
WINTER 2020

The Wildlife Witness

Washington County Wildlife Society Newsletter

1305 E Blue Bell Rd, Ste. 105, Brenham, TX 77833

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wcwildlife.org

Annual Stew Supper and Business Meeting

January 17, 2020

Please Join Us!

5:30pm - Social Hour

6:15pm -Free Will Donation Stew
Dinner

6:45pm- Business Meeting

7pm- Guest Speaker Ross Winton
will speak on the Issues Facing
Pollinators, Who the Pollinators
are, and What We Can Do to help
them.



Photo Credit: William Dingus

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Ross is the Invertebrate Biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife. His current work is focused on implementing conservation actions for Texas' Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and increasing the knowledge of their distribution and abundance. Ross received his B.S. in Wildlife Management and his M.S. in Entomology, both from Montana State University. Ross has worked with a wide variety of invertebrates found in habitats from caves to forest canopies across North America and the West Indies. In Texas, Ross has begun efforts to advance our knowledge regarding our important pollinators, unique dune endemics and engaging with institutions and citizen scientists to learn more about the many invertebrate species that call Texas home.

President's Remarks

2019 has again been a very active year for your Washington County Wildlife Society. Thank you to the Directors and Vice Directors of our WMA's, Board members and many volunteers that keep this organization going.

Our report from Stephanie Damron, the County Biologist, on Does harvested from the MLD permits and the open Thanksgiving weekend was about 250 Does. This type of management is necessary to keep our Doe to Buck ratio in tack and demonstrates good deer population management within our County.

We want to remember those members who passed this year and their influence they left on WCWS. Jim Dixon, a devoted Board Officer who willingly gave of his time and talents. He truly admired nature and conservation. Also, Jim and Irene Bacak, who admired the outdoors as well. From memorials and donations in their memory, two trees have been planted, one at Henderson Park and one in Burton. A Thank you to William Amelang for spear heading the planting of these trees.

Our annual stew dinner and meeting is January 17, 2020. Our speaker is Ross Winton. His Biography is enclosed and he will be speaking on Issues Pollinators Face, Who the Pollinators are, and What we can Do to help them. I Hope to see most of you there.

The nominating committee is still looking for Board Officer positions to fill: President, Vice President and Secretary. I know this organization has many fine members who could do these jobs. If any of you are willing to give a little bit of your time and talents, we need you. Please step up and help out.

As we celebrate this Christmas Holiday, let us remember the True "Reason for the Season", the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. So, as I step down from serving as your president, I pray each of you continue supporting this Great organization and to never lose sight of how important our LANDS and wildlife are to us. It has been my great honor and pleasure serving you these past several years.

Blessings for a Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year!!

Celeste Dickschat

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Fall Food Plot Trials and Tribulations

by Terry Tiemann, member, Rocky Creek WMA



If your property is cursed, or blessed depending on your point of view, with Bahia grass maybe my experience can benefit you. Also perhaps this article will encourage readers to offer suggestions which can improve on my process. After all, sharing of information to the benefit of wildlife is what we are about!

In June of 2019, I purchased a six foot 3 point tiller in order to more easily make deer winter food plots. I immediately mounted the tiller to my tractor to test it. To my chagrin the Bahia grass which covers the entire 61 acres of the family farm was too much for the tiller. To continue would have easily burned up the tiller's slip clutch. Obviously a different plan was needed.

First, I applied herbicide to the area of the planned food plot area. After two weeks, I sprayed herbicide again as much of the Bahiagrass was still green. After another two week wait, it appeared the grass was dead. Time to till!

I reattached the tiller to the tractor and was ready to prepare the plot. Once again, the Bahiagrass proved to be too much for the tiller. Even though the grass was dead, the well developed root system was too thick and still caused the tiller's slip clutch to slip. Not owning a disc harrow and with no funds available to purchase one, I attached my box blade to the tractor and lowered the six ripper shanks to their deepest setting. This successfully loosened the Bahiagrass root system.

I reattached the tiller for the third time and tried again. This time the Bahiagrass roots wrapped up so thickly on the tiller's shaft that once again the slip clutch began to slip. Now I knew the roots would need to be removed if I were ever going to till this plot. Luckily, our farm has a good foot deep layer of sandy loam which made the grass roots easy to remove but very time consuming. I purchased a large (24" wide) aluminum leaf rake and began the chore of removing the roots. After removing twelve trailer loads of grass roots, I once again attached the tiller and finally was able to till the 1/2 acre plot.



