Illinois Native Plant Society

The Harbinger

Newsletter *of the* Illinois Native Plant Society

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

Gentianopsis crinita (Greater Fringed Gentian) at Paintbrush Prairie in Cook County. Photo by Christopher Benda.

In This Issue

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Message from the President

Dear INPS members,

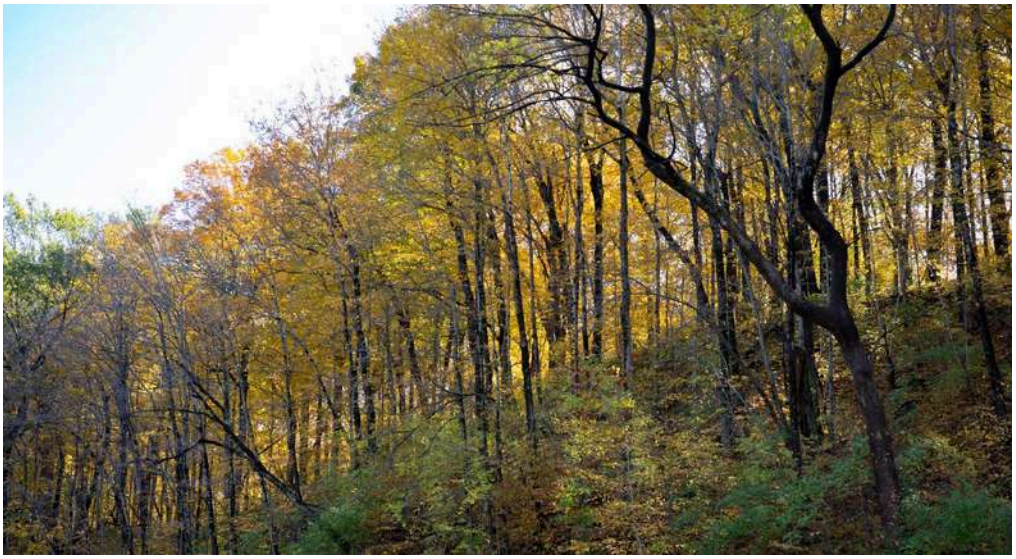
Happy autumn! I hope your summer botanizing was grand and that you are enjoying cooler weather. It's still good weather for planting next year's garden.

We have two important ballots to watch for in your email soon. The first is the by-laws update that was presented at the Annual Gathering. The main points of this update are to clarify that chapters should not have their own by-laws, but follow the state's, and to give the state governing board the power to change the number of membership levels. We currently have many membership levels, which is confusing and administratively burdensome. The second ballot will be to elect the state governing board positions for next year. The President spot is still open, so please email illinoisplants@gmail.com or inpspresident@illinoisplants.org to let us know if you're interested in serving!

Emily

Message from the Editor

Fall is here, with asters ushering us from one season to another. In this issue, you'll find an article from Mark Widrlechner who graciously reviewed Ilinois Rubus specimens with support from INPS. This is essential work and there are very few who can do it, so we are eternally grateful! We also have an article from Ray Bruzan on the importance of native species in urban areas for maintaining biodiversity and connecting to nature. Please enjoy, and as always we welcome any submissions for future issues.
–Brian Charles, Co-Editor



Kickapoo State Park

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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2026 Illinois Native Plant Society Research Grants

Exciting news hot off the (plant) press! Community scientists, students, and conservation groups are invited to apply for an INPS Research Grant for up to $3,000 to fund one-year projects in 2026. Research on Illinois native plants and their communities, such as their life history, reproductive biology, demography, genetics, community ecology, ecological interactions, threat impacts, analytic floristic inventories of a single site or multiple sites, and comprehensive surveys of priority* plant species. Research on threats to native plants and communities, such as invasive species, are acceptable. Laboratory research on native plants, as well as projects focused on research relating to education or restoration of native plants or communities are also eligible. Applications will open December 1st, and further instructions will be available online on the INPS Grants page.

