



Spring-Summer 2022 Newsletter

Join us for National Trails Day, June 4th

By John Daly, Member of the Education Committee and former Board Vice-President

National Trails Day has been celebrated on the first Saturday in June for many years. It recognizes the benefits that trails - federal, state, and local - provide for recreation and exposure to nature. The day encourages people to discover their local trails, become active concerning trail issues, and share their excitement for the outdoors.



On Saturday afternoon, June 4th, (1:00 pm-4:00 pm), the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy will host with the City of Middleton Parks & Recreation and Dane County Parks a three-hour event at Orchid Heights Park and throughout the lands of the

Conservancy. This is an open house concept with participants coming for all or part of the afternoon. The program activities can be done by participants on their own (self-guided) or with the assistance of a trained Naturalist or Volunteer. Orchid Heights Park in Middleton, which is adjacent to the Conservancy, will be the gathering place and trailhead.

A final program and schedule will be posted on social media by the hosts in mid-May and displayed at the trailhead. Volunteers and "Trail

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#RunToRestore with Prairie Chase on June 25th!

By Peter Witucki, Board Vice-President and Race Director

The 8th annual Prairie Chase is back! Join us at Orchid Heights Park on June 25th for a 5K Run/Walk on the main limestone path, or a 10K adventure exploring the more rugged terrain - and exceptional views - of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.



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Pheasant Branch
Conservancy

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Kubiak, Open Door Bird Sanctuary

Newsletter Editor

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From the Co-Presidents

Dear Friends,

It is always a refreshing sight to see the Conservancy prairies begin to green up each spring, and it was especially needed after this year's slow crawl out of winter. While some hardy volunteers spent time removing invasive species from the Conservancy on short, cold, winter days, it was also a time when the board and committees worked indoors and remotely from afar to make sure preparations were in place when spring finally sprang. With these preparations we were ready for successful controlled burns of the West Prairie, as well as the Hillside Savanna. This carefully planned management activity during cooperating weather, avoiding nesting grassland bird season, helps to cycle nutrients, create diverse habitat, and make way for new vegetation. These recently burned areas are to be noted, as they will soon be indistinguishable from the rest of the prairie, except for perhaps their taller plants and brighter blooms.

We're excited to participate in National Trails Day on June 4. Various activities will be available, as we encourage the entire community to realize and connect with the wonderment of Pheasant Branch. Activities will be planned throughout the Conservancy so watch www.pheasantbranch.org for details.

As the weather continues to warm, and we find ourselves out in the Conservancy more, it's important to remind ourselves of trail etiquette. Always be mindful of others enjoying the Conservancy. In

addition to others, we must respect both the land and the wildlife who call Pheasant Branch Conservancy home by remembering to keep dogs on leash at all times and to stay off closed trails and other areas closed for restoration activities.

Temporary closures only work if they are obeyed, and if they are not, areas may need to be permanently closed in our efforts to protect sensitive features. And while we expect visitors to not litter, it's always appreciated if you pick up what you can to keep the Conservancy clean and safe. There are many ways to be a good member of the Friends and we are very proud of our membership. We hope our positive behavior will set an example for others in our effort to protect, restore, and promote the Conservancy.

While in the Conservancy be sure to stop by the 5 kiosks to learn about upcoming events and seasonal information. A new interpretive sign will soon be placed along Pheasant Branch Road featuring the tussock sedge. We hope to see you on the trails, but if you need to reach us in the meantime, contact us both at the email address below.

Pam Shannon and Hans Hilbert

Pam Shannon *Hans Hilbert*

Co-Presidents
copresidents@pheasantbranch.org



Seeding the New Prairie – Feb 2022

By Lois Sater, Board Member and Development and Marketing Committee Co-Chair

The second 40-acre quadrant of the new addition to the Pheasant Branch Conservancy has now been seeded with over 200 different species of native prairie plants. Not only is the diversity impressive in this "Platinum Prairie," but the density of seeds per area seeded also surpassed initial planning. This was only possible with the amazing donations from all of you who contributed and with the teamwork between Dane County Parks, the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, and the Clean Lakes Alliance (CLA.) In late February 2022 representatives from the county, the Friends, and the CLA participated in a ceremonial seeding following the initial seeding.



