



The Harbinger

Newsletter of the Illinois Native Plant Society

SPRING 2026
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"...dedicated to the study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and natural communities of Illinois."



Phacelia purshii (Miami mist). Photo by Brian Charles.

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Message from the President

Introducing Nick Seaton, the new INPS President!

I have been involved with the Illinois native plant society for a number of years now. First as a member of the southern chapter and later joining the board as a member at large and then into president and vice president positions. I'm currently an ecologist for the Forest Service on the Shawnee National Forest and enjoy spending time both personally and professionally in the natural areas hiking, running and botanizing. I've lived in southern Illinois for the last 16 years and am always amazed at how much more there is to see. It never gets old. My alma mater is southern Illinois where I have two degrees in forestry and plant biology.



I hope you are all enjoying the spring flowers and making it out to enjoy your favorite places to see them. It's always exciting to hear about the great educational and outdoor activities the local chapters have scheduled to serve their members. If there is any way to provide additional support to the local chapters please reach out and we can help advertise and spread the word about your events. One event in particular that brings everyone together from all of the chapters is the annual gathering. This year the Forest Glenn Chapter is hosting the annual gathering later in August. More information will be shared as we get closer to the date. The Central Chapter will also be hosting their plant sale in May which usually draws many people out that are interested in native plants and landscaping with them.

The governing board met earlier in the month and had some really productive conversations about priorities to focus on for the coming year and moving forward. The website is going through some changes and is a significant priority for this organization. Membership and board successional planning also made the list for the three priorities to focus on. Not only gaining new members but also retaining members and how that looks with the various membership levels that we currently offer.

The final item is successional planning and will pay it forward to keep things moving smoothly. If you are reading this and would like to be more involved with the Illinois Native Plant Society at the board level, it takes all types of skill sets to keep organizations like this working. Joining the board as a member at large and working into positions of more responsibility allow for knowledge to be passed down. Please reach out if you would like to learn more about joining the board. Enjoy your time outside!

Call for interest to fill multiple vacant at-large board member seats:

If you are interested in a leadership position on the INPS board, please reach out to illinoisplants@gmail.com or any board members. We welcome all who would be interested in serving the Illinois native plant community!

Message from the Editor



Thalictrum dioicum (Early Meadow Rue)

Happy spring! In this issue, we highlight the Illinois Botanist's big year, our annual friendly competition to find the most plants in Illinois.

We have a follow-up from Chris Benda, who won this year's competition. Gerould Wilhelm and Kathy Garness have an excellent article which details the history of Hosah Park and their recent field work there as part of an Illinois Native Plant Society Research Grant they were awarded last year. Floristic inventories such as theirs are an incredibly important way to document plant diversity and provide vouchered specimens that can be used for many kinds of ongoing and future research.

Although we are no longer awarding survey grants, INPS is continuing to support floristic inventories through the research grant.

–Brian Charles, Co-Editor

Submissions to the newsletter are always welcome!

Please contact editor Brian Charles (brianmc4@illinois.edu). Deadlines are March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1 for the spring, summer, fall, and winter issues respectively.

INPS Chapters

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Chapter News

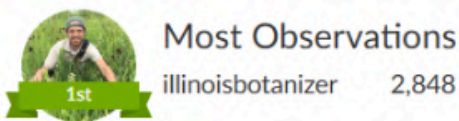
For information about each chapter, visit our website at
illinoisplants.org/chapter-locations

Illinois Botanist's Big Year 2025

By Brian Charles



The Illinois Botanist's Big Year (BBY) is an annual competition on iNaturalist to see who can observe the most plants in Illinois. The competition was founded by Cassi Saari in 2016, so this marks 10 years of BBY! To learn more about the competition, learn tips for using iNaturalist, and to join the project for 2026, please check out the link to the project on iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/illinois-botanists-big-year-2026>. Want to get involved? Contact Brian Charles at brianmc4@illinois.edu.



Most Observations

illinoisbotanizer 2,848

janelew	2,539
rarecatsnake	1,980
abelkinser	1,861
buffalobuffalobuffalobu...	1,668
rynxs	1,641



Most Species

illinoisbotanizer 1,353

abelkinser	1,247
rynxs	884
janelew	808
molinarolomax	683
elhaase	672



Most Observed Species

Virginia Springbeauty 210

Bloodroot	175
Prairie Trillium	174
Mayapple	138
Virginia Bluebells	131
Common Milkweed	128

The winner this year is Chris Benda (illinoisbotanizer), who had 2,848 observations of 1,353 species!

In another article below, he details some of his finds.



We could not have this data without our most prolific identifiers! Abel Kinser led the way with 6,000 identifications.