Applications are due January 15th, 2026.
Awards will be announced March 15th, 2026.

*Priority plant species are listed in a document along with grant instructions and guidelines.

For any questions regarding the INPS research grants, reach out to grants@illinoisplants.org.

Chapter News

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

Mining the Records – Blackberries, Dewberries, and Raspberries in Illinois

By Mark P. Widrlechner

In 2021, Scott Namestnik, State Botanist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and I began a long-term collaboration to study the genus *Rubus* (blackberries, dewberries, and raspberries) in Indiana, with the goal of preparing a full report about all the species known from Indiana, including synonymy, keys, descriptions, and county distribution maps. We envisioned the maps to include not only Indiana but to be range-wide, covering North America.

We are now five years into that study and have examined more than 2,500 historic herbarium specimens and collected hundreds more in the field. When we started working with a GIS specialist to draft range-wide maps, one thing soon became obvious: there were major gaps in our knowledge of *Rubus* species distributions in Illinois.

A quick online search indicated that the herbaria at the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) in Champaign held the most *Rubus* specimens from the state in one spot. On one of my many trips between my home in Iowa and Butler University in Indianapolis (my base of operations for the Indiana project), I made a brief stop in Champaign and could see that the combined herbaria of the Illinois Natural History Survey and the University of Illinois could, with sufficient work, go a long way to fill our Illinois information gap.

With a small grant from the Illinois Native Plant Society (INPS), for which I'm most grateful, I was able to spend about eight days in December 2024 and March 2025 "mining" the North American *Rubus* holdings in Champaign by focusing primarily on vouchers from Illinois and those from other states for species known from Indiana.

From my past work over the last 35+ years, I knew that Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri each have between 30 and 35 species of *Rubus*. And, over the last five years, Scott and I have been able to identify about 50 species from Indiana. For context, Mohlenbrock's most recent key for Illinois *Rubus* included 49 species, and Wilhelm and Rericha noted the presence of 34 species from the Illinois counties of the Chicago Region. But those are just hints at what might be out there. No one had examined or annotated the bulk of the *Rubus* specimens in state. What might be waiting at the Illinois Natural History Survey?

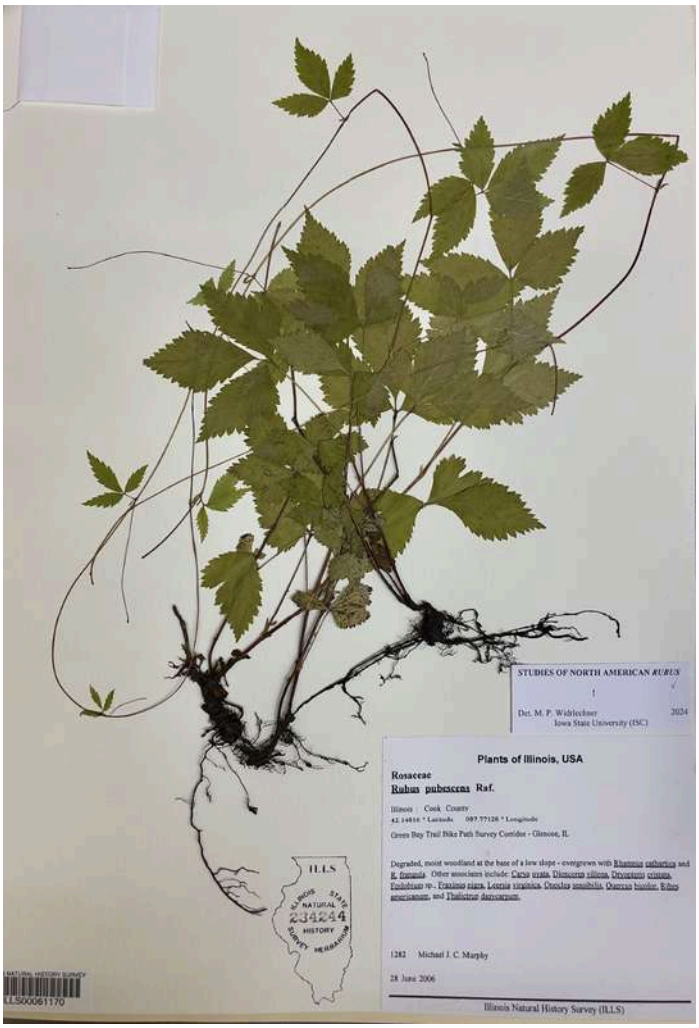
During my two visits there, I was able to annotate more than 2,500 specimens, including 1,509 from Illinois. The quality of the Illinois specimens was remarkably good. Only 16 sheets were so fragmentary that they couldn't be determined at least to section. Another 195 were incomplete (typically a good specimen needs to sample both first- and second-year stems; advice on how to make complete specimens that sample material needed to make definitive identifications to the species level is included at the end of this story) but could still be identified at the sectional level. However, this still gave me nearly 1,300 good Illinois specimens to work from.