Joleen Stinson, Dane County Parks Director, and others seeding the prairie in February 2022

This restoration of existing farmland back into natural prairie and wetlands will continue to improve the quality of water entering Lake Mendota and the Yahara Chain of Lakes now and into the future, as well as provide an enhanced and enlarged beautiful natural area for all of us to enjoy. What is good for the lakes is also good for us! Thank you to all who helped this to happen. We are halfway there with Seed the Need!

A video of the second quadrant seeding can be found at: <https://vimeo.com/688148472>

Please see page 10 for a list of the "Seed the Need" donors for 2021.



Membership/Donation Form



Name: _____
 Street: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

Membership Level:

Memberships purchased after 9/1 apply to following calendar year

- \$10 Student
- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Restoration
- Education
- Watershed
- Development & Marketing
- Special Events (such as Prairie Chase Run/Walk)
- Board Member

Additional Giving Opportunities

- \$_____ Unrestricted – use where needed most
- \$_____ Glen & Joan Pulver Education Endowment
- \$_____ Restoration Endowment
- \$_____ Seed the Need

Send this membership form and payment to:

Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Inc
 P.O. Box 628242
 Middleton, WI 53562

For charitable IRA donations or legacy giving, please use our legal name, PO Box address and Tax ID# 39-1838491

Joleen Stinson Named Dane County Parks Director

By Stefanie Brouwer, former Board Member and Newsletter Editor

Joleen Stinson, former Friend's administrative assistant, board member, committee member and volunteer, was recently named Director of Dane County Parks. In 2020 she was hired as the Deputy Director and was named Interim Director in 2021, following the retirement of Darren Marsh, who served as parks director for 28 years. This position has a vast set of opportunities and challenges, for which Joleen is eminently qualified. She will serve as the liaison between the Friends and Dane County on issues related to

the Conservancy including restoration of the new 160-acre property. We congratulate her on this achievement and look forward to working with her on many collaborative projects.

Joleen has a long history with the Friends. She became involved as a high school student studying environmental science with Deb Weitzel. She then attended UW-Stevens Point majoring in natural resources management and environmental education. After college she joined the Friend's board and began editing the newsletter. Later she worked as our part-time administrative assistant while furthering her career in park management. Joleen has worked for the City of Sun Prairie, Village of DeForest, Rock County Parks, Village of Waunakee, UW-Extension and Department of Natural Resources.



Joleen Stinson

In 2020, she was chosen as the Outstanding Park Professional of the year by the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association. The award recognizes park professionals who show outstanding leadership and dedication to their communities and is the highest honor for professionals working in the field.

Friends Receive Grant from Foundation for Dane County Parks

By Stefanie Brouwer, former Board Member and Newsletter Editor

The Friends have received an award from the Foundation for Dane County Parks for outreach to underserved populations. The grant will cover rental of all-terrain wheelchairs; program planning for individuals with disabilities; backpacks containing dip nets, magnifier, birding booklet, trail map and field guide; and Wonder Walk mini-lessons on the topics of forest bathing, landforms, lookouts,



All-terrain wheelchairs provided by Access Ability Wisconsin

prairie, springs and water. The application was submitted by the Education Committee.

Each year, the Foundation for Dane County Parks awards grants of up

to \$2000 to Friends organizations and partner groups that support education, interpretation, and volunteerism within the Dane County Parks system. During the 2021 grant cycle, the Foundation funded nine projects totaling \$17,000.00. The funds come from endowments managed by the Madison Community Foundation.

The Friends also received a grant in 2019 that was extended to 2021 due to the restrictions of the pandemic. That grant supported a "Dementia Friendly and Limited Mobility Day in the Conservancy;" an ALL-IN presentation on The Pheasant Branch Conservancy Watershed; and the Backpack Project.