Top 10 most observations in 2025:

- 1.illinoisbotanizer - 2,848
- 2.janelew - 2,539
- 3.rarecatsnake - 1,980
- 4.abelkinser - 1,861
- 5.buffalobuffalobuffalo - 1,669
- 6.rynxs - 1,641
- 7.grantfessler - 1,270
- 8.molinarolomax - 1,196
- 9.emrym - 1,172
- 10.redadmiral98 - 1,056

Top 10 most species in 2025:

- 1.illinoisbotanizer - 1,353
- 2.abelkinser - 1,247
- 3.rynxs - 884
- 4.janelew - 808
- 5.molinarolomax - 683
- 6.elhaase - 672
- 7.grantfessler - 651
- 8.mrostrowski - 644
- 9.rarecatsnake - 624
- 10.danielpohl - 462

Top 10 identifiers in 2025:

- 1.abelkinser - 6,000
- 2.rynxs - 3,154
- 3.bgrimmer - 1,980
- 4.grantfessler - 1,370
- 5.molinarolomax - 941
- 6.sedge - 809
- 7.dogwoodvalley - 771
- 8.flowerdelvalle - 735
- 9.mrostrowski - 697
- 10.mo_monocots - 522

History and Vegetation of Hosah Park

By Gerould S. Wilhelm and Kathleen Marie Garness

Given the exceptional floristic richness of the Zion Beach Ridge Plain at Hosah Park, the Illinois Native Plant Society generously provided funding to survey the vegetation in 2025 and report on its condition. Hosah Prairie, a part of the geologic area known as the Zion Beach Ridge Plain, was born from littoral drift from sediments that flowed southward from the mouth of the Root River, which empties into Lake Michigan at Racine, Wisconsin. Its origins began about 2,800 years ago after the last lake stage of Glacial Lake Chicago, the level of which originally stood at 640' above sea level. The Zion Beach Ridge Plain at Hosah Park consists of broad sand terraces interrupted by low sand ridges and high-water-table flats, which topography is easily seen from aerial maps. It is the youngest of all landscapes in Illinois.

The movement of the water and wind, along with the annual formation of ice along the shore, has ensured a constantly changing shoreline landscape. While it has been the nature of the Lake Michigan shoreline to accommodate the vicissitudes of seasonal variation in water and weather, the relationship between strand vegetation and the elements sustained a rather remarkable stability, which perennial plant associations formed on the windward side of the storm beach. Over the last 30 or 40 years, other forces have been instituted along the western shores of Lake Michigan that have catastrophically destabilized the system.

**“ The Zion Beach Ridge Plain
... is the youngest of all
landscapes in Illinois. ”**



People occupied the lake shore for millennia, long before the arrival of Europeans who began to arrive after the end of the Black Hawk in 1832. Native American people frequented the area for hunting, fishing, and gathering, in what essentially was a mutualistic stewardship of the land. There are many plant species of cultural importance to the Native Americans at Hosah Prairie, notably rushes, cattails, and willows for basketry, and St. John's Worts and willow for traditional medicines, to name just a few. All of their life's day-to-day necessities were managed within walking distances of their encampments.

The eloquent description of the "Waukegan Moorlands" by H. S. Pepon in his 1927 *Flora of the Chicago Region* has continued to inspire botanists to visit the area. Botanists of the Illinois Natural Area Inventory began in the mid-1970s to spend a great deal of the time in the Beach Ridge Plain. Among the young botanists was Fran Harty, who described what he called sand prairies, some with a high grade of "B," some with the very high grade of "A." In these early inventories, Hosah Prairie specifically was visited. Unfortunately, according to endangered species ecologist Brad Semel, who worked for a time with Fran Harty, Harty's original inventory of Hosah has been lost. But the prairies at Hosah Park were assigned both grade A and B ratings. (Personal communication, Randy Nyboer, Illinois Natural History Survey).

By the late 1970's, boaters were waiting for hours to launch at Waukegan. Some people of the Zion area, including the mayor, were proposing a marina on their lake front. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers declared the land "insignificant." The Department of Conservation conducted a study that showed otherwise. In 1979 Stephen Packard, then director of the Illinois Environmental Council, spoke for the prairie before 250 people at the Illinois Beach State Park Lodge. His point of view was not well received. Still, Packard and others persisted. Town hall meetings were organized to gather support for saving

Hosah Park, and the marina went farther north to Winthrop Harbor, which was already developed down to the lakefront and where houses were being lost to the lake. Construction of the marina started in 1986 and was completed in 1990.