By mid August the plot was ready to be fertilized and seeded but it was another month before we finally had forecasts of sufficient rain. Finally the rains came, the plot sprouted and by November was lush beyond my expectations. Seeing the number of deer which have been utilizing the plot makes all the hard work worthwhile. It was a lot of work but luckily I am retired and have lots of spare time. As the old saying goes "I wake up with nothing to do and at the end of the day I'm only half finished". Now next year I plan to build a second plot.



A note from the editor: Feel free to stop by your local NRCS & SWCD Office for suggestions and resources. As you read through this newsletter, you will see that there are a number of ways to complete this task successfully. Also, all grass and food plot seed ordered through Washington SWCD supports local Ag and Conservation Events.

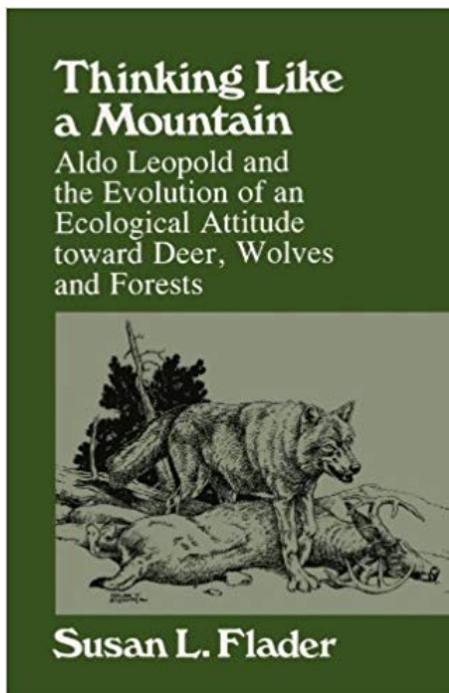
Food Plot Trials and Tribulations (CONT.)



A Book Review - Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the evolution of an Ecological attitude toward deer wolves and forests by Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator & Newsletter Editor

I took a long time to read this book because it's PACKED with information and citations. Ms. Flader did an excellent job compiling all she could from Aldo Leopold's work at the University of Wisconsin. This book really tells the story of how he got there and reminds us of how crazy people think you are when you discuss new concepts in Agriculture. There really aren't any spoilers here. There can't be; we already know what happens

Leopold's professional development is told through his work and research experiences. At the beginning, those were in the Carson National Forests of New Mexico working for Fish and Game. In case you didn't know, he has a Wilderness Area named after him near Silver City, NM which is part of the Gila National Forest that he established and first proposed. After that, he worked on the infamous Kaibab National Forest of what is now the Grand Canyon National Park and his management philosophies changed in that time alone. Many of you may not know but in the beginning, Leopold had the mind of a hunter. The old mentality of "we need lots of deer so we can shoot lots of deer." Of course that seems pretty straight forward, but when you investigate the functionality of the ecosystem, which can take decades to do, you find that it's nowhere near that simple. During Leopold's lifetime he finds himself in the East, working in D.C., in the southwest, which clearly has a special place in his heart because that's where he got his start and he finishes his career in Wisconsin, which was, and still is a mecca for forestry, deer hunting and management. Throughout his career, someone was always asking Leopold to serve on a board or committee or he was being appointed to a government office of some sort, only to be laughed at or told no by other members or superiors but that didn't slow him down.



I really enjoyed seeing into Leopold's development because it is a good reminder that even the father of wildlife management wasn't born a prodigy of the subject. He worked through the problems of the time, the exact same thing each of us do as we work the land to improve habitat for wildlife or production of food plots even if you take the simple approach. I can't say I didn't warn you! You've got to be committed to read this book, but it's not nearly as dry and fact filled as Rachel Carson's Silent Spring. This book is worth the time if you want to know the man behind the Ax, Cow, Plow, Fire and Gun and how he got there.

Let's Talk About Food Plots!

by Cary Dietzmann, Greenvine WMA Vice-Director & 2011 Lone Star Land Steward Award Recipient

Many associate the term "FOOD PLOT" with deer. Yes, many whitetail deer enthusiasts, hunters, and wildlife biologists and managers will plant food plots specifically to benefit, attract and feed whitetail deer. However, many more species of wildlife utilize a diversified food plot, not just the deer.

Premixed food plots come in a range of bag sizes, 1 lb - 50 lbs and costs can range from a few \$\$ to \$\$\$\$. Often these mixes require specific planting criteria to be effective. Many require specific soil ph ranges, weed suppression and control, and fertilization. All these associated management activities tied to your food plots can quickly turn into a lot of time and money.