Graber Pond Update

By Hans Hilbert, Co-President and Watershed Committee Member

Graber Pond is a kettle pond located on the northwest side of the City of Middleton. For over 40 years the city has used conservancy zoning to protect and promote the ecological importance of the pond and save it from the fate of three other kettle ponds in the city that have been urbanized, used for stormwater detention, and as a result lost their protected shoreline buffer spaces.

Since the early 2000's, northwest Middleton has been a fast-developing area of the city, especially in terms of new development that converts greenspace and cropland to buildings and other impervious spaces. With no natural outlet, water from the kettle pond, or prairie pothole, only leaves the Graber Pond Watershed through infiltration and recharge of groundwater; evapotranspiration through the air and vegetation; or by overtopping its northeastern rim which is the pond's lowest elevation.

In high water years, such as 1993 and 2018, Graber Pond's natural capacity can be exceeded which results in the overtopping water making its way into the Pheasant Branch Marsh. The water first passes through a stormwater management system designed for the Misty Valley Subdivision, after which it flows through a culvert under High Road and heads south entering into the Western Stream which flows through a culvert under Pheasant Branch Road and enters the Pheasant Branch Marsh.

Ideally this overtopping water would be allowed to diffusely flow over the land, slowing down and reducing its volume as it heads downstream. In actuality the flow has been channelized and routed through a poorly designed and failed stormwater management system. As a result, the water flow increases, the infiltration rate decreases, and additional pollutant laden water makes its way quickly into Pheasant Branch Conservancy. These pollutants include eroded sediments, phosphorus, seeds of invasive species, and other substances picked up along the way.



Since fall of 2021 the City of Middleton has been developing a plan that will divert stormwater runoff originating from west of Highway 12, and currently routed toward Graber Pond, to the Tribeca Wet Ponds located west of Middleton Outreach Ministries on Parmenter St. The plan includes redesign of these existing basins that will improve water quality and reduce flooding. After settling, the water makes its way into Pheasant Branch via the creek corridor, rather than a direct route into the marsh.

While the Friends support this routing and improved design, we continue to follow other developments and city proposals that will impact Graber Pond. Currently an open dialog exists between the city, National Electrostatics Corporation (NEC),

and the Friends as we work to balance interests in management of Graber Pond's elevation. In 2018 NEC experienced dangerous flooding in their high-tech facility. The city has proposed artificially drawing down the pond's elevation to try and prevent future flooding. NEC has invested significantly in additional flood mitigation practices. The Friends, advocating for keeping water higher upstream, are also interested in enhancing the wetlands and vegetation surrounding Graber Pond and redesigning and repairing the downstream Misty Valley stormwater system to balance all interests.

Trails Day

Continued from page 1

Ambassadors" will have reference copies of the programs and the fold-out trail maps to distribute.

A sample of the activities include:

- All-Terrain Wheelchairs provided by Access Ability Wisconsin (AAW)
- Demonstrations of Kite Flying by the Wisconsin Kitters Club
- Fun in Urban Nature (FUN) Exploration Tables
- Madison Reading Project – free books on nature, free ice cream
- Mini-Sessions on Forest Bathing and Music Therapy
- Naturalist-led or self-guided short hikes and a long hike
- Scavenger Hunts

It is our hope that this celebration of the outdoors will encourage people of all ages and abilities to discover or re-discover the Pheasant Branch Conservancy and enjoy the health benefits of being outside.

PBC Bird Monitoring, Year 2

Janet Kane, Restoration & Management Committee Member

Several years ago, local birders reported declines in grassland birds at Pheasant Branch Conservancy that were larger than comparable sites nearby. The Friends worked with Dane County Parks to make changes based on the birders' concerns. Sherry Caves and Deb Turski, Wisconsin Master Naturalists, selected 8 target species and designed a monitoring program to evaluate the changes. In 2021, the program's second full year, the Acker farm was added to the monitored area.

By 2018, Sedge Wrens and Willow Flycatchers had noticeably declined at PBC, and the other target species were rarely seen on site. Worldwide, grassland birds declined 50% since 1970, primarily because of habitat loss to intensive agriculture and suburban development. Conservancy areas with essential breeding habitat are critically important for these declining species.