Illinois Natural History Survey Herbarium, showing “Rubus row” at right.

Stacks of *Rubus* specimens.

So, would Illinois resemble states to its west for *Rubus* species diversity or be more diverse like its neighbor to the east? The answer is somewhere in between. Among specimens currently accessioned in Champaign, I found one or more supporting the presence in Illinois (outside of cultivation) of 38 species and one named hybrid. In addition, a recently collected specimen (yet to be accessioned) documented the presence of the invasive European dewberry, *Rubus caesius*. And I knew from my past work of one more species, this time a native, *Rubus wisconsinensis*, from material collected in Jo Daviess County that I had annotated from the Milwaukee Public Museum herbarium. That would bring Illinois’ list of *Rubus* up to 41 taxa.

Of these 41 taxa, 35 are likely native, with six non-native species that have naturalized and could become invasive. The larger group of 35 natives includes four subgenera: *Anoplobatus* (the unarmed Thimbleberries) with one representative; *Cylactis* (the herbaceous dwarf raspberries) with one representative; *Idaeobatus* (the true raspberries) with two species and their interspecific hybrid; with the remaining 30, members of six of the eight sections of subgenus *Rubus* that are native to eastern North America. Of those eight, only sections *Canadensis* and *Cuneifolii* have not been found in Illinois. Notably, Illinois’ most diverse section of subgenus *Rubus* is section *Procumbentes* (which includes the bulk of the dewberries) with 12 species.



Top left: Dwarf Raspberry (*Rubus pubescens*), the sole Illinois representative of subgenus *Cylactis*, is also listed as threatened in the state.
Bottom left: Some of the extensive collections of Allegheny blackberry (*Rubus alleghaniensis*).