Over the last 20 years I have purchased and been both successful and unsuccessful with many different types of food plot mixes or different varieties of specific food plot plant species. Over that time I have come to recognize products and practices that both work well and are the most economical and productive.

One of the simplest ways to create a Wildlife Food Plot is by SCALPing an area with a lawn mower. Yep, it's that simple.

The photos attached will show various examples of pasture behind my house here in the Salem community of Washington County. I used this same method of SCALPing on the ranch I had formerly in Austin County with great success there also.

Simply mow the area desired, after the first hard frost or freeze. You may have to mow the area several different times reducing the deck height each pass so as to not generate a thick mat of clippings that will shade the soil. Each pass will mulch the previous clippings into smaller organic material and eventually your last pass will be at the lowest possible setting on your mower. The lower the better here, we want to SCALP the area so the sunlight penetrates to the soil.

It only takes Mother Nature a short period of time to start utilizing the sunlight to begin sprouting grass, broad leaf weeds, forbs and clovers. Everything from rabbits, deer, birds and wintering insects will be attracted to the winter salad bar! Deer don't eat a lot of grass, but I have laid on my belly camouflaged with binoculars and watched them pull individual tiny blades of new growth out of these scalped areas. They especially like the native forbs that thrive after performing a SCALP. Eventually the grasses will become inedible to the deer but the forbs and flowers persist until heat of late spring ensues.



I also raise cattle, and SCALP my pastures when time permits. These pastures begin to "GREEN UP" much quicker than those ignored by the SCALPing mower. So it gets my cattle pastures into rotational grazing quicker.

The left photo is of FALLOW pasture taken 12-13-19. Fallow being not grazed or SCALPed.

The right photo is of GRAZED pasture taken 12-13-19. Here my cattle have trimmed the turf. But as you can see, the turf is still completely concealing the soil.



Let's Talk About Food Plots! (CONT.)



This picture (left) is of a SCALPed pasture next to my fallow wildlife zone, picture taken 12-13-19. Here you can see the GREEN! Also in the area by the deer feeder you see a dedicated deer food plot of a variety of planted species. The green winter plot in front of the browned spring plot next to the tree line.

The picture below is a close up of the ground in a pasture SCALPed during the last week of November, picture taken 12-13-19. Notice the kernel of corn I placed to give size perspective to the tiny clovers, forms, and grasses emerging.



The picture below is a pasture I SCALPed the first week of November, picture taken 12-13-19. Notice the difference in the height and growth of this pasture as compared to the one on the left. I should have put something in this photo for scale. It is about 2 1/2 " tall. You can also notice the difference in the amount and height of the grasses...Looks like spring growth on pasture that was SCALPed only 6 weeks ago heading into winter!

Wildlife food plots by SCALPing your land! If you have any questions regarding the information in this article send me an e-mail to, cary@acountryliferealestate.com



"In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways and they're still beautiful."

~Alice Walker

A Winter Evening on the Farm

by Dee Wolff, member, Greenvine WMA

December 11, 2019

A wintering sky greets me as I leave the warmth of the old farm house for an evening walk. My heart sings a bit, a bittersweet song, as I inhale the sweet earth and feel the warmth leaving the ground. A cool chill rises up to surround my feet.

I am awed each evening with appreciation for the amazing drama unfolding in the western sky. The powerful, life-giving golden orb is beginning its decline into evening darkness. It seems to linger for an instant before it disappears immediately at the end of the driveway. Does it hide in the dirt until the morning? Does it illuminate and warm inhabitants on the other side of the world? Perhaps it sets on the heads and antlers of the deer that our neighbors hand feed each evening in the cacti garden of their backyard. As they call the name of each creature, I see the sun reflecting from their eyes, off of their horns and onto the bucket that our neighbor carries to feed his pet deer- people. That is love....love of nature, love of beautiful animals.

I am mesmerized by the opalescent palette of the setting sun. Each evening painting differs from the night before in color, diversity, intensity. Sometimes, the sun opens in the sky and creates stepping stones onto cloud layers that appear as a path to heaven itself. Sometimes, the sky churns and turns and looks like the great ocean waters as the wind blows and creates rainbows in the sunlight. Sometimes, the sky foams and spews forth little wisps of white that are sky animals- bears, cats, birds. They appear to fly out of the clouds to greet us. Sometimes, there are angels in the clouds, elusive and ephemeral creatures that move among us with grace and ease and disappear as we gaze into the sky. How does one begin to describe the pageantry of creature and color...the delicate pinks and melon and misty lavender hues that weave in and out of indigo and deep violet, and golden yellows that create haloes around the cloud and make golden and silver linings.