2021 Observations of the 9 Target Species

In 2021, many Dickcissels took up residence on the Acker property! Sixty-two Dickcissels were reported on 19 checklists, ranging from 1-9 per checklist. In June, monitors reported many singing males, and in July juveniles appeared. Dickcissels weren't nesting in the restored prairies, but did well on the farmland. In recent years, extensive drought in the West displaced many Dickcissels, and

populations are known to fluctuate from year to year. Will they return in 2022?

Savannah Sparrows also nested on the Acker property last year. Monitors logged them on 13 checklists, ranging from 1-15 individuals. The previous year, none were observed in the restored prairies. We added Savannah Sparrows to the target species for the future.



Savannah Sparrow

In 2020, monitors observed Eastern Meadowlarks and some fledglings, the first record of nesting in recent years. In 2021, a single meadowlark was reported on 7 checklists. The Eastern Meadowlark is known to be extremely sensitive to human activity. Now that the trail is reconstructed and the southern half of the new parcel is seeded, maybe these skittish birds will again nest at PBC.

Willow Flycatchers are doing well. The 2021 average count, 3.46, was just slightly below 2020's record of 3.98. Last year was rough for Sedge Wrens. Monitors logged only 7

observations on 6 checklists, much lower than 2020's 108 birds across 45 checklists. Extreme and persistent winter weather across the Southeast in spring of 2021 impacted many short-distance migrants. We hope the population will rebound quickly. Sparrow species are rarely seen; two Grasshopper Sparrows visited during spring migration; no Clay-colored, Henslow's or Vesper Sparrows were reported.

Conclusions

2021 events linked to climate change – extreme drought in the Great Plains, icy weather in the Southeast, and reduced rainfall locally – may have affected some of the target species. But there are hopeful signs. Eastern Meadowlark fledglings in 2020, nesting Dickcissels and Savannah Sparrows in 2021, and the many Willow Flycatchers all document successful nesting. The Conservancy also provides R&R for many migrants traveling to and from their summer territories.

We've learned a lot about target species' habitat preferences. The County and the Friends are working to add habitat options by controlling tall prairie grasses, establishing areas of shorter vegetation, managing shrubs' stem density, and customizing seed mixes for site characteristics. Research consistently finds that one large habitat area has more birds AND more bird species than several fragmented parcels of equivalent area. The newly-acquired 160 acres provides lots of space to establish suitable habitats. We're looking forward to the discoveries ahead in 2022!

FOPBC at the Bird & Nature Festival

By Mary Bachhuber, Volunteer with the Education Committee

The 2022 Bird & Nature Festival was held on April 24th at Warner Park in Madison. The festival is a free, family-friendly event celebrating Madison Bird City, Arbor Day and Earth Day. The FOPBC Education Committee was invited to have a table at the festival again this year. The festival highlights many nature organizations through displays, demonstrations and hands on activities. This year FOPBC provided a family friendly scavenger hunt in addition to the visual display and touch items such

as rocks, pinecones and very large tree cuts! Volunteers from the Friends were available to answer questions and assist folks to get started with the scavenger hunt. Cayla Matte, the Education Coordinator for FOPBC, did a great job of pulling together the display and activities. We were lucky to be located near the live Birds of Prey from Open Door Bird Sanctuary. It was a chilly and very windy day on April 24th but that did not get in the way of many people out enjoying the festival. People stopped by the table inquiring about where the Pheasant Branch Conservancy is located or relating their wonderful times walking the trails in the Conservancy.

Madison Friends of Urban Nature (FUN) organizes and hosts the Bird



Barred Owl

and Nature Festival along with monthly walks in several Madison and Middleton parks including Pheasant Branch Conservancy. The walks in the Conservancy are held the 4th Saturday of every month. Full information about the walks can be found on the Friends' website.

QR Code Trail Coming to the Conservancy

By Mary Bachhuber, Volunteer with the Education Committee

Perhaps you recognize them: QR codes. They seem to be popping up everywhere and soon will be used at points of interest in Pheasant Branch Conservancy. QR stands for quick response and the codes are described as bar codes on steroids at tech.gov.sg. Scanning bar codes is routine now at the grocery store. QR codes can hold up to 10x more information than bar codes.

