Illinois Native Plant Society

The Harbinger

Newsletter *of the* Illinois Native Plant Society

SUMMER 2025
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"...dedicated to the study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and natural communities of Illinois."

Tephrosia virginiana (Goat's Rue) at Hooper Branch Savanna Nature Preserve in Iroquois County. Photo by Brian Charles.

In This Issue

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Message from the President

Happy Summer, Native Plant Lovers!

In June, the Southern Chapter hosted a very successful Annual Gathering. Participants enjoyed a variety of field trips and presentations by INPS grant award winners, John Schwegman, and Chris Benda.

Our web team is supporting each chapter and board member in converting to use an email address hosted by our website (ending in @illinoisplants.org) instead of using gmail addresses.

Though it's only mid-year, I am thinking about the next INPS board election and next year's board members after my term as president ends. If you are interested in a leadership position on the board, please reach out to me (inpspresident@illinoisplants.org) or any other board member.

I hope you are enjoying native plants in your garden and natural areas this summer!

Sincerely,
Emily Dangremond

Message from the Editor

Happy summer! I hope you have been able to get out and enjoy all that this time of year has to offer, like this Longhorn Bee (*Epimelissodes obliquus*) on Yellow Coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*). In this issue, you will find tips on how to distinguish the native American Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *americanus*), a review of a recent book on the oval sedges, and recaps of the annual gathering, a conference, and a collections tour. Please enjoy, and as always, we welcome any submissions for future issues.
– Brian Charles, Co-Editor

Submissions to the newsletter are always welcome!
Please contact editors: Chris Benda (botanizer@gmail.com), Brian Charles (brianmc4@illinois.edu), or Ingrid Felsl (ingridfelsl@gmail.com). Deadlines are March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1 for the spring, summer, fall, and winter issues respectively.

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2025 INPS Annual Gathering

By Chris Benda

I have attended nearly every INPS annual gathering for 10 years, but have not been able to participate in any since the Covid pandemic began, so I was especially happy to attend this year's gathering in southern Illinois in my hometown of Makanda, Illinois. The gathering was hosted by the Southern chapter and held at Touch of Nature Environmental Center, the same site as the last time the Southern chapter hosted.

These gatherings are so important for many reasons and one is connecting with fellow plant enthusiasts. After mingling and eating on Friday evening, we settled down for a talk by renowned Illinois state botanist John Schwegman about the natural divisions of Illinois. John showed many photos taken throughout the state during his tenue and shared how he was tasked with creating the first natural divisions of Illinois map. His contributions to the natural history of Illinois are many, as chronicled in his "Natural History of Illinois" book, and we extend our gratitude for his tremendous work with every aspect of natural resource conservation in Illinois.

On Saturday, there were several field trips offered and I led morning and afternoon field trips at Simpson Barrens Ecological Area in Johnson County. On the way there, I stopped at a small gravel parking lot at the intersection of Highway 147 and Trigg Tower Road in the small town of Simpson to collect a species of Mud Plantain, *Heteranthera limosa*, and observe other neat wetland obligates that found a tiny space of disturbed ground that holds water long enough for them to sustain themselves. It was truly a reminder of why a good botanist keeps one eye on the road and one eye on the ditch.

Simpson Barrens.

Just to the north of Simpson is Simpson Barrens EA, which contains Dry Woodland and Limestone Glade natural communities. And the good stuff comes right up to the road. We observed Gray-headed Coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), Prairie Dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*), American Agave (*Manfreda virginica*), and other neat plants while standing on the road, but also hiked to the interior of the site. It was a very hot day, with a heat index over 100 degrees, so we did not hike too far, but I wanted to show the group a couple highlights.

The day before I took my students in the Flora of Southern Illinois class at Southern Illinois University to the site, where one of them found Pinesap (*Monotropa hypopitys*), a rare species that I had never seen, nor ever heard reports of occurring, at the site. This non-green plant, a mycoheterotroph, basically lives underground and only surfaces to flower. Other highlights include Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), Pale Indian Plantain (*Arnoglossum plantagineum*), and Shrubby Sundrops (*Oenothera fruticosa*).