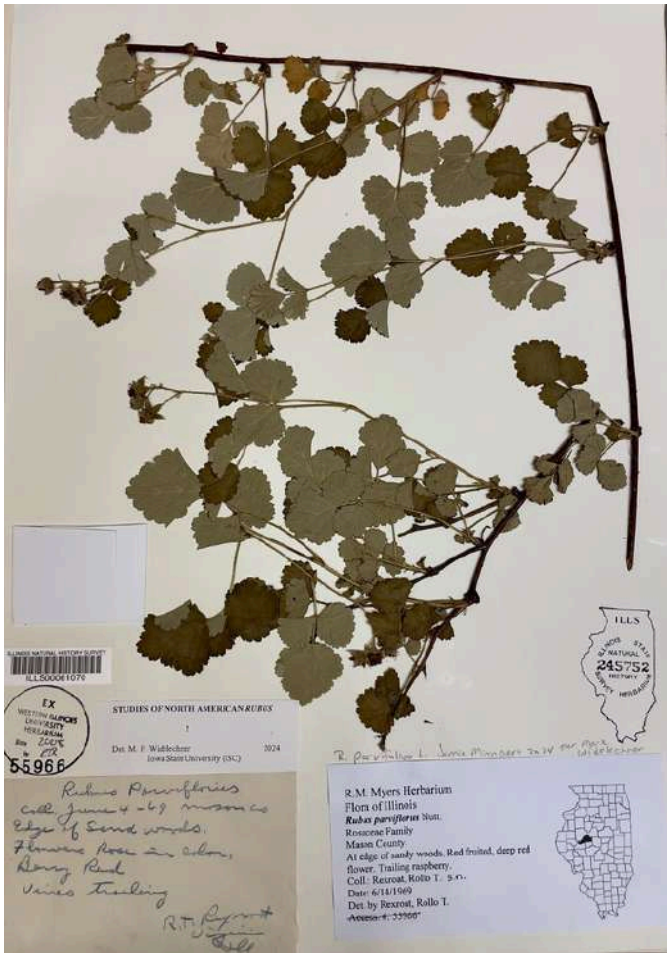
Remarkably, the two most common *Rubus* species in Illinois dominated the set of specimens I examined in a way that may significantly over-represent their actual presence in the landscape. Together (at 674 sheets), black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*) and Allegheny blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*) represented more than half of the specimens at the INHS determinable to species from Illinois. Perhaps this is because they are large plants that are among the easiest brambles to identify in the field, so collectors felt more confident sampling them.

On the flip side, there were 17 native taxa each represented by fewer than ten sheets. A key question is: “Are these Illinois’ rarest *Rubus* species or have they been under-collected?” Only concerted efforts to locate these species based on what we know about their habitat preferences and identifying sites resembling those where past collections have been made can put together the pieces needed to answer that question.

That said, based on my experiences surveying nearby states, I would start with a shorter list of species that may truly be rare in Illinois, more than just being under-collected. It would include all four species of section *Setosi* (the bristleberries) known from Illinois: *Rubus missouricus*, *semisetosus*, *wheeleri*, and *wisconsinensis*, along with *Rubus fulleri*, a tip-rooting species that also has bristly canes related to *Rubus hispidus*, *Rubus mollior*, an Ozark near-endemic highbush blackberry, and *Rubus deamii* and *serratus*, two dewberry species with inflorescences bearing stipitate (stalked) glands that are more common to the east of Illinois.

Other, more disturbing finds were to come across specimens of non-native brambles in Illinois. Five particular species are cause for

the most concern: the Himalaya blackberry, *Rubus armeniacus*, one of the most aggressive invaders in the Pacific Northwest, has been collected in Alexander County; the Evergreen blackberry, *Rubus serissimus*, a similar, if somewhat smaller, invader which has been spreading northward in Kansas and Missouri, turned up in four Illinois counties; the Japanese raspberry, *Rubus parvifolius*, is rapidly expanding its range in much of the Midwest; the wineberry, *Rubus phoenicolasius*, is a serious invader in the southeastern US; and the European dewberry, *Rubus caesius*, can form near monocultures in disturbed, shady areas, such as floodplain forests.



Japanese Raspberry (*Rubus parvifolius*), which is rapidly expanding its range in the Midwest.

Brief advice for making specimens

A complete specimen includes a sample of the plant in its first year of growth (called the primocane), ideally including its apex, but taken late enough in the season that at least some of the leaves are fully expanded, a sample from the second year's stem (called the floricane) bearing fully expanded inflorescences either in flower or fruit, and notes about rooting behavior, growth habit, and other features that are not readily preserved on an herbarium specimen. Make sure to display both the upper and lower leaf surfaces and to give unimpeded views of pedicels and cane armature. Altogether, these give the full picture needed for species identification.

The eight days that I spent in Champaign were well worth my time and effort. I learned a great deal about the diversity of *Rubus* in Illinois and filled important gaps in our understanding of species' distributions. I am grateful to both the INPS for helping to cover my expenses and to Jamie Minnaert-Grote, who curates the herbaria at the INHS, for the many hours she invested in hosting my visit and in databasing my annotations.

