

Conservancy Notes



Wildlife on the farm: It's not always simple.

by Drake Hokanson

Farmers and ranchers everywhere have a love/not-so-much-love relationship with wildlife. They may love to see the winter birds at the feeder, but are less happy to see the raccoons pillage the sweet corn. But the whole relationship between agricultural folks and the wildlife that lives with them is more complicated and nuanced than most people think.

"To the lay person, 'wildlife' means a nice fawn," says Jim Munsch, Vernon County cattle raiser and farmer. He sees a broader picture: "Wildlife starts with bacteria and other micro-organisms in the soil, and goes all the way up the food chain."

Munsch believes agricultural producers must work for a strong ecosystem and a robust food chain. "The bottom of the food chain is land use—what's in the soil, proximity to the soil, what grows in the soil." He says you have to adopt land management practices that nourish all levels of the system. Thus, his definition of wildlife starts with bacteria and works its way up from there.

Among other things, Munsch uses grazing practices that mimic natural processes, including careful pasture

rotation to prevent his livestock from overgrazing in any particular area. "This feeds insects and on up the food chain—mice, voles, snakes—all the way up," says Munsch.

For instance, if the farm habitat supports small mammals and other food sources for coyotes, they will be less likely to attack cattle. He's never had trouble with coyotes on his place in the Coon Creek watershed. "If you have a robust food chain, a coyote doesn't have to face off a 1,200-pound cow," says Munsch.

His big problem is white-tailed deer, and it's personal. "We have allowed them to proliferate," he says. In addition to all-too-common deer/vehicle accidents, they carry diseases that affect cattle and others. "Everyone in my family has had at least one of the deer tick-related diseases, even the dog and cat."

Nonetheless, living with wildlife makes for good teaching moments. "The great-grandkids know they will always get a nature factoid from Grandpa," says Munsch. Together they explore different kinds of ants, find in-ground bees, watch the birds build nests. "Many people have taught me many things." And Munsch is eager to share what he knows.

"Once you've scratched around the web of life, it boggles your mind, the ebb and flow of species over the decades."



Photo by Abbie Church

Healthy soil and good grazing practices provide food for everyone in the food chain, according to cattle grazier Jim Munsch.



Nature in Your Neighborhood

by Megan Muehlenbruch, MPH, CHES, Health Educator
at Get Active La Crosse

As a person whose job is to help people connect with nature, I'm very glad to be in an area where a land trust – Mississippi Valley Conservancy – has that as part of its mission as well. Let me explain.



Megan Muehlenbruch

I'm the health educator in the La Crosse County Health Department's *Nature Connections* program. Funded through the La Crosse Community Foundation, the goal is to connect county residents to an abundant and diverse presence of nature in their daily lives to positively benefit their health.

In the last decade, the number of studies linking nature and health has skyrocketed. The mental health benefits appear endless, including reduced levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Positive correlations with productivity, focus, and attention have been found as well. In children, nature is often associated with reduced symptoms of ADHD and asthma. Physical activity, lower blood pressure, and improved air quality have all been linked to the presence of nature. As species diversity increases, the health benefits have been seen to get a boost as well. The list goes on.

The Nature Connections program seeks to increase knowledge of this nature-health connection through workshops and outreach; to facilitate and enable individuals and organizations alike to enhance the presence of diverse nature; and to connect residents to the abundant presence of nature that already surrounds us.



The mission and projects of Mississippi Valley Conservancy play an important role in optimizing health through nature. By conserving the presence of the natural areas around us, by making them places where residents can connect and learn; and by providing community outreach and engagement, the Conservancy is promoting and enabling this nature-health connection. Their efforts lend us, as residents, the opportunity to gain an appreciation and understanding for the nature that surrounds us, and the ability to reap the known health benefits. Nature is no longer just an environmental word; it's now a health-related word as well.



Above right: A young birdwatcher enjoys a nature hike at one of the Conservancy's 21+ nature preserves that serve as outdoor classrooms for educators and schoolchildren throughout the nine-county area served. Above left: Hikers enjoy insights gained on a hike guided by Conservancy staff at the Conservancy protected Eagle Eye State Natural Area. Locations and maps are available at mississippivalleyconservancy.org.

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If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your traditional or Roth IRA to Mississippi Valley Conservancy. You can donate up to \$100,000 each year without incurring income tax on your withdrawal - it's an efficient way to protect land, air, and water. For more information, call Carol Abrahamzon today at 608-784-3606 x 4.



Closer to 20 in 20!

These recent conservation agreements with the Conservancy have moved us closer to our dream of 20,000 protected acres in twenty years!

Outstanding Tree Farmer-of-the-Year Permanently Protects Land in Monroe County

From 1974 through 2016, the Kann family planted over 45,200 trees on their property. Now, thanks to your support, a land preservation agreement means the Kann tree farm will never be converted to rows of houses, but will always be shelter for bobcat, fisher, black bear and badger. Every spring the serenade of spring peepers, chorus frogs, and wood frogs will continue. Winter hikes reveal an abundance of wildlife tracks, proving the forest provides food and cover throughout the year. Thank you.



On Arbor Day, 2017, Gerald and Charlotte Kann celebrated the closing of their conservation agreement with the Conservancy. The thousands of trees they've planted, with the help of their sons Kurt and Karl, provide food and cover for a variety of wild-life throughout the year.

20 Year Habitat Investment Near Norwalk Protected Forever

George and Carmeen Johnston couldn't thank you enough for supporting private land conservation. Because you were here to help, 54 acres of prairies and oak woodlands near Norwalk will help protect the water flowing into the Kickapoo River and on down to the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers.

The Johnstons know that at some point they will be gone. They've spent a lot of time caring for their land and wanted to make sure it stayed a place to always enjoy the smile of the western sunflowers in the prairie and the mystique of the deep oak and hickory forest.

