

NAMEKAGON BARRENS WILDLIFE AREA

Our mission is to develop programs and activities that educate and promote the importance of conserving Wisconsin's Northwest Sands pine-oak barrens habitat.



Photo courtesy Mark Nupen

IN THIS ISSUE:

[BUG ART P2](#)

[BOTANY NATURE WALK P2](#)

[DOG TRIAL REPORT P3](#)

[DARK SKY PARK P3](#)

[WHAT LURKS... ? P4](#)

[BLUEBIRD REPORT P5](#)

[1863 BRIDGE P5](#)

[SPECIAL EVENTS P6](#)

To Our Dedicated Members

Gary Dunsmoor

A big Happy New Year, and even bigger Thank You to all our Friends that have made a donations for membership and/or our beautiful third annual Barrens calendar for 2021. Remember, any donation, no matter what the reason or amount, is greatly appreciated and puts you on our FNBWA membership/mailling list. It's not too late to make your 2021 membership donation to keep our friends group going, and assist with barrens conservation.

Despite COVID-19 the FNBWA did manage to work on a few projects in 2020. Our FNBWA website is undergoing an update, we assisted with the improvements on the South Unit scenic overlook, and adding a new overlook on the east end of the South Unit. Also, more signs directing people to the Barrens were installed at town road intersections. Hopefully we will tackle and accomplish more projects this year, including improving the kiosks, updating the auto tour, and possibly improving the outhouse situation at the cabin.

We could not begin to do many of the projects completed over the years without our many dedicated members that see the importance of the globally significant barrens habitat.

A schedule for our 2021 events is listed on the last page of this newsletter.

Unfortunately Sharp-tailed Grouse viewing blinds will again be unavailable this spring due to the continuation of the COVID-19 situation. The Barrens is always there however for your personal exploration of the flora, fauna, and great scenery.



FNBWA
BARRENS
CONSERVATION
www.fnbwa.org

Bug Art on the Barrens

Mark Nupen

As I wander around the Barrens, NBWA, each year I often noticed those ‘pine cone’ like things on the willow plants. Indeed some plants have many of them on the upper stems! And the plant doesn’t seem to be affected by them. Then I look a little closer and I see these often red / green swellings on the willow stems and even on the leaves I will see these strange shapes growing within the leaf! Of course they are kind of cute, thus I call them Bug Art!

Well, the experts call them ‘Willow Roses’ or ‘Stem Galls’ or ‘Leaf Galls’.

Mainly I see these odd plant growths on the Willows! Why the willows? These galls are formed by worms that hatch from eggs laid by Saw Flies, midges, which are tiny mosquito like flies that often fly in swarms. The eggs hatch into worms and the interaction of the plant and the worm creates these sometimes rather elaborate galls on their host willow plant. They grow in such a way that it appears the plant and worm work together. Insects often have their preferences, I guess. Something like Monarchs preferring milkweed.

This is another rather amazing part of the Barrens. Remember to get out of your car, walk around and look closely for your next surprise!

Manipulation of the phenolic chemistry of willows by gall-inducing sawflies by Tommi Nyman and Riita Julkunen-Tiitto. PNAS Nov. 21, 2000.

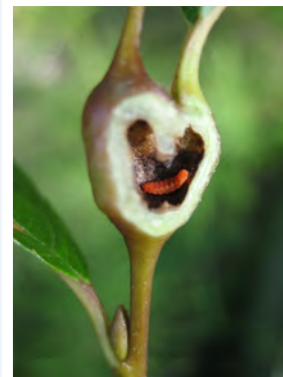
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC27199/