I hope this short article inspires you to take a closer look at the diversity of the genus *Rubus* across Illinois. And if you are interested in learning more about these plants, I can suggest two books that have keys to many of these species that you can encounter in Illinois, along with detailed descriptions. For the southern two-thirds of Illinois, I'd suggest trying out the key to *Rubus* in Volume 3 of George Yatskievych's "Steyermark's Flora of Missouri" (2013), with a caveat to ignore the line drawings, which are sometimes misleading. For the northern part of the state, check out the key in Welby Smith's "Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota" (2008), which includes a wonderful selection of Welby's photographs from verified populations. As for equipment, don't forget to bring good leather gloves, a sharp hand pruner, a ruler marked in millimeters, and a high-quality hand lens with at least 10× magnification. Hair and prickle types (including size and density) are often important characters for distinguishing among these species.

Mark P. Widrlechner is a retired Affiliate Associate Professor of Horticulture at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa.

In The Shadows of Our Trees

By Raymond Bruzan

“ I often enjoy viewing the beauty of our trees, but had never before really looked at the intriguing message provided by a tree’s shadow. I became much aware that what I was observing would never return as I now saw it. From one moment to the next, the tree shadow I was observing would change with the changing position of the sun. Even if the sun was ever to relocate exactly where it had been the moment I observed the tree shadow, the tree itself would have changed, and along with that change would display a different shadow. ”

This passage that I had written for the introduction of a recent book seemed to elicit extended messages and questions that took my mind in several directions that were influenced by The Condor’s Shadow, a book by Ecologist David S. Wilcove. While gazing out of my front window enjoying April’s renewal of our yard, I became aware of not only the tree’s shadows but also what was growing within the shadow of our trees.

Spring beauties in the shadow of our maple tree.

There they were, beautifying our yard, just as they have for all of the 54 years we have lived in this historic 127 years old home. In full bloom were hundreds of tiny pale-rose-white colored flowers of *Claytonia virginica*, commonly called spring beauties. Their flowers appear in early spring for several weeks, and then seem to disappear for the rest of the year. Seeds of *Claytonia*, dispersed by the wind, are capable of growing into 3-6 inch thin leaves that manufacture food stored in its’ underground corms, often called fairy spuds.

This article was previously published in the July 2025 issue of *The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine*.

The one-half to two-inch diameter corms provided prized food for the Native Americans who greeted the first Europeans colonizing eastern North America. Wild-foods expert and author Euell Gibbons described the spring beauty corms as quite delicious, but discouraged their harvest because of the potential impact on the plant's survival.


Left: Spring beauties, *Claytonia virginica*. Right: Corm of spring beauty, *Claytonia virginica*.

During the summer, other wild plants also appear in the shadows of our trees and seem to reflect a changing biotic community. *Claytonia* flowers become overshadowed with the growth of dandelions thanks to the Europeans who brought and established them in America. That favor was retuned by Americans traveling to Europe who dispersed the small composite flowering fleabanes. Fleabanes grow among the grass in our yard with other wild plants that include phlox, milkweeds, pokeweed, ragwort, shepherd's purse, clover, Jerusalem artichoke, pigweeds, and wild violets.

It's been enjoyable witnessing the appearance of wild plants that have gained a foothold on our corner city lot. Our 20 trees, whose age vary from 30 to 100 years, seem to have created a micro-forest environment. Perhaps that is what has made possible the establishment of the previously mentioned diverse wild plants. That thought in itself raises several interesting related questions.

Wilcove describes how biotic communities have been greatly altered by human activities that cause habitat destruction, and that it is difficult to predict what plant species will replace their predecessors. Disturbed biotic communities do bounce back but their developing food chains and food webs may take decades before returning to a stable ecosystem. The appearance of the wildflowers in our yard may be the remains of a forest environment that may have previously existed on this property. Or perhaps they are invaders in the process of re-claiming a former environment.