Here is how the idea for a trail developed. Liz Lusk, a participant in the Wisconsin Master Naturalist Course, which is sponsored and conducted the FOPBC, was very

concerned about the Springs in the Conservancy. She felt people were not respecting the area. Peter Witucki and Mary Bachhuber joined Liz to explore and make recommendations to provide education about the Springs. After much exploration it was decided to provide the information by a QR code and the group realized that a whole trail of QR code points could be developed.

The trail will be hosted by the FOPBC website. Smartphones today can open a code using the camera. If a phone does not recognize codes, an app can be downloaded to the phone for free. Ten points of interest have been identified in the county and city sections of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy. By opening a code users will see a photo related to the point of interest and hear information

about that point from an expert in the topic. The information will also be available directly from the website making it accessible even if not in the Conservancy. The plan is to have at least some of the points of interest installed and ready for use by National Trails Day on June 4th.



An example QR code that directs to a conservancy trail map - try scanning with your mobile device!

Restoration and Management Committee

By Gary Sater, Board Member and Restoration and Management Committee Co-Chair

Although we have not sponsored a “workday” open to our wonderful volunteers for some time now, we have been busy. Our last workdays during the winter season were limited in size largely due to the type of work we were doing and the area within which that work was being done. At that time, we were clearing and treating invasives within the wetlands on the eastern and southern edges of the county portion of the Conservancy, bordering the boundary with the city portion. Much of the other recent wetland restoration work has been done by contracted our third three-year AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) grant. We remain politically aware and involved in the city’s Graber Pond and the new proposed “Acker Farm” housing development projects, as they both have the potential to impact the work we’ve been doing in restoring our vast and valuable wetlands within this watershed. Workdays open to our volunteers will begin again sometime in June according to our Conservation Land Manager, Rob Schubert. Stay posted on these upcoming offers to volunteer in 2022.

We’ve been able to conduct two very successful prescribed burns already this spring. The first occurred on the day following the Spring Equinox, March 21st, within the western prairie up to the composite trail. The second was done on April 10th and involved



Drone photos of spring burn activity

Frederick’s Hill, the areas surrounding the hill and the eastern prairie up to the composite trail. As you can see from the elevated drone images, both of these burns were very successful. Prescribed burning continues to be a valuable tool in our R&M toolbox for managing these natural landscapes.

Another ongoing and important project involves the reconstruction of the “belly board” and protected approaches to the Springs. The deterioration of the existing structure and the increasing use and erosion of the surrounding area necessitated a redesign and rebuild of this space. In collaboration with Dane County Parks and the Department of Natural Resources, R&M has been integrally involved in this project. We will hopefully have this completed over the spring and

summer. Thank you to all who have helped reduce the use and erosion issues by not approaching the Springs from this previous and now removed structure. Also, thank you to all who’ve refrained from hiking the hill during this wet spring season, as it is very helpful for a short time in reducing erosion and trail repair. It will soon be open for use!

Look for an upcoming R&M t-shirt fundraiser to support our work in the wetlands going forward. A new Tussock Sedge sign will soon be erected along the composite trail to replace the Garlic Mustard sign, utilizing an illustrated version of this important sedge by Chris Kubiak. This illustration will be used on the new t-shirt and proceeds will be saved for our wetland R&M work. Rob Schubert and Susan Gruber are busy making this happen soon!

R&M is also considering a Dog Awareness Week campaign to inform and encourage dog owners to keep their dogs on a short leash and to not only bag their dog waste but to also carry those bags out of the Conservancy and dispose of them properly. Some dog owners are still leaving the bags along the trail or throwing the bags out into the Conservancy. Please respect the rules and remain courteous, such that your ability to walk or run your dogs remains a privilege within the PBC. Be aware that most conservancies do not allow the presence of dogs. Thank you for your cooperation.

Lastly, National Trails Day is coming up on June 4th. Look for special activities occurring within the Conservancy to celebrate our beautiful Conservancy!

