

Added to the Arkansas System of Natural Areas in 1991, Baker Prairie is a 71-acre tract, the largest remnant of a prairie of the same name that once occupied about 5,000 acres in Boone County.

Located within the city limits of Harrison and adjacent to Harrison High School, Baker Prairie is one of Arkansas's finest educational resources and among the most accessible of all the natural areas in the system.

Baker Prairie is co-owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy and the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission.

The Arkansas General Assembly created the Natural Heritage Commission in 1973. The agency's job is 1) to identify those lands and waters that retain the state's most valuable biological resources, 2) to acquire tracts of such lands to include in the system of natural areas, and 3) to manage those resources for the benefit of future generations while promoting their appreciation and beneficial use.

For more information on the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, write to 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201; call (501) 324-9619; or e-mail info@DAH.state.ar.us and check out our Web site at <http://www.heritage.state.ar.us/nhc/>



Baker Prairie Natural Area is part of the Arkansas System of Natural Areas.



The Arkansas System of Natural Areas is administered by the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, a state agency within the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

Baker Prairie

NATURAL AREA

Visit a remnant
of tallgrass prairie,
easily accessible
within the
city limits
of Harrison.

(photo by Bill Shepherd)





Sturnella magna
(Eastern Meadowlark)
(detail from a painting by David Plank)

Baker Prairie Natural Area is a remnant of one of several prairies that formerly occupied parts of the Springfield Plateau of north-central and north-western Arkansas.

Distinguished for its limestone and chert substrata, Baker Prairie supports typical prairie grasses like big bluestem, little bluestem, switchgrass, and Indian grass. Five Arkansas special plant species live in this natural area: Ozark wake robin, prairie violet, royal catchfly, downy gentian, and silky aster.

Baker Prairie is also home to three animal species of special concern: grasshopper sparrow, prairie mole cricket, and ornate box turtle.

The ornate box turtle is remarkable because its habitat is restricted to unplowed grasslands. Since most grasslands in Arkansas have been plowed or cultivated, the ornate box turtle has a tenuous hold in its Arkansas range. Arkansas Game and Fish Commission regulations protect box turtles from being collected.

The Great Plains region was the largest native grassland encountered by pioneers moving west. Isolated grasslands also exist in parts of Arkansas, but these are less well known than the Great Plains.

Plant life in a grassland community is very sensitive to subtle variations in soil moisture, chemistry, and texture, and that accounts for the many different grasses and flowering plants that



Viola pedata
(bird's-foot violet)
(photo by Bill Shepherd)

grow here. An acre of native grassland can be shown to support up to 150 different species of native plants.

While grasses dominate Baker Prairie, at certain times of the year, the prairie bursts alive with showy wildflowers.

More than 99 percent of Arkansas's original grasslands have been cultivated. Turning the soil alters it permanently and allows weeds to invade. Once the prairie sod is plowed, native plants often disappear, and with few exceptions, only the tracts of land that were set aside for raising hay have retained their original flora and soil structure. We call these tracts "prairies," borrowing a word the pioneers used for "grazing land."

Because of Baker Prairie's location in an urban area, we must take special care to protect it. The area is an excellent place to see and study some of Arkansas's native plants, but they must not be removed from the prairie.

When visiting this Arkansas Natural Area, please remember to leave nothing but footprints and take nothing but photographs. Please limit travel within natural areas to foot traffic only. Motorized vehicles, horses, camping and construction of permanent hunting stands are prohibited in Arkansas Natural Areas.



Ammodramus savannarum
(grasshopper sparrow)
(photo © T.J. Ulrich/WIREO)