I like and welcome to my yard plant species that our neighbors may dismiss as weeds. Weeds, sometimes defined as "plants out of place," are welcome guests in our yard. I have what Hannah Holmes describes as a Freedom Lawn (FL). In her book, Suburban Safari, she defines freedom as it applies to both plants, animals, and people free from watering, fertilizing, and pesticides. Holmes' Freedom Lawn in Maine may be more complex than our Illinois prairie yard. We both, however, welcome life forms that provide a biodiversity of species that can survive the mower.

This article was previously published in the July 2025 issue of *The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine*.

In his book, *The Diversity of Life*, Harvard University Professor of Science Edward O. Wilson describes how the loss of biodiversity is increasingly recognized as a major environmental issue. It is largely caused by human activities that simplify an environment resulting in habitat destruction. The plants and animals of that habitat then face the possibility of becoming extinct. An example would be the removal of a forest to be replaced by a sub-division of homes or farmed to become a monoculture field of corn.

It is understandable that to feed the world's growing human population, monoculture of vast acreages of land is necessary to grow fundamental food crops such as corn, wheat, beans and rice. But what is the benefit of monoculture so often observed in city lawns?

The logic of city lawns that resemble golf courses escapes me. A major topic of numerous books and articles describe the problem of the loss of biodiversity, largely caused by habitat destruction. Creating city ordinances and laws requiring homeowners to designate a segment of their lawns to a Bio-Diversity Patch (BDP) would be a start to recognizing and emphasizing the importance of biodiversity.

BDPs would provide opportunities for parents to interact with their children in their own yards. Children at a young age need to learn the importance of biodiversity. Parents and their children can both experience loving moments of time together, planning, planting and observing over time, the creation and development of food chains and webs that contribute to stabilizing the natural world. Therefore, time spent in their own BDP, rather than in front of a computer or television screen, can enhance the lives of every family member.

Author's Bio-Diversity Patch (BDP).

It would be imperative to require schools to develop and maintain a BDP that would provide opportunities for quality-time experiences for both the teacher and student. This outdoor Laboratory Based Learning (LBL) would make available a chance for students to be taught the importance of biodiversity and learn science as a hands-on activity.

Our BDP includes a historic 1898 home that sits on a one-third acre lot. Over the years I have planted trees to honor births and deaths of our beloved family members. Our small but beautiful forest includes maple, oak, sycamore, pine, bald cypress, horse chestnut, cedar, redbud, spruce, hackberry, tulip, and walnut trees.

They provide a welcome habitat for birds including bluejays, robins, cardinals, goldfinches, blackbirds, woodpeckers, owls, hawks, and even vultures. Seasonal changes impact the appearance of wildflowers and weeds that play host in our yard to other fascinating life forms. These include mushrooms, worms, snails, slugs, insects, spiders, frogs, squirrels, raccoons, opossums, rabbits, and an occasional snake.

The biodiversity of our yard is unlikely to be found in the monoculture yards so often preferred by landowners of today. Because our house is in the city limits, I do mow our lawn, but less often than our neighbors do, who are required to treat their sod lawns with pesticides and fertilizers that contribute to reducing biodiversity. This may also lead to landowners depriving themselves of meaningful encounters with the natural world.

Advertisement and mailings from lawn care companies offer property owners services that include fertilization, insect control, and weed control, all of which reduces biodiversity. It seems that it would be a “win-win” possibility if these companies also provided the option of offering to the landowner a technician trained in the construction of a BDP as part of a lawn-management program. The technician could recommend and sell wildflower seeds to the lawn owner and offer advice on how to encourage their growth without the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

I love our trees and take pride in being called a “tree hugger.” When it becomes our turn to move on, I sometimes wonder what changes might the new owners observe in our Bio-Diversity Patch. Will additional forest species such as mayapples, trilliums, and bluebells join the existing spring beauties as they re-establish a forest ecosystem? Will the new owner choose monoculture over diversity and establish a sodded-grass environment? Or will climate change dictate unanticipated successional changes in the establishment of future biotic components?