Carmeen expressed, "We're glad that our little bit of heaven can stay our little bit of heaven. We wouldn't have known what to do, if it weren't for the Conservancy and its supporters. Thank you."



George and Carmeen Johnston celebrated the closing of their conservation agreement with the Conservancy in March of 2017, along with conservation specialist, Megen Kabele. Their conservation act helps protect water that flows into the Kickapoo River.



What Snakeroot Teaches Us

It was a tale worthy of a Halloween outing. Cursed land. Death by poisoning. Abbie Church told the story of white snakeroot to the hikers on a recent Mississippi Valley Conservancy tour – a visit to one of the properties the landowners have permanently protected with a conservation agreement.

Abbie, the Conservancy's conservation director, reached down next to the trail to show a plant with white flowers commonly found in woods and fields at this time of year. Snakeroot likes to move into areas that have been disturbed, so the pioneers often found it invading the land they cleared. When cows ate it their milk became toxic and some of those who drank it died. Not knowing the cause and thinking the land was

cursed, the pioneers moved on only to have the same thing happen once again. Abraham Lincoln's mother was said to be one of the casualties of milk sickness, as it was called.

When the Conservancy protects land, it also learns and shares the lore of the land, which, in this instance, was just a little spooky.

Happy Halloween.

Snakeroot (Eupatorium rugosum) in bloom.



Photo by Abbie Church

JOIN US
IN CELEBRATING

*The land.
Our future.*

TOGETHER, WE'LL
FUND THE FUTURE
AT MISSISSIPPI VALLEY
CONSERVANCY'S
20TH ANNUAL
FALL FUNDRAISER.



20th Annual Fall Fundraiser

November 9, 2017 ~ 5:30 p.m.
The Radisson Ballroom

Tickets: \$50 in advance (includes 5 raffle tickets).
\$60 at the door.

Themed grazing menu. Live local music.
Conservancy update. Raffle. Live & silent auctions.

RSVP by November 6th

info@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

or call 608-784-3606 ext. 1

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Giving Thanks at Harvest Time

A message from the Conservancy's Executive Director



Carol Abrahamzon

Stepping outside as the eastern sky begins to lighten, I hear a few chirps and chatters from the morning birds. Earlier this summer the air was filled with tweets and twitters.

The difference a month can make. The sun rises 30 minutes later, the morning bird chatter has died down to an occasional chirp. Fall is upon us.

For me fall is a time for giving thanks. I am thankful for the bounty the garden has provided. I am thankful for the beauty I enjoyed all summer as flowers came to life, filled with buzzing bees, butterflies gracefully unfurled their wings, and baby birds took their first flight.

But most of all I am thankful for you. You are the reason we were able to help Carole Porter make her mother's wish come true – her wish to protect

Kickapoo Caverns for the bats that depend on it for their winter hibernation.

Because of your support, a Buffalo County family farm that raised five kids will remain a way of life for generation after generation. Joan fondly remembers her five children running through the fields, splashing in Rose Valley Creek, and helping dad and grandpa on the farm. Now her grandchildren help their dad check the fields, cool off in the creek, chase butterflies, and pick wildflowers for grandma. This 710 acre farm will continue to feed many families and provide a home for bees, birds, turtles and frogs.

Thank you for providing the bounty of a home to our bees and butterflies. Thank you for protecting clean water. Thank you for helping us get generations of kids playing in nature. Please continue to support our water, our wildlife and our way of life. You make all the difference in the future of the Driftless Area.

Together,
Carol Abrahamzon

**As the Fall days shorten,
I'm reminded of all that
you've done for the land.
I thank you, as well as
landowners, partners, and
staff, for the many gifts
of time, talent, and support
given to protect
this place we love.**



Contributions help save our beautiful lands.

Yes! I want to support our water, our wildlife, and our way of life with my gift today.

Gift Amount: \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 Other _____

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My check made payable to Mississippi Valley Conservancy is enclosed.

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Please include this form
with your gift to:

Mississippi Valley Conservancy
P.O. Box 2611, La Crosse, WI
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– OR –

Donate online at:
www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org

*Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a 501c(3) Non-Profit Organization.
Contributions are tax-deductible as provided by law.*





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Mississippi Valley Conservancy is a regional, non-profit land trust based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The Conservancy permanently conserved 19,389 acres of blufflands, prairies, wetlands, and streams in and around the Mississippi, Kickapoo, and Wisconsin River since our founding in 1997. Over 4,000 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowshoeing.

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Many thanks to Vendi Advertising!

When Vendi Advertising agreed to donate its services to refresh our image and communications, we were excited. We're happy to say that the creative solutions they delivered exceeded our expectations!

From updating our logo and messaging to delivering a whole new website and a gorgeous new *Conserved* magazine, the Vendi team went all out to create communications that are as breathtaking as the land we work to protect. Visit our website and we're sure you'll agree. The Vendi team also created our two beautiful new videos, our 20th anniversary logo, and they helped create the identity for our landmark Trail Trek Challenge event.

The result of this work is our greater ability to reach and engage the people who can make the biggest difference in protecting the land we call home.

There are many treasures to be protected. We couldn't do it without the talent and support of generous sponsors like Vendi Advertising.



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Join Us For These Upcoming Events!

- Nov. 4 **Greens Coulee Hike** – a *Linked To The Land* event sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System.
- Nov. 9 **20th Annual Fall Fundraiser** – RSVP at 608.784.3606 ext. 1
- Nov. 11 **Volunteer Work Day** at Holland Sand Prairie
- Dec. 9 **Mathy Quarry Hike** – a *Linked To The Land* event sponsored by Mayo Clinic Health System.

Details for all these events and more at mississippivalleyconservancy.org