As I observe the beauty of the setting sun, I am reminded of truly divinely inspired painters who have labored with paint, canvas and brush to create moments of celestial beauty which share captured sunsets. Alfred Bierstadt, the Great German-American painter, JMW Turner, Thomas Cole and Thomas Moran are masters of color, movement and texture. Their sunsets are breath on canvas, works so alive with nature's gifts that one can say they are achingly beautiful. Thomas Moran created a painting named "Fiercely the Red Sun Descending Burned His Way along the Heavens". This painting reminds one of the great mythological sun god Apollo slowly gliding his way across the heavens in a golden chariot pulled by four handsome steeds. As he reaches the end of the day and before his descent into nighttime, he leaves a reminder of his power in the form on a magnificent sunset. Perhaps the image of a sun setting holds such power because it reminds us of an ending, our ending, just as a sunrise symbolizes another birth.

As the sun descends, I circle the yard, walk to the lake with the sun at my back and the moon rising in front of me. Brilliant Luna is surrounded with an aureole of silver, fitting for her beautiful face. As I turn back west to the road, I am greeted by an entirely different view; the world has changed into eventide theater. The sun has dispersed its light into a million small flares of frosty fuchsia and misty tamarind, and midnight blue. An exotic deep purple fish- cloud slowly swims in the night sky above as I hear the plaintiff sound of the first coyote call of the evening.

The chilling mist of the evening is whispering that it is time to go indoors, into the warmth of this old house and its emories, into the familiar warmth of my cat who owns me and my wonderful husband, the love of my life. I am remembering that as a child, I would spend each evening watching the sun set from a hill on my father's farm. The hill was on the west side of a country road which traversed my Dad's farm. It was lined by a row of Russian olive trees which emanated with an aroma of mint in the springtime. I would sit on the hill's top, draw pictures in the fine silt, and feel the presence of God- who lived directly at the top of the cloud path into the sky. The quietude of the evening would surround me like a soft blanket as I listened to the chortling of birds as they began to retire for their nights rest.

As I close the door to the old house, stars appear in the darkened sky. I know that Apollo has completed his journey to the other side of the world.

Lefty Yarnold – A Dedicated Texas Master Naturalist

by Lori Buffum, Texas Master Naturalist, Chapter Gideon Lincicum

"I just learned that Lefty Yarnold passed away suddenly Friday, October 25. It is a sad day for all that knew him. Words are not enough to convey what a wonderful soul Lefty was. My Introduction to Lefty, and of course LuAn, was at one of my first Texas Master Naturalist classes. I will never forget how kind, encouraging, and helpful both of them were at the time. Over the past few years I have grown to appreciate their love for each other, for nature, and indeed for all of us who have been lucky enough to work with them." – Betsy Palkowsky

"What a gift to have worked with Lefty and LuAn on so many TMN projects over the last 5 years. Lefty had such a sweet and gentle nature and an engaging way with kids of all ages. He and LuAn became my friends and my mentors through the TMN organization and had a tremendous impact on our chapter's work with Brenham school district's outdoor education programs and with Washington County's annual AG Safety Day. I will miss him so much and I know many in the Gideon Lincicum Chapter feel that loss. Love to LuAn and the family." – Lori Buffum



[Please see the obituary page for Lefty at Brenham Memorial Chapel: <https://www.brenhammemorialchapel.com/obituaries/harold-lefty-yarnold>]

Lefty (and his sweet wife and sidekick LuAn) joined our TMN chapter in 2010 and this year had almost achieved his 1,000 hour milestone; but, I think he often put in more hours than he recorded because he had such a passion for the projects he worked on. Several years ago, the Yarnolds designed and produced a series of trifolds depicting and describing aspects of Texas Nature. Those wonderful, colorful posters led to the creation of a scavenger hunt/bingo game that was so fun for kids and families at the Washington County AG day and the Bellville and Flatonia Science Nights. Those trifolds have proved to be a lasting resource for our chapter to use at many other events too. What a special legacy!

Lefty and LuAn loved working with kids, and kids from kindergarten to 8th grade loved having the Yarnolds lead them on wildflower hikes out at the parks or teach them about the biology of deer or quail in their school labs. They helped new members of the chapter feel welcome and faithfully attended chapter meetings to greet old friends and new, always learning more about the world around us and sharing that knowledge with everyone. Many members remember working with them at our greenhouses as we grew plants for our many pollinator gardens. And they were there when the gardens were first started at Washington on the Brazos.