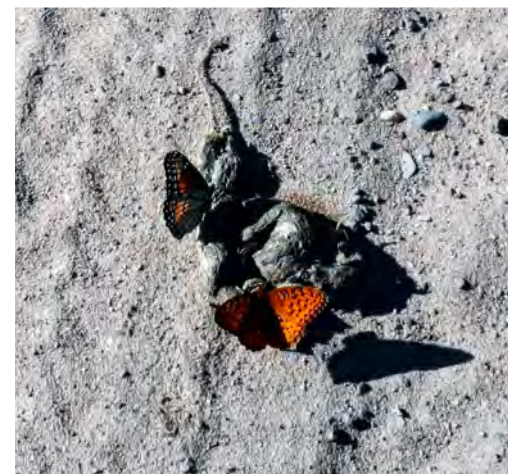
Botany Nature Walk

Jerome McAllister

Gary Dunsmoor led a 6-person botany nature walk on the South Unit of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. There is a road along the south boundary, and about ½ mile west of the Namekagon Trail is a south-facing hillside which holds a large array of lupine. Two acres, maybe more, of the blue flowers interspersed among scrub oaks stretch from the road all the way to the hilltop. There the lupine abruptly stops. It may be the northernmost stand of lupine in Wisconsin. Over the years, naturalists have looked for the endangered Karner’s blue butterfly in this patch but to no avail. The northernmost verified Karner’s sighting is about 2 miles south. The photo at right with a “steep hill” sign in the foreground, shows a panorama of the south unit with the lupine hillside in the foreground about 150 yards away.



The lupine was gone to seed and the plants were begging for rain. Some sort of caterpillar had been feeding on the leaves but there



was not a tell tale from the Karner’s. The only butterflies flitting about were monarchs and fritillaries The latter were identified as Aphrodite’s. Both appear in an attached photo puddling on the moisture from coyote scat. The only flower in recent bloom was the blue harebell. Birds still singing included catbird, golden-winged warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, common yellowthroat, and veery. A dry June had abruptly turned spring to summer.

Dog Trial Report on the NBWA in October

Vern Drake

Two out of the three dog trial groups were able to hold their events again last fall (October 2020) at the NBWA. There are three different dog trial groups.

The first group is the Chippewa Valley Grouse Dog Association. Usually arriving the last week in September, they usually have about 40 dogs, maybe 20–30 people, and a few horses. They walk through the barrens with their dogs, and only the judges are on horses. They were unable to participate on NBWA this season because the event was initially disallowed due to COVID. Although the decision was later reversed, an alternative location was already chosen and notices were out to participants.

The next group is the Region 19 of AFTCA (Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America) which includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin but they also come from many different states. They bring lots of horses as the competitors ride them following their dogs, and the judges and observers are also on horses. When a dog goes “on point” the owner and judge ride close to that area, dismount to observe as they approach the dog and the judge decides how well the dog stayed on point and how well it responded to the owner’s commands.

The third group was limited to the Vizsla breed dogs. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vizsla>. Although I missed last year, this was a new group for me, so I’m not familiar with it at all. There is some information at: <https://www.cwvc.org/Field-Trials>

In summary, it was decent weather this year and both groups seemed to enjoy themselves. The important thing is that they did manage to hold their events in spite of COVID. The best news is that everyone I talked to in the dog trial groups said that they thought the Sharp-tailed Grouse had a good year as they found them plentiful.



Photo courtesy Jeff Hintz

Conserving the Night Sky: A “Dark Sky Park” for the Barrens?

Kathy Bartilson

How many of us get inspired to go out and stargaze or locate planets, and realize it’s hard to find the stars with so many lights on around us? Believe it or not, even in the woods in Washburn County, we see “sky glow” from Spooner and Trego at our home.

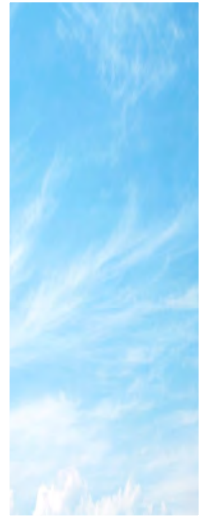
But, we don’t live far from some of the darkest skies with the least “light pollution” on the planet. The Barrens area in northwest Wisconsin is rated a “2” on the Bortle scale, which scores skies with no unnatural lighting as “1” (the darkest skies) up to “7” for the brightest

night skies, which are most affected by artificial lighting.