In 1989, at the behest of Steve Packard, Barbara Reed Turner, and Gill Moreland from the Nature Conservancy of Illinois, Bob Pushee, of the Zion Park District, commissioned a study by botanist Dr. Wayne Schennum to inventory the plant species at Hosah, since many people were alarmed that this completely unique area might be destroyed by other development. Schennum focused his two visits on the natural remnant areas of Hosah, and from that he generated a list of 155 plant species (of which 136 were native), all noted during the months of July and September of 1989. The vernal flora was in little evidence at that time, but the preponderance of conservative species native to the Beach Ridge Plain caused quite a stir to local natural historians and Zion residents. Among other rare plants Dr. Schennum reported, 44% of the species had C values that range from 7 to 10; the Mean C value for all native species registered 6.3 with a Floristic Quality Index of 75. These are phenomenal metrics for a landscape in Illinois—or anywhere else, particularly for an area as small as it is.

Formal stewardship of Hosah Prairie started in 1989, with Zion native and Abbott Labs employee Don Wilson, who was then steward of natural remnants at Spring Bluff Forest Preserve near the marina. Don had a degree in biology with an emphasis on ecology. The initial target of Don Wilson's stewardship was to remove garbage, purple loosestrife, and sweet clover from the dune area. Between 1989 and 1995 the boardwalk, observation platform, and educational signage were installed.

“ The preponderance of conservative species native to the Beach Ridge Plain caused quite a stir to local natural historians and Zion residents. ”

In 1991, other Zion residents, Roger and Karen Debenham, followed briefly by Dave LeMieux, took over the stewardship from Don, who became the steward of Illinois Beach State Park. In 1994, Hosah Prairie and the adjacent portion of the North Dunes Nature Preserve were the Lake County pilot study areas for the efficacy of the *Galerucella californiensis* beetles on Purple Loosestrife.

In 2015 Kathleen Garness was offered stewardship of Hosah Prairie by the Zion Park District and, with the ongoing help of botanists Kendall Winter, James Steffen, Ken Klick, Belynda Alberte, and Dr. Gerould Wilhelm, began research into its flora, expanding the Schennum's sight record species list from 155 to 413.

The primary habitat types at Hosah Prairie, travelling westward from the lakeshore, consist of: the beach strand; antedunal dry sand prairie; mesic sand prairie; wet prairie; marsh; panne; black oak savanna, and ruderal areas. So far, 413 species have been sight-identified at Hosah Prairie, of which 354 species have been vouchered.

There are ongoing threats from catastrophic lakeshore erosion and incursion of invasive species, which has been addressed the past ten years by monthly (or more frequent) stewardship workdays. Although the park was dedicated by the Zion Park District as a natural area, there is no legal dedication of it as a nature preserve on the state level. Its inclusion in the Illinois Natural Areas North Dunes Nature Preserve Inventory gives it no formal protection. Hosah and the adjacent Chiwaukee-Waukegan Beach Ridge Plain is formally a part of the Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance.



We have no crystal ball to predict Hosah Prairie's future. Ongoing stewardship is essential to preserve this incredible hotspot of biological diversity. It has a very rich faunal diversity as well. We consider it very well worthwhile to be

part of the ongoing stewardship and monitoring of this beautiful remnant of Illinois coastal plain sand prairie and oak savanna.



The Illinois Botany Big Year Competition 2025

By Christopher Benda



It was at the INPS Annual Board Retreat, at Allerton Park in Monticello, Illinois, where the idea of a competition for observing plants, similar to the Big Year that birders do, was first envisioned and implemented by Trevor Edmonson and Cassi Saari using the platform iNaturalist. And ever since then, I have wanted to win the competition, and in 2025 that finally happened!

The goal of the competition is simple. See how many observations of wild plants you can make with photos within the boundaries of Illinois in a given calendar year. There are challenges to participating in such a competition, mainly that it takes a lot of time and effort to travel, observe, photograph, ID, and upload thousands of observations. Although I have been active on iNaturalist for many years, the lack of high-speed internet at my rural home in Makanda, Illinois was a major limiting factor for me personally, so it wasn't until 2023 that I participated in earnest in the competition. That year, I came in 3rd place after Abel Kinser and Ryan Sorrells with 2615 research grade observations of 1190 species.

But in 2025, I was in it to win it! One major factor that helped me compete is that I had several botanical contracts in central and northern Illinois that would supplement the observations that I have every year in southern Illinois, where I live and work. Besides conducting botanical inventories and teaching plant ID, I monitor rare plants along with volunteers for the Chicago Botanic Garden's Plants of Concern program in southern Illinois. As a result, I observe lots of plants in the wild every year.

The posting of observations is highest at the beginning of the year, so you have to put a lot of effort in at the beginning of the season. Plus, there are many plants that

will disappear as the season progresses, so you must make sure to get good photos of them while they are visible. I found that I was posting 50 observations a day or more at times. Although it took a long time with poor internet, I found that I was disappointed on days I didn't have any observations to post. So that was a motivating factor.