Involving Youth in Restoration Work

By Gary Sater, Board Member and Restoration and Management Committee Co-Chair

Providing opportunities for youth to assist us in our restoration work in Pheasant Branch Conservancy is essential to fostering their care, concern and conservation efforts throughout their lives. Youth are indeed the natural lands caretakers of tomorrow. The Friends involve youth in numerous ways to foster this relationship with natural lands and wildlife. Our Restoration and Management Committee is hosting MOUSY (Madison's Only United Synagogue Youth,) a Jewish youth group from the Beth Israel Center for the second year in restoration work. R&M Co-chair Gary Sater and Mousy Director Deborah Hoffman hope to continue this relationship for many years. Additionally, R&M collaborates with Operation Fresh Start through the

leadership of R&M's Susan Gruber and Rob Schubert (Conservation Land Manager). Their work has been invaluable over the years. The FOPBC Education Committee through the leadership of Deb Weitzel and Cayla Matte has long been a leader in activities of all sorts involving youth. These efforts range from environmental education within the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, to seed collection in collaboration with R&M, to providing nature photography of the Conservancy for our annual calendar fundraiser.

The future of restored and well managed natural and wild places, including Pheasant Branch Conservancy, will be held in the hands of our youth. R&M values this human resource and remains committed to providing opportunities for youth to get involved early in their lives and to develop values and ethics that will sustain their care, concern and conservation of these places into the future.



MOUSY group from Beth Israel Center

Prairie Chase

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Stick around for the post-race celebration featuring the free Kids' Fun Run, light refreshments, and live music by the Currach Irish Trio!

Registration is open now at: www.prairiechase.com

Prairie Chase is cup-free! In an effort to be better stewards of the Conservancy and reduce single-use garbage, Prairie Chase will not have disposable cups at aid stations or the finish. Instead, participants can refill their reusable cup, handheld bottle, or hydration pack from water coolers along the route. Learn more about #cupfreeracing at our website.

Calling all volunteers! We are looking for volunteers on race day! Volunteering at Prairie Chase makes for a fun, exciting morning, and our volunteers are essential to a successful event. Head to our website to learn more and to sign up for a volunteer shift.

Prairie Chase is a celebration of community and our relationship with Pheasant Branch Conservancy. Race proceeds support the restoration, education, and advocacy work of the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

Conservancy Days

Conservancy Days occur on odd months, 3rd Wednesdays, 6:30 to 7:30 PM. See our website for registration and location.

Evening with PBC Herptiles
Wednesday July 20, 2022

Join the Madison Herpetology Society with educational reptile species in the Conservancy, discussing herptiles in the area. Frog & Toad Survey coordinator Chris Kubiak will also discuss community science efforts in the Conservancy.

FUN (Friends of Urban Nature)

FUN events occur on the 4th Saturdays of the month, 1:30-3 PM. No need to register. Location is 4864 Pheasant Branch Rd parking lot.

Alex Singer: Prairie Plant ID
Saturday June 25, 2022

Sean Gere: Summer Tree Phenology
Saturday July 23, 2022

Robin King: Late Summer Flora & Fauna
Saturday August 27, 2022

ALL-IN Program

Grassland Birds Citizen Science Project with Janet Kane
Tuesday July 26, 2022

Active senior adults are invited to join Janet Kane of the Grassland Bird Monitoring Project on a Conservancy walk to learn about grassland species and restoration efforts.

See our website for registration and location.



2021 Donors

\$100 - \$499

Paul and Kathie Beckett
Susan and George Benton
Mary and Bob Brod
John Cole

Dana and Sandra Corbett
Lynn DeRolf
Rick Eilertson
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Dane County Land & Water Resources

The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy would like to thank these major contributors to the 2021 Seed the Need Campaign.

\$4000 - \$5000

Bruce and Linda Christensen

Newcomb Construction

Pat Paska

\$1000 - \$3999

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Michael Niebauer

Gary and Lois Sater

John Selbo and Burnie Bridge

Deborah and Pat Turski

Mark and Marilyn Warshauer

Madison Community Foundation

Peter Witucki and Brittany Allen

Shinrin-Yoku: The art of noticing, the practice of feeling good

By Kate Bast, Certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide

I went to the woods because ...