There’s a proposal gaining support locally to designate the Douglas County Wildlife Area and the Namekagon Barrens as a Dark Skies Park through the [International Dark-Sky Association](#). This designation could make our area a destination point for local citizens and visitors seeking excellent stargazing opportunities. The designation doesn’t carry any regulatory requirements and will not affect future land use. But it does point out on the map where there are dark skies to appreciate, and an area where the natural environment is not greatly disturbed by light pollution.

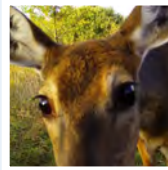
The Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area Board supports including the Namekagon Barrens in the park. We are also interested in hosting some stargazing events on the Barrens (after the pandemic risk is over). The champion and organizer of the project is Angela Botner of Solon Springs, a Board member of the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary. She can be contacted for further information at town-ofsolonsprings@gmail.com. There will also be updates on Facebook under [NWWisconsinDarkSkyProject](#).

Some experts are calling darkness a “resource” to be conserved. Dark skies are important for everything from bird migration and animal behavior to human health and the human spirit. Light pollution can disturb all of these things. [Continued on page 6](#)



What Lurks on the Barrens?— Part 2

Gary Dunsmoor



In last winter's newsletter I wrote about deploying a Wisconsin SnapShot camera on the Barrens.

This citizen monitoring project utilizes trail cameras throughout the state to monitor wildlife. Organizations as ours, individuals, families, and students have the opportunity to be involved in monitoring our wildlife resources to learn more about Wisconsin's wildlife, and help the WI DNR make management decisions to benefit these animals, their habitat, and people.

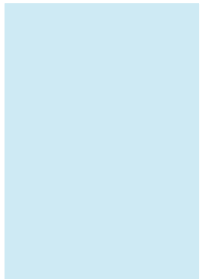


Unfortunately, when I ventured out on the Barrens in March I found the camera had been stolen, even though it had been cable locked to the tree. Due to COVID-19 a replacement camera was not received until July. The new camera was deployed in August and checked in early November. While I expected many camera trips, I did not expect 1,476 pictures! Many high wind event pictures, where moving vegetation trips the camera, were included, but there were still hundreds of wildlife pictures. Critters 'captured' included: Gray Wolf, Coyote, Red Fox, Bobcat, Stripped Skunk, White-tailed Deer, Red Squirrel, Wild Turkey, Woodcock, Blue Jay, Common Flicker, and happily, numerous Sharp-tailed Grouse.



The camera was again checked in mid-January. While I did not expect to find as many captures on the camera in the dead of any barrens winter, there were over 500 pictures of animal mug shots to add to our SnapShot photo collection. Since many animals are nocturnal, most captures were night photos, but there were again some great day pictures of Sharp-tails, deer, and a Bobcat. I posted the best of the photos on our FNBWA Facebook page in November and January. Some camera capture favorites are shown here.

If you are interested in what Snapshot is all about, and possibly be a volunteer, just go to the WI DNR website and type Snapshot in the search bar. The website will also give you information on how you can help classify SnapShot animal pictures from all over the state.



Bluebirds on the Barrens

Dave Clauson

The Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area is one of my favorite places in the world. I have been a frequent visitor since about 1958. My Dad and I, along with some other friends from Milltown, would tent or trailer camp each year for the opening of Sharp-tailed Grouse season. We did that for about 10 years in a row. By that time I was hooked on the beauty and uniqueness of the Barrens and couldn't stop going. Sue, my wife and I would make several wildflower drives each year just to watch as the flowers progress through the seasons. I was also good friends with Bruce DeLong and Dan Lien who monitored and maintained the 24 bluebird houses throughout the NBWA. I always enjoyed staying at their cabin whether we were exploring the landscape or banding birds. When Bruce died, Dan took me on as his assistant on the bluebird trail. With Dan's passing, I just kind of inherited the job.