I ended up posting 3,285 observations of 1,473 plant species in the wild in Illinois in 2025. However, only 2,848 observations of 1,353 species have been confirmed as research grade. That's a lot of plant species! Yet, that's still only about 40% of the species known to occur in the wild in Illinois.

My favorite observations include *Ammoselinum butleri* (a state record Carrot) in Massac County, *Corydalis halei* (a very rare fumewort) in Pope County, full glorious bloom *Rhododendron prinophyllum* (wild azalea) in Union County, flowering *Chimaphila maculata* (wintergreen) in Hardin County, *Poa wolfii* (a rare bluegrass) in Vermilion County, blooming *Liparis loeselii* (lesser twayblade) in Cook County, a gorgeous *Platanthera pycnodes* (purple fringed orchid) in Lake County, and late season *Gentiana crinita* (greater fringed gentian) in Cook County.



Rhododendron prinophyllum
(Wild Azalea)



Platanthera psycodes (purple fringed orchid)



Gentiana crinita (greater fringed gentian)

Generally speaking, I love iNaturalist and the Illinois Botany Big Year Competition, but as with anything there are limits to capabilities. My pros and cons are as follows:

Pros

- You can share your neat finds with a community.
- You can have your observations corroborated by others, often with helpful identification tips.
- It's a great way to catalog and search for what you have previously observed.
- You are feeding a database with useful scientific information.

Cons

- It can be difficult to capture details in photos for hard-to-ID species.
- Research-grade observations can still be incorrect.
- You can be certain you've identified something correctly, but it won't get to research-grade without at least one person confirming your ID. This is important because only research-grade observations count for the competition.

Journal Article Roundup & Other News

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

- **“A network is racing to save the Midwest’s native seeds”** by Juanpablo Ramirez-Franco for WBEZ Chicago. www.wbez.org/environment/2026/03/02/midwest-seed-bank
- **“Historic Ogle County cemetery provides new life for Illinois’ prairies”** by Nathaniel Langley for WFIR. www.wifr.com/2026/04/03/historic-ogle-county-cemetery-provides-new-life-illinois-prairies/
- **“Where The Prairie Still Remains”** by Christian Elliott for Noema Magazine. www.noemamag.com/where-the-prairie-still-remains/
- **“Frequent prescribed burns help young oaks thrive despite invasive grasses, Illinois study finds”** by Emily Steele for Illinois Extension. extension.illinois.edu/news-releases/frequent-prescribed-burns-help-young-oaks-thrive-despite-invasive-grasses-illinois
- **“Corpse flowers are threatened by spotty recordkeeping”** by Amanda Morris for Northwestern Now. news.northwestern.edu/stories/2025/04/corpse-flowers-are-threatened-by-spotty-recordkeeping
- **“How a clump of moss helped convict grave robbers in Illinois”** by Ian Sample for The Guardian. www.theguardian.com/science/2026/mar/05/how-moss-helped-convict-grave-robbers-illinois

Botany Humor

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Carpinus



Car Pinus

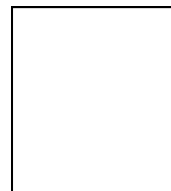




ILLINOIS NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Springfield, IL 62791

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www.illinoisplants.org



The Harbinger Spring 2026

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!

Join us!

- ☐ New member ☐ Address Change Only
☐ Renewal ☐ Additional Donation

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
Phone _____ Membership Year _____
Email _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: Illinois Native Plant Society
INPS, Membership, P.O. Box 9245, Springfield, IL 62791

The Harbinger Newsletter is sent electronically via email.

☐ Check here to receive the newsletter BY MAIL.

Erigenia, our scientific journal, is now available digitally as well as in print. Please indicate your preference for receiving the journal.

☐ Email Only ☐ Postal Mail Only ☐ Both

Chapter Affiliation

- ☐ Central (Springfield) ☐ Northeast (Chicago)
☐ Forest Glen (Westville) ☐ Quad Cities (Rock Island)
☐ Grand Prairie (Bloomington) ☐ Southern (Carbondale)
☐ Kankakee Torrent ☐ Other/Uncertain

Membership Categories

- ☐ Individual.....\$25⁰⁰
☐ Student.....\$15⁰⁰
☐ Household (3).....\$35⁰⁰
☐ Supporting Household (3).....\$50⁰⁰
☐ Patron Household (3).....\$100⁰⁰
☐ Institutional.....\$125⁰⁰
☐ Business (4).....\$125⁰⁰
☐ Life (Individual).....\$500⁰⁰
☐ *Iliamna* (1, Life).....\$1,000⁰⁰
☐ *Primula* (1, Life).....\$2,000⁰⁰
☐ *Erigenia* (1, Life).....\$5,000⁰⁰

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: _____