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What's New

2010: Census Time

[Jonelle Doughty](#)

The premise of the U.S. Census is simple: To collect data on our population. How old you are and where you live dictate, among other things, how federal funds should be allocated within your community. In much the same manner, ANHC gathers information on Arkansas's plant and animal populations. The information we get can be used in a variety of ways.

Results from recent winter bird surveys at the Cherokee Prairies complex in Franklin County showed a population of Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) on properties surrounding or adjacent to our natural areas there. Knowing these relatively unaltered pieces of tallgrass prairie host wintering Le Conte's Sparrows helps us better manage our own properties for their habitat. These survey results also help us pinpoint properties of interest for possible acquisition in the future.



Le Conte's Sparrow (left), and Bill Holimon, ANHC Chief of Research, surveying for the bird near Cherokee Prairie Natural Area.

ANHC staff members are currently gearing up for field work during the green seasons. Our botanists will look for rare plants and take general inventory of plant life on our natural areas. Our aquatic specialist will be checking for species of concern in creeks and rivers around the state. And our chief of research will visit our population of red-cockaded woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*) to see if there are any new babies. You can help by taking pictures when you visit a natural area and posting them on [our Facebook page](#). We want to hear from you!



Celebrate Art and Nature

[Jane Jones-Schulz](#)

The [Arkansas Ecological Services Field Office](#) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is celebrating [Endangered Species Day](#) with the 1st Annual Arkansas Endangered Species Day Art Contest. Endangered Species Day is a celebration of our nation's wildlife and wild places. Started in 2006 by the United States Congress, Endangered Species Day is an opportunity to learn about endangered species. The art contest is an integral part of celebrating Endangered Species Day, May 21, 2010.



Art work should highlight one or more land, cave, and/or stream dwelling endangered, threatened, or candidate species (animal or plant) found in Arkansas. Winners will be chosen in four categories: K-Grade 2, Grades 3-6, Grades 7-9, and Grades 10-12. Entries must be postmarked by April 28 and winners will be notified prior to the end of the current school year (May, 2010). Details are available at the [Arkansas Field Office website](#) or from Erin Leone at Erin_Leone@fws.gov or (501) 513-4472.

Visit the [Research and Data](#) section of our website to learn more about rare species in Arkansas. You can even use our Rare Species Search Engine to see what animals and plants we track in your county. For inspiration, visit our [Image Gallery](#) and check out the pictures of rare plants and animals.

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Cooperative Conservation

[Karen Smith](#)

On February 17, 2010, I was invited to join Scott Simon of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to speak to the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission (AGFC) about cooperative conservation in Arkansas. In 2001, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) signed a Memorandum of Agreement with AGFC establishing 14,000 acres within the System of Natural Areas as Wildlife Management Areas. That agreement was later renewed in 2008. Together, the two agencies now co-own or co-manage more than 41,000 acres as Natural Areas/Wildlife Management Areas. With the support of Governor Beebe and the [Department of Arkansas Heritage](#) (DAH), we continue to pursue innovative arrangements with conservation partners to maximize an array of funding sources.



Our mission is to conserve Arkansas's biodiversity, and we do this in a number of ways. Within the System of Natural Areas, we seek opportunities to conserve rare species and restore vanishing habitats across the landscape of Arkansas. Our stewardship staff works diligently to sustain the conservation vision and ecological goals for each of the 67 natural areas in the System. The Memorandum of Agreement with AGFC brings the additional support of wildlife biologists and enforcement officers. I showcased the following locations:

[Warren Prairie Natural Area](#): The rich biodiversity of this area—including 14 rare plants, such as the federally endangered geocarpon (*Geocarpon minimum*), and the chance to bring back federally endangered Red-cockaded woodpeckers—allows us to compete well for federal grant funding. This spring we will double the size of the natural area with Arkansas's second award from the Federal Forest Legacy grant program, bringing a total of 4,500 acres to conservation.

[Falcon Bottoms Natural Area](#): At this site, it has taken 18 years and over 20 separate transactions (negotiated by commission staff and TNC on our behalf) to protect 3,200 acres of relatively unaltered bottomlands along Bayou Dorcheat.

[Nacatoch Ravines Natural Area](#): This unique partnership between the commission and TNC involves a combination of fee-title, easement, and undivided interest ownerships to conserve 1,653 acres. This natural area represents one of the largest and most intact upland forests in Arkansas's Gulf Coastal Plain. We will add 469 acres to this site later this spring.

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Natural Features

Restoration at Warren Prairie

[Jonelle Doughty](#)

On Wednesday, March 11, ANHC staff visited Warren Prairie Natural Area to assess stewardship work performed last summer. Since 2006, the commission has conducted ecosystem restoration at this natural area—including ecological thins, fire, and other mechanical work—restoring pine woodlands to the more open habitat structure appropriate for this site and reducing the woody vegetation degrading some barrens.



ANHC staff surveys for Henslow's Sparrows (left). A naturally regenerating pine woodland (right).

What is a barrens?

Also known as saline prairie, a barrens is a naturally treeless area, generally only a few acres in size, that appear in a mosaic with surrounding woodlands. The soil contains high amounts of sodium and changes seasonally from very wet to very dry. These conditions keep open areas relatively free of woody vegetation. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is a dominant species in barrens at Warren Prairie Natural Area. Fire suppression has allowed woody vegetation to encroach upon these barrens, reducing the size of the open areas, and thus reducing habitat for barrens-specific species.