Biologists Estelle Levetin and Karen McMahon describe in their book Plants and Society that we are currently in a biodiversity crisis and that species are declining at an accelerated extinction rate. They state that the loss of plant and animal species due to habitat destruction in tropical rainforests is estimated at 9,000 species per year. E.O Wilson wrote that loss of diversity endangers not just the body but also the spirit. He predicts that the biodiversity changes occurring now will harm all generations to come.

This article was previously published in the July 2025 issue of *The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine*.

I have little doubt that over the next 50 years, biotic changes in our lawn will take place. Like the shadow of our trees that changes with the position of the sun, biotic communities change over time. The loss of biodiversity, however, greatly impacts what the future holds for today's existing life forms. We all have a part to play in maintaining the diversity of plants and animals. For the landowner, part of that role to play is certainly available just a few steps away, outside the door to their own yard.

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About the author...

Traveling and experiencing nature have been major components of the life of author and educator Ray Bruzan. Boating on the Danube River to explore Europe or, closer to home, hiking to the bottom and across Arizona's Grand Canyon, and still closer to home, canoeing and camping along the Sangamon River from Springfield to Beardstown, demonstrates Bruzan's love of nature and the outdoors. He credits his instructor, Dr. Robert Mohlenbrock of Southern Illinois University, founder of INPS, with contributing to his knowledge and joy in experiencing the natural world.

Bruzan has authored articles for *The American Biology Teacher, The Journal of Chemical Education, The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine,* and *Illinois Times*.

He has received numerous teaching awards that include the State of Illinois Environmental Teacher of the Year and Springfield, Illinois, Educator of the Year. Three of his books received the Award of Excellence from the Illinois State Historical Society.

The April 2020 issue of *Smithsonian Magazine* featured Bruzan's 1970 Earth Day march with his students to the Illinois State Capitol. He donated to the Smithsonian's permanent historic artifact collection in Washington, D.C., the Earth Day flag displayed in that march.

Bruzan concluded the last five years of his 42-year teaching career as a chemistry professor at Benedictine University-Springfield. He continues to enjoy his Bio-Diversity Patch at his Rochester, Illinois historic home.

He can be reached at rmb601@yahoo.com.

This article was previously published in the July 2025 issue of *The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine*.

cathartica

by Andy Neill

Hidden popularity
Disguises your menace
Green is green
And so it is
Real harm can come from common things
Arriving from over seas you spread with so much ease.

Dark black berries Rhamnus thick
A handful will make you awfully sick
Off you go and skip this line
Even running from this page
To purge in a violent rage.
Catharsis seems more polite even cheery.

Simple leaves with cutting edge
Deep set veins make up the hedge
Selective cutting is what to do,
No one cares or cries boohoo.

Stop before you turn to go,
treat the stump in chemical goo.
You’re not done with all your tricks
The soil lays heavy in a seedy mix.

So now we’re here together found,
You’re part of nature all around.

Journal Article Roundup & Other News

Check out these recently published **journal articles:**

- **Battle of the giants: Clonal expansion rates, effects on wetland plant communities and competition between introduced Phragmites australis australis and native Phragmites australis americanus** published by Bernd Blossey et al. in Functional Ecology. Open access.
- **https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1365-2435.70164**

- **RELIX: A Dataset of Vascular Plant Species Presence for 353 Prairie Remnants in the Midwestern United States, with Prairie Remnant Metadata** by Jack Zinnen et al. in the Natural Areas Journal. **Remnant data is publicly available here (https://databank.illinois.edu/datasets/IDB-565391),** but the article is not open access.
- **https://bioone.org/journals/natural-areas-journal/volume-45/issue-3/2162-4399-45.3.3/RELIX--A-Dataset-of-Vascular-Plant-Species-Presence-for/10.3375/2162-4399-45.3.3.short**