Left: Pinesap (*Monotropa hypopitys*) Right: Shrubby Sundrops (*Oenothera fruticosa*)

On Saturday night, we heard from grantees of the INPS grant program, which is an important project made possible by donations from members. Being one of the grantees, I spoke about surveys for rare plants. Others spoke about their projects funded by INPS. I also spoke after dinner about some of the changes to the Illinois flora since 1997. There have been many additions to the flora, both native and non-native species, as well as interesting observations over the years. The talks were all recorded and will be available soon.

The gathering concluded on Sunday with a tribute to Dr. Robert Mohlenbrock, who passed away last year, by his son Trent Mohlenbrock. It was truly precious to see his videos of his dad, my mentor and friend, in his element. At the gathering, a lucky participant walked away with a full set of Dr. Mohlenbrock's Illustrated Flora of Illinois, all signed by the author. We hiked to Inspiration Point at LaRue Pine Hills, a site that Dr. Mohlenbrock cherished, and spent much time at, eventually recording an astonishing 1200 vascular plant species in its environs. It was truly a great culmination to a great event.

Watch recordings of INPS Research grantee presentations from the 2025 INPS Annual Gathering on the INPS Southern Chapter's YouTube channel: youtube.com/@illinoisnativeplantsociety4635

Chapter News

For information about each chapter, visit our website at illinoisplants.org/chapter-locations

Top left: John Schwegman delivers a presentation on the natural divisions of Illinois
Top right: Annual Gathering attendees
Center left: Kayak tour of Buttonbush Swamp in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge
Bottom left: Memorial hike for Robert Mohlenbrock at LaRue-Pine Hills Ecological Area in the Shawnee National Forest
Bottom right: View from Inspiration Point at LaRue-Pine Hills

Touring the Chicago Academy of Sciences Collection

By Daniel Lara

On May 17, I had the privilege of attending the Chicago Academy of Sciences Ravenswood collection tour organized by the Northeast INPS chapter. I learned about the history of the museum, about their ongoing initiative to digitize the collections, and got to see a vast array of preserved specimens.

It began when the tour guides, Dawn and Jessica, explained that the original museum was rebuilt after burning down in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Many specimens were preserved in the museum prior to the fire, which they showed me in old black and white photographs. The current collections house thousands of submissions by individual contributors in the form of physical preserved samples and descriptive journal submissions, all compiled with great care. One of the most famous contributors that was mentioned was Chicago botanist Anna P. Kummer, who helped identify and catalogue lots of native plants in Illinois and Indiana. Correctly documenting specimen information is no easy task, as I found out they sometimes call upon experts in linguistics to decode labels and notes written not only in other languages but also in dialects that are no longer commonly spoken. There was one botanical sample with handwritten notes in cursive which I found out took over a year to decipher!

The archives grew exponentially over time after the museum was rebuilt. To properly identify samples and preserve them from natural disasters, an initiative was started to digitize every possible specimen. All the digitalized files created from that venture are now available online via the databases Arctos Collections and Chicago Academy of Sciences Collections for individuals to explore and enjoy.

During the last part of the tour, we stepped into a separate room where all their archived samples are stored. This included thousands of botanical, insect, avian and mammalian samples. It was fascinating to see all the plants, especially some that capture a short time in Chicago's history when vendors packaged medicinal plants and marketed them for many common ailments (see photo below).

In addition to all the cool plants, I also got to see mammals that have since gone extinct, a real woolly mammoth jaw, and rare butterflies that are some of the first identified quadrilateral gynandromorphs (butterflies that have both male and female features distributed stunningly in a four-part pattern, across their wings).

This tour was such a great experience and I hope that more people from INPS have the opportunity to stop by and visit in the future. All thanks to Dawn and Jessica for taking the time to show me around and for sharing the fascinating history of the collections.

Identifying the native *Phragmities australis* ssp. *americanus* in the field

By Brian Charles

European Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*) is the bane of many of our existences. The sight of it along a roadside is enough to conjure up memories of being stabbed by phrag-ments while trying to hack through a dense colony. However, if you are in a higher quality area, or what once was a high-quality area, you may be lucky enough to encounter American Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *americanus*). This native subspecies (sometimes elevated to full species status as *Phragmites americanus*) was formally recognized by morphological and genetic analysis in 2004 (Saltonstall, Peterson and Soreng 2004). It was recently assessed as critically imperiled (S1) in Illinois due to threats from the non-native *Phragmites* and habitat destruction/degradation. Identifying it in the field can be relatively straightforward if you know what to look for.