-Thoreau

We all know that famous nugget by Henry David Thoreau. Our reasons for going to the woods, to nature, may be the same as his, or vastly different. In the end, though, it doesn't really matter why you go to nature – just that you get there. And stay awhile.

Why? The simple answer is that Nature makes us feel good! Reflect, just for a moment, on how nature makes you feel, when you are with it, in it? When you listen to the wind in the trees, how do you feel? And where do you feel it? When you notice textures, or colors, how and where do they make you feel them? Synesthesia is the term for this phenomenon -- noticing with one sense, that activates the felt sense of the experience through another sense.

Shinrin-Yoku, "forest bathing" as the term translates, was developed in Japan in 1982, is a practice that embraces those very noticing - asking always: how, and where, do you feel this. The practice immerses us in the atmosphere of nature, letting it wash over us, activates all of our senses (there are far more than just five) to help us find stillness, presence in the moment, space, and just be-ingness.

Some call it mindfulness. I call it mindlessness. When we are alive in our senses, deeply noticing nature, our rational minds seem to switch off. Our senses exist only in the present moment, and when we are alive in that palpable moment, we create space for other things to bubble up – many levels of connection, rest, invigoration, joy, grief, creative ideas – as the hamster wheel in our brains spins off to be lost elsewhere in the woods.



The evidence – international, evidence-based scientific research - tells us why nature makes us feel so good. The benefits for our physical and mental well-being are myriad, and lasting. Essentially, our sympathetic nervous system responses (fight, flight, freeze, stress, chaos) soften, and the parasympathetic system (rest, digest, heal) is amplified. Our muscles relax, and tension releases, as our respiration, heart rate and blood pressure decrease - these benefits can last up to 5 days. Viewing fractal patterns, even for just 5 minutes, decreases our stress levels by 60%. Phytoncides, emitted from pines and other conifers, increase our immune function by 40% after a few hours in the woods, as our Natural Killer cells,

the virus and tumor fighters, are activated. Creativity increases 20% after 2 hours in Nature. Dopamine, the happiness hormone, increases, and we feel lighter, happier, joyful. The practice is a balm to mood disorders, anxiety, depression, and tends PTSD and ADHD. People recovering from surgery heal 12% faster when recuperating in a room with a view.

You can walk either path with the practice of Shinrin-Yoku. In Japan, where a connection to nature is culturally embedded, the walks measure the health benefits and their effects – with electrodes, analysis of salivary stress hormones, vitals measurements. The Western version focuses on the health benefits, yes, but also what else one finds in their time with – not just upon – Nature. It is about understanding the web of connection and who or what else is there with us. It is about building a relationship with Nature, which can be profound, as we come to know a spot, feel welcomed there, love and even tend it. The evidence is clear: When we tend nature, it tends us, and the relationship becomes reciprocal, to both our benefit.

It's clear, Nature is medicine, in so many ways. The forest is the therapist, Nature provides the healing and what we individually and uniquely need – it fulfills our reason for going to the woods. The guide opens the doors to it all, through a series of invitations, or prompts, designed of the moment based on what Nature is providing.

Hope to see you in the woods June 4, 2022, at Pheasant Branch Conservancy's Day of the Trails events – including a forest bathing session scheduled for 1:30-3 pm!



The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy

PO Box 628242
Middleton, WI 53562

*To sign up for a paperless
newsletter, please email
office@pheasantbranch.org*



The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy

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Calendar of Events

June

- 4 National Trails Day – A Celebration of the Outdoors
- 20 Board of Directors Meeting
- 25 8th Annual Prairie Chase
- 25 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Prairie Plant ID

July

- 18 Board of Directors Meeting
- 20 Conservancy Day: Evening with PBC Herptiles
- 23 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Summer Tree Phenology
- 26 All-In Program: Grasslands Birds Citizen Science Project

August

- 15 Board of Directors Meeting
- 27 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Late Summer Flora and Fauna