This was an interesting year (aren't they all). We saw more Upland Sandpipers than we have ever seen. I think we saw 1-4 on almost every trip. For the first time, red squirrels took over 2 nests. One chipmunk was very possessive and would chatter loudly when I knocked on her door. We had less swallows and wrens than other years. This year a bluebird actually drove out a swallow family and successfully raised a brood. Normally I think it works the other way.



Photos courtesy Dave Clauson

More on the 1863 Bridge

Vern Drake

This is a photo taken with a drone camera of the sharp bend in the Namekagon River where the 1863 bridge was built and remnants still exist. It's very near the south unit of NBWA, and one of the highlights of the area from a historical standpoint in the Town of Blaine. The red line approximates the location of the old bridge. Notice how the small island was used as an abutment to shorten the span. The old stagecoach trail from St. Paul to Bayfield ran right through East Blaine, thus the need for the bridge. A book, written by Don Monson, retired DNR fellow from Spooner, is about this bridge and it's a fascinating history. Title: "The Namekagon Bridge 1863 - 1941".



Photo courtesy Don McConkey

[Continued from page 3](#) Scientists describe three types of light pollution:

Glare: Bright lights that hurt your eyes and make it hard to see when driving, etc.;

Light Trespass: Where light from one property sends unwelcome light into neighboring buildings and grounds, and

Sky Glow: The light on the horizon from developed areas.

Excess light is the easiest pollution to cure, without needing treatment

and filtration technology. What do we need to do to help in our homes and communities? Simply turning off unneeded lights, using timers and sensors, choosing the appropriate wattage, focusing the light downward, and shielding fixtures will help cut down the light scatter. This in turn saves energy, stops disruption to humans and wildlife, and even improves safety in some areas.

There are several good resources on -line with further information on

light pollution and what can be done about it, especially “TED” Talks (Technology, Entertainment and Design) on YouTube. One especially good one is by Paul Bogard, (author of “The End of Night”) who concludes his comments by saying we need to “*regain a world where seeing the Milky Way is part of what it means to be alive on this beautiful planet and where night’s natural darkness is part of every human life.*”

2021 SPECIAL Events!

Kathy Bartilson

The Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Board met virtually on Saturday, February 21. We are planning to construct a small shelter with benches and display boards in the North Unit, near where the current display kiosk is located. In the South Unit, we plan to place an interpretive sign on the new Namekagon Trail scenic overlook and update the kiosk on Spring Brook Trail. We may put a picnic table near the new shelter and at the parking area on Spring Brook Trail. We are researching options and costs to upgrade our restroom facilities at the cabin and picnic shelter site. Our website re-design is also underway.

We are not planning an annual meeting or picnic because of the potential for COVID exposure. We did, however, set dates for our field trips. As in the past, all are subject to change or cancellation if needed. Watch our blog for further details through www.fnbwa.org All events begin at 9:00 a.m. at the driveway to the cabin at 33174 Gomulak Fire Lane. Here’s the schedule:

- Natural Resources Foundation (NRF) Birding Tour – **Saturday, May 22**
- Lupines on the South Unit – **Saturday, June 5**
- NRF Bog Walk – **Saturday, June 12**
- Wildflowers – **Saturday, July 10**
- Blueberry walk – **Wednesday, July 14**
- Plant survey – **Saturday, July 31**
- Sharp-tails and Bird Dogs – **Wednesday, August 11**

To participate in the Natural Resources Foundation tours, sign up through their website at www.wisconservation.org/field-trips/. No pre-registration is needed for the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens trips.

Many thanks to all of our members for [renewing your memberships](#) and your donations in support of our group and the Barrens!



Photo courtesy Mark Nupen