From a distance, the first things to note are habitat, height, and habit. *P.a. americanus* is often in fens or areas that are nutrient limited, unlike *P.a. australis* which performs best in nutrient-rich areas. *P.a. americanus* will be shorter and does not typically grow over 7 feet, whereas *P.a. australis* can tower above 15 feet. *P.a. americanus* forms less dense colonies that also have less dense inflorescences than *P.a. australis*.

Left: *P.a. americanus* panicle with open, sparse inflorescence.
Right: *P.a. australis* inflorescence showcasing dense habit.

Note lower stem density of *P.a. americanus* on left compared to *P.a.australis* on right.

Once up close, there are a few characteristics that will help confirm the ID. The ligule is the most reliable feature that can be measured in the field. *P.a. americanus* has a 0.4-1mm ligule, which is consistently longer than the 0.1-0.4 mm of *P.a. australis*. Below the ligule, you will find that *P.a. americanus* has looser sheaths compared to *P.a. australis*. The lower stems of *P.a. americanus* are often shiny and red, whereas *P.a. australis* has rougher, tan stems.


Left: Ligule of *P.a. americanus* Right: Red stems of *P.a. americanus*

P.a. americanus is now a species of conservation concern on the Illinois Plant Watch List. This list is designed to capture species that are vulnerable but need more information or are not yet imperiled enough to be designated as threatened or endangered at the state level. If you find this subspecies in the wild, please consider posting it on iNaturalist. The data can then be synthesized to help us better understand the conservation status of this oft-ignored subspecies.

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Impact of hemiparasitic *Pedicularis canadensis* on tallgrass prairies invaded by *Lespedeza cuneata*

By Cassie McGinnis, 2024 INPS Research Grant Recipient

Last summer I studied vampires. Not the fanged, bat-transforming kind, but the ones with leaves and roots that suck nutrients and water out of their victims. In particular, I studied *Pedicularis canadensis*, or Canadian wood betony, which is a hemiparasite native to Illinois. While hemiparasitic plants are capable of using photosynthesis, they also use specialized structures called haustoria to attach to a host plant and take nutrients, water, and organic carbon from that host plant, reducing the host's growth [1, 2]. In other words, they're plant vampires.

Pedicularis canadensis
(Canadian wood betony)

But these plant vampires might not be evil monsters! Through direct effects of parasitism and indirect effects via changes in soil nutrients and soil microbial diversity, root hemiparasites such as *P. canadensis* could alter biodiversity of ecosystems [1]. A major goal of my research was to determine through which pathways hemiparasites like *P. canadensis* influence their surrounding plant community. If a hemiparasite acts as a **Keystone Species**, it could increase biodiversity by reducing growth of competitively dominant species. Suppression of the dominant species allows subordinate hosts and non-host species to increase [1–6]. Because hemiparasites typically produce nutrient-rich senescent leaves, they can also act as **Ecosystem Engineers** by altering nutrient availability for other species. Nutrient-processing soil microbes decompose this leaf litter, creating spatially heterogenous patches around and underneath *P. canadensis* and potentially altering plant species composition and richness [1, 2, 7–9].

In addition to *P. canadensis*, I also focused on an invasive species. Over the last 20 years, the exotic legume *Lespedeza cuneata*, or silky bush clover, invaded the restored tallgrass prairie where I conducted my field work. My second goal was to determine whether the presence of *P. canadensis* influences the prairie community's response to the invasion of *L. cuneata*. According to the **Biotic Resistance** hypothesis, exotic species invade when they overcome the biotic resistance of the resident plant community already exploiting resources. If so, more species-rich communities would offer more resistance to invasion by *L. cuneata* [10, 11]. On the other hand, according to the **Limiting Similarity** hypothesis, *L. cuneata* directly competes with functionally similar species, such as the native *Lespedeza capitata*, and invades when there are fewer similar species present in the prairie community [12, 13].

