Built and planted seed propagation boxes
- New heater and overhead door were installed at Afton shop

Projects
December 2015 – January 2016
Bill Prain, Northern Preserves

- Safety report redo for new tablet – *pending*
- Snow plowing
- Storm cleanup of limbs and trees along roads, lanes and trails
- Sign storage construction
- Road gravel layout and grading
- Shelter repairs
- Restore Miller Cabin Windows and Shutters – *In process*
- Fabrication of new benches, pipe gates and split rail fence – *In process*
- Administrative Priorities as called for
- Safety investigation and reporting

Winterfest

Saturday, January 16

~ SCHEDULE ~

9:30 a.m. ~ Bird Behaviors & Identification

Whether you are a beginning birder or just enjoy watching the birds, join us inside the Natural Resource Center to learn simple techniques for identifying birds as you watch our feeding station.

10:00 a.m. ~ Family Hike

Take a guided walk through the woods. (Meet out front)

10:00 to 11:30 a.m. ~ Candle Making

Volunteers will be on hand to assist in the making of hand-dipped candles you can take home with you. (One per person, please)

10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. ~ Crafts & Activities

Make and take crafts with helpful volunteers available to assist as well as other on-going family-friendly activities. (Large classroom)

11:00 a.m. ~ Woodpeckers

Join U of I Extension Educator Peggy Doty for a presentation on Illinois woodpeckers. (Small classroom)

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. ~ Snacks & Lunch

Available for purchase from the Genoa Prairie Gems 4-H Club

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. ~ Horse Drawn Wagon Rides

Enjoy the winter scenery of Russell Woods Forest Preserve from the comfort of a horse drawn wagon.
(Pick-up and drop-off in front of the Natural Resource Center)

1:30 p.m. ~ Story Time

Join Sarah Tobias as she reads "The Mitten" by Jan Brett. Children in the audience will help tell the story through the use of interactive props.
(Meet in Little Seeds Library)

2:00 p.m. ~ Geocaching

Join U of I Extension staff member Connie Handel for a beginners lesson on the exciting world of geocaching. After the lesson Connie will lead a hike to look for a cache located in the preserve. (Small classroom)

3:00 p.m. ~ Family Hike

End the day with a guided walk through the woods. (Meet out front)