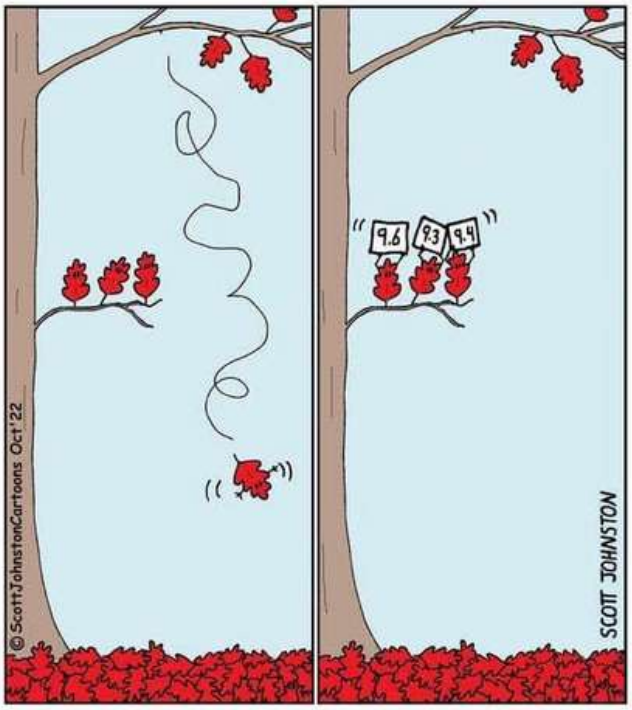
- **Illinois threatened and endangered plant S-rank update and a new Illinois plant watch list** by Brian Charles et al. in the Natural Areas Journal. Open access.
- **https://bioone.org/journals/natural-areas-journal/volume-45/issue-3/2162-4399-45.3.5/Illinois-Threatened-and-Endangered-Plant-S-Rank-Update-and-a/10.3375/2162-4399-45.3.5.full**

Read about the recently-passed Illinois Rewilding Law in an article from the Rewilding Institute. **"Let Illinois Amaze Us: Rewilding Law in the Prairie State"** https://rewilding.org/let-illinois-amaze-us-rewilding-law-in-the-prairie-state/

From the Chicago Botanic Garden Plants of Concern program, read the story of a volunteer rare plant monitor in Southern Illinois. **"The Guardians Between Plants and Extinction"** https://www.chicagobotanic.org/blog/plant-science-conservation/guardians-between-plants-and-extinction

From WBEZChicago, check out the story, **"Kankakee mallow: How a rare Illinois flower was saved from extinction"** https://www.wbez.org/curious-city/2025/10/15/kankakee-mallow-how-a-rare-illinois-flower-was-saved-from-extinction

Botany Humor



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illinoisplants@gmail.com
www.illinoisplants.org

The Harbinger Autumn 2025

You can renew/join by filling out the form below or online at illinoisplants.org/online-membership-form/.
Please become a member and support this local non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and study of the native plants and vegetation of Illinois!

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INPS, Membership, P.O. Box 9245, Springfield, IL 62791

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- ☐ Life.....$500^{00}
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- ☐ *Primula* (Life).....$2,000^{00}
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- ☐ Forest Glen (Westville)
- ☐ Grand Prairie (Bloomington)
- ☐ Kankakee Torrent
- ☐ Northeast (Chicago)
- ☐ Quad Cities (Rock Island)
- ☐ Southern (Carbondale)
- ☐ Other/Uncertain

I would like to help with...

- ☐ Leadership & Organization
  Serving on Board at State or Chapter Level
- ☐ Leading Field Trips & Tours
- ☐ Organizing Workshops &/or Seminars
- ☐ Giving Workshops &/or Seminars
- ☐ Public Speaking
- ☐ Fundraising
- ☐ Website Assistance/Management
- ☐ Public Media/Communications
- ☐ Writing/Submitting Articles
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Other:_____
- ☐ My area of expertise:_____