To test these four different hypotheses (Keystone Species, Ecosystem Engineer, Biotic Resistance, and Limiting Similarity), my lab mates and I returned to 95 1-m2 plots previously established at John English Prairie. We first took soil samples from each plot and used the microBIOMETER® soil test to determine whether hemiparasite presence in each plot correlates with soil microbial carbon biomass. Soil samples from each plot were also sent to Cropsmith, INC. which performed the Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test on each sample to determine if hemiparasite presence correlated with the amount of organic nitrogen in each plot. Finally, we performed a community survey in each plot, recording each species and percent cover in order to calculate species richness, composition, and evenness. All of these data, along with data from a community survey done in 2019, were analyzed using piecewise structural equation modeling to test postulated relationships between the measured data. This allowed me to determine the direction and strength of *P. canadensis*' effects on the local plant community, the microbial community, the soil nutrients, and the abundance of *L. cuneata*. Multiple models were created for each hypothesis, with the best models selected based on how well they fit the data and how well the significant pathways supported each hypothesis.

John English Prairie.

Out of all four hypotheses, the Limiting Similarity hypothesis fit the data better than any of the models created for the other hypotheses. Also, there was a significant negative direct effect of the native *Lespedeza capitata* on the invasive *Lespedeza cuneata*. This indicates that plots with greater cover of the native congener have less cover of the invasive *L. cuneata*. However, based on preliminary analysis there was no indication that the historic 2019 *P. canadensis* cover altered either of the *Lespedeza* species in 2024 since there was no significant direct effect of the hemiparasite on either of the legumes.

By considering the Limiting Similarity hypothesis, land managers can make more informed decisions to combat the invasion of *L. cuneata*. The direct negative effect of *L. capitata* on *L. cuneata* suggests that the presence of functionally similar species could help slow invasion by decreasing the cover of *L. cuneata*. Because *P. canadensis* did not significantly affect *L. cuneata* cover in any model, it would most likely not be a good candidate for helping impede the spread of invasive legumes like *L. cuneata*. Nonetheless, it could potentially help land managers achieve or maintain desired diversity goals through its effects on plant cover within the prairie. Overall, my favorite vampires might not be doing much to help fend off an invasive legume, but this knowledge can help managers be better positioned to maximize the beneficial effects of *P. canadensis* in maintaining and restoring prairies.

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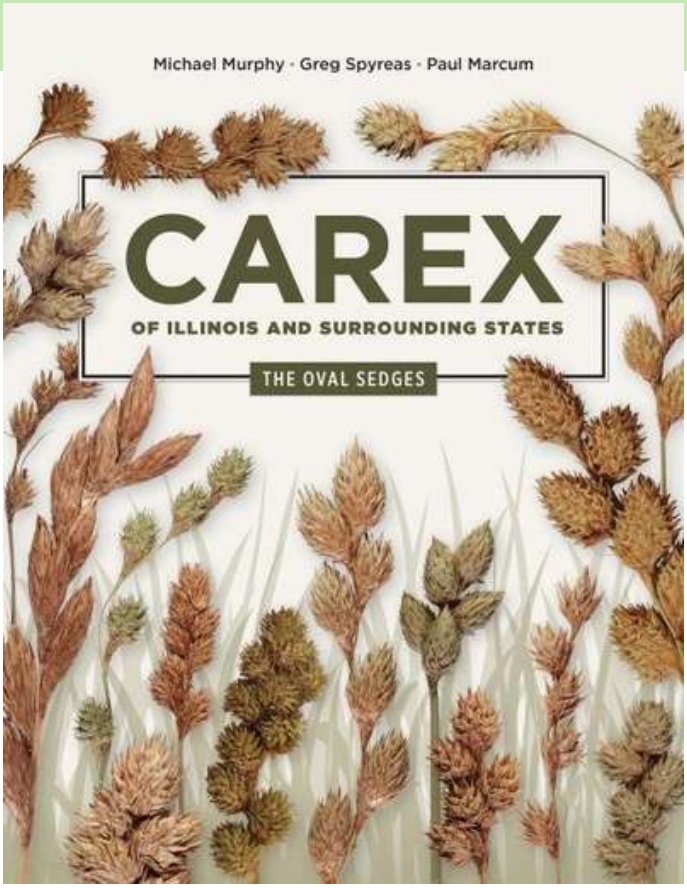
Carex of Illinois and Surrounding States: The Oval Sedges by Michael Murphy, Greg Spyreas, and Paul Marcum