What do open pine woodlands have to do with it?

Pine woodlands, or pine savannas, at Warren Prairie Natural Area were historically wide-spaced with an open canopy that allowed for diverse, prairie-like ground cover. Fire suppression and past forestry activities have very much affected the native structure of the pine woodlands. Dense, woody undergrowth caused canopies to close, keeping light from the forest floor and hindering the growth of the native ground cover.

Why is it important to restore these habitats?

Warren Prairie Natural Area is home to many rare plants and animals. Henslow's Sparrows (*Ammodramus henslowii*) winter throughout the southeastern United States in pine savanna and other open habitats such as the barrens found at Warren Prairie. They are a species of concern due to loss of habitat. Until recently, these birds were considered to winter only in small numbers in Arkansas. But in early 2006, ANHC's Theo Witsell and Bill Holimon completed surveys documenting a large population of wintering Henslow's Sparrows, all in saline soil barrens.



Species of concern Henslow's Sparrow (right), and the rare Diana Fritillary, our state butterfly (right).

Open pine woodlands are also historically home to our state's butterfly, the Diana Fritillary (*Speyeria diana*). This rare butterfly was first documented at Warren Prairie Natural Area in the summer of 2008 in areas thinned a few years before.

In our most recent restoration work, performed in the summer of 2009, a forestry mulcher, also known as a grinder, was used to reduce shrub and mid-story trees in areas that were previously thinned. This work allowed sunlight to better reach the forest floor and encouraged re-growth of native grasses and forbs. The results were nearly instantaneous with both Henslow's Sparrow and Diana Fritillary responding positively to the habitat restoration. In the winter of 2009, Henslow's Sparrows were observed in a previously degraded barrens and a restored pine savanna that were treated by grinder only months before. And Diana Fritillaries were also observed in greater numbers as a result of last summer's grinder work.

Our recent site visit proved the restoration work continues to be successful; we were able to flush another Henslow's Sparrow from the barrens. He took shelter in a nearby brush pile and sat

still long enough for ANHC staff to get a good look at him. See a photo gallery of the bird here. We also visited a few of the restored pine savannas where, hopefully, we will see even larger numbers of Diana Fritillaries this summer.

By doubling the size of the natural area this spring and moving ahead with habitat restoration, we expect the rare plants and animals at Warren Prairie Natural Area to continue thrive. For a photo gallery of our site visit and the varied landscape of this unique natural area, go to our Flickr page.

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Shamrocks and Arkansas Clover

[Jane Jones-Schulz](#), [Theo Witsell](#)

The word "shamrock" is the English version of the Irish/Celtic word "seamroy" or "seamrog," which translates literally as "little/young clover." There is much debate about which species is the real shamrock, and some of the likely candidates, including black medic and wood sorrel, are not even classified as clover. While not all Irish agree, the plant most commonly referred to as a shamrock is white clover (*Trifolium repens*).



This debate is partly due to the mythology of the shamrock and the different representations that have appeared in Celtic artwork through the centuries. Some legends suggest that the plant began its historical and symbolic journey with the Druids of Ireland. As in many religions, three was a mystical number in Celtic religion, and the shamrock was sacred to the Druids because its leaves formed a triad.

Many stories connect the shamrock with Saint Patrick. According to one legend, in the 5th century Saint Patrick plucked a shamrock from the soil to illustrate his Christian message to the Irish. Here was nature's proof of the Holy Trinity in the three leaves of the shamrock. St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York bears out a connection between the clover-like shamrock and Christianity. Its architecture is festooned with three-leafed symbols.

By the 17th century, the shamrock had become a symbol of emerging Irish nationalism and was worn as a lapel badge of Irish identity on Saint Patrick's Day. As the English seized Irish lands and made laws against the use of the Irish language and the practice of Catholicism, many Irish began to wear the shamrock as a symbol of pride in their heritage. In Queen Victoria's 19th century, the shamrock was recognized as a sign of rebellion. Irish regiments were forbidden to wear or display it and risked death by hanging if they did. This was this period which spawned the phrase "the wearin' o' the green". Though the shamrock is not an official emblem of Ireland—that honor is reserved for the harp—it was used as a popular 'national' brand in the 20th century, a statement of being Irish or having some Irish connection.



Arkansas native Buffalo clover (*Trifolium reflexum*).

Some people say that shamrocks only grow on Irish ground, but Arkansas is home to the favored white clover as well as 16 other clover species, most of which are not native. Learn about Arkansas's native clover species in [this article](#) on our website.

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ID these Trees

[Jonelle Doughty](#)

Winter tree identification can be both fun and challenging. No green leaves mean you must pay close attention to other details such as habitat and bark. Can you identify the two different trees below? I'll give you a few hints: They both grow in wet, swampy areas, their trunks widen at the bottom to form a buttress, and they have similar distribution around the state. Visit [our Facebook page](#) to post your best guess and find out which natural area you can visit to see both.



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ARKANSAS NATURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION
1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
Phone: (501) 324-9619 / Fax: (501) 324-9618 / TDD: (501) 324-9150
arkansas@naturalheritage.org



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