Review by Brian Charles



At long last, Illinois has a guide to the oval sedges (section *Cyperoideae*, formerly section *Ovales*). *Carex* is already the most diverse genus in North America and Illinois, and oval sedges are the largest section of *Carex* in Illinois. This is a section that plagues most botanists, and anyone who has tried to use dichotomous keys to identify species knows how easy it is to go wrong. Knowing this group is especially important for those doing wetland and prairie work, where many oval sedges occur.

The book starts with a general introduction with straightforward diagrams. Before the species treatments, there is a "Quick ID groups" section, which uses three morpho-characters to quickly narrow down groups of species. This is extremely helpful and likely something I will continuously rely on. Directly after is a photographic perigynia reference guide for all species, which will also undoubtedly be something I reference time and time again. Each sedge is given a detailed photo-rich treatment which includes how to distinguish between similar species, and further notes about overall distribution and Illinois records. It is excellent to have photos with the actual size of perigynia and 10x for realistic comparisons. It would have been nice to have in-situ field photos for each species, but some are given in the additional photos section.

This book is well-built for the field, with a ruler on the back, a section for field notes, and a design that fits nicely in a backpack without taking up too much space. It is essential for anyone interested in Illinois' rich sedge diversity. Available from the University of Illinois Press for $29.95, or as an eBook for $14.95. https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/?id=p088469

The Society for Ecological Restoration–Midwest/Great Lakes Chapter 2025 Annual Meeting in the Quad Cities

By Katie Kucera

The Society for Ecological Restoration-Midwest/Great Lakes Chapter held their 2025 Annual Meeting in Moline, IL, from April 25–27. This year's meeting theme, "Engaging Agricultural and Rural Communities in Ecological Restoration," brought together people from different backgrounds to discuss how we can collectively work towards restoring natural areas while providing valuable services for human society alongside plants and wildlife. The event featured a keynote speaker, a panel discussion with local professionals, and symposia, workshop, oral, and poster presentations, plus a number of field trips to local natural areas.

Dr. Laura Jackson delivers her keynote.

Dr. Laura Jackson, Director of the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa, was the meeting's keynote speaker. Dr. Jackson's keynote brought attention to programs in Iowa that largely focus on restoring native habitat on roadside rights-of-way—which comprise a whopping 60% of publicly-owned land in Iowa. Programs such as Iowa Roadside Management and Iowa Department of Transportation's Living Roadway Trust Fund provide resources and management guidance to county roadside programs. As a researcher and advisor, Dr. Jackson has made many contributions to these programs, aiming to "make prairie practical" for state and local programs and landowners. I think Illinois could learn a thing or two from Iowa on the subject of roadside management! Dr. Jackson also introduced meeting attendees to Irvine Prairie, a 292-acre prairie restoration in Benton County, IA, that was donated to the University of Northern Iowa Foundation between 2018-2023 by Cathy Irvine. In honor of her husband, Cathy wanted the prairie to serve as a "permanent invitation to experience something vast, to be surprised and filled with awe by the life of the prairie."

Another highlight of the annual meeting was the local "round robin" panel discussion that featured speakers and a moderator who are involved in restoration and sustainability programs across the Quad Cities, ranging from state and non-profit employees to a schoolteacher and members of the Quad Cities Community Foundation's Clean River Advisory Council. Panelists shared how they came to be involved in restoration and sustainability and discussed the challenges and successes they face in implementing restoration and sustainability practices in their communities. The panel was moderated by Nina Struss, River Health and Resiliency Organizer for Prairie Rivers Network based out of Champaign, IL. I personally appreciated hearing perspectives from community members whose work is tangentially related to ecological restoration, but who don't focus directly on land management and plant and wildlife conservation as part of their day-to-day activities. Kudos to Quad Cities local restoration practitioner Rob Liva for organizing the panelists and moderator.

From left to right: panelists Jim Alwill (Prairie Earth Nursery), Brian Burkholder (IRVM Scott County Secondary Roads), Dale Maxson (The Nature Conservancy), Erin Allen (Bettendorf Public Schools), and Ragan Baker (Clean River Advisory Council).

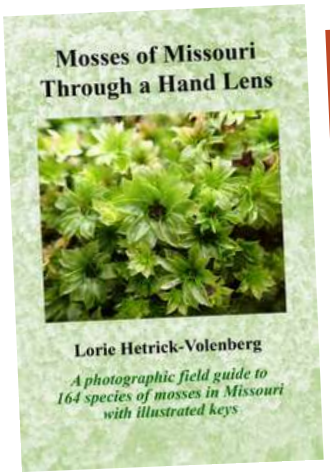
Highlights of the workshops and symposia offered at the Annual Meeting include a native seed mix design workshop taught by Jason Fritz (Ecology, Nursery Business Development Manager at Stantec), a "painting with soil" workshop led by local ecology enthusiast Adriana McBride, and symposia focused on creating harmony between ecology and agriculture (how can we better work together across professions to accomplish shared goals?).

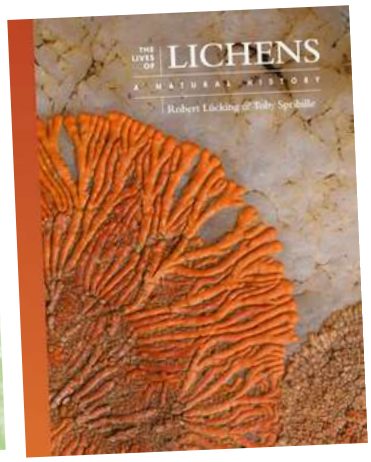
Last but not least—field trips! The Annual Meeting featured a total of eight field trips, to local marshes, hill prairies, sand prairies, and even to Niabi Zoo located in Coal Valley, IL. I attended the field trip to Collinson Ecological Preserve led by Stephen Hager and Rob Liva. Collinson Ecological Preserve is owned by Augustana College and is adjacent to the Josua Lindahl Hill Prairies Nature Preserve. Field trip participants were treated to great views, plants, and discussion about managing upland hardwood forest, ravines, and loess hill prairies.

Field trip participants traverse one of the high-quality, recently burned loess hill prairies at Collinson Ecological Preserve/Josua Lindahl Hill Prairies.

Other News, Articles, Web Links, & Videos

Listen to a recent episode of the *In Defense of Plants* podcast **featuring the authors of the new book, *Carex of Illinois and Surrounding States: The Oval Sedges.*** indefenseofplants.com/podcast/2025/4/28/ep-524-tackling-the-oval-sedges





Check out two new books on mosses and lichens!

Mosses of Missouri Through a Hand Lens by Lorie Hetrick Volenberg, published by Compass Flower Press: compassflowerpress.com/books/coming-soon/mosses-of-missouri-through-a-hand-lens/

The Lives of Lichens: A Natural History by Robert Lücking and Toby Spribille, published by Princeton University Press: press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691247274/the-lives-of-lichens

Read these recent **open-access journal publications:**

- "Pollinator seed mixes are phenologically dissimilar to prairie remnants" published by Jack Zinnen et al. in *Restoration Ecology* Vol. 33, No. 3, e14352
- "Influence of ecological characteristics and phylogeny on native plant species' commercial availability" published by Jack Zinnen, Rebecca S. Barak, and Jeffrey W. Matthews in *Ecological Applications* 35:e3070
- "Understory Revegetation Enhances Efficacy of Prescribed Burning after Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) Management" published by Michael J. Schuster et al. in *Natural Areas Journal* Vol. 44, No. 4, 206-214

Botany Humor

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The Harbinger Spring 2025

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- ☐ Northeast (Chicago)
- ☐ Quad Cities (Rock Island)
- ☐ Southern (Carbondale)
- ☐ Other/Uncertain

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- ☐ Giving Workshops &/or Seminars
- ☐ Public Speaking
- ☐ Fundraising
- ☐ Website Assistance/Management
- ☐ Public Media/Communications
- ☐ Writing/Submitting Articles
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Other:_____
- ☐ My area of expertise:_____