We will miss your smile and kind nature, Lefty; you leave a hole in our Texas Master Naturalist family!"
– Cindy Hobbs

Supplemental Feeding: To Feed or Not to Feed Wildlife

By Dana Kobilinsky, associate editor at The Wildlife Society

When it comes to the age-old question of whether or not to feed wildlife, a new study is finally providing us with a step in the right direction.

Depending on a few different factors including the type of animal and the kind of food it's given, feeding wildlife can either increase or decrease instances of disease in the animals, according to the study published in Ecology Letters late last month.

The study was a meta-analysis of 20 studies on supplemental feeding across the world, according to Daniel Becker, a PhD candidate at the University of Georgia Odum School of Ecology and lead author of the study.

"We were motivated by knowing that supplemental feeding in a broader sense is providing wildlife with food whether it's intentionally through birdfeeders or management methods, or through accidental means such as foraging in garbage dumps, which is sometimes associated with increased risk of disease in wildlife," Becker said. "There were some studies that showed more animals who were being fed having a disease, and there were some cases where some people had found the opposite."

Supplemental Feeding: To Feed or Not to Feed Wildlife (CONT)

Becker and his team systematically looked at past literature, noting qualitative and quantitative data from findings in past supplemental feeding studies. They then divided the studies' findings up into four different categories: recreational feeding, like birdfeeders; resources left out for wildlife, as in agriculture; urban resources such as trashcans; and management. In the end, the team had a few ideas as to why infection might differ in different feeding environments, Becker said. They hypothesized that the type of pathogen, for example, whether it is a virus or a parasite is a factor as well as the type of feeding environment, whether it was accidental or intentional feeding.

In fact, researchers found in the recreational feeding category, which includes birdfeeders, tourism or feeding stations, wildlife on average had a greater infection rate from bacteria or viruses, Becker said. This is likely because animals come into greater contact with one another, and high densities and aggregations of wildlife supports disease transmission.

Becker and his team also analyzed the studies' reports of the behavior and condition of the animals. While Becker initially hypothesized that similar to humans, the more animals are in good condition and eat every day, the better their immune systems will function, research suggested otherwise.

"One-third of the studies we looked at showed the immune defense of wildlife and body condition," Becker said. "One surprising result we found was when people feed wildlife their immune systems actually get worse."

Becker said this is because the animals are acquiring more food, but also are contracting more diseases associated with the food. Their immune system suffers since they're not being fed high quality food when it comes from resources like trashcans. Becker currently is working on a case study in Latin America to test the same factors including supplemental feeding on immune defenses in the common vampire bat (*Desmodus rotundus*).

While in some instances supplemental feeding increased diseases, the researchers occasionally noted a decrease in disease. For example, Becker and his team found that in urban feeding environments, including trashcans, red foxes feed more on supplemental food and, as a result, are less likely to get infections from parasites such as tapeworms, Becker said.

"We don't want to give the sense that feeding wildlife is always a bad thing," Becker said. "We need to develop a better knowledge of when and where feeding will make disease worse. Our research highlights the directions to go in general contexts of where wildlife might be more at risk for diseases."

originally posted April 8, 2015 on The Wildlife Society (<https://wildlife.org/to-feed-or-not-to-feed-wildlife/>)

Creature Feature: American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

by Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator & Newsletter Editor

The American Kestrel, also known as the sparrow hawk, is the smallest falcon in North America, roughly the size and shape of a mourning dove. Its head larger and its wings more narrow and long. It is often spotted on fence posts or in flight over fields flapping it's wings quickly. When looking up at a kestrel in flight, it is pale with brown spots and a black band near the tip of the tail (see bottom photo, next page). When perched, males can be identified by their beautiful slate blue wings (see top photo, next page); and females by their reddish brown wings (see middle photo, next page). Both males and females have black vertical slashes on the sides of their faces, like sideburns. It's call is a klee call, is used for stress or excitement, the whine call can last for 1-2 minutes and is used during feeding and courtship, the chitter call is used most often for a "friendly approach".

Being a member of the falcon family, the kestrel hunts it's prey, which could be insects, spiders, earthworms, caterpillars, crawfish. Or small birds, mammals, reptiles, or even bats. As strange as it sounds, kestrels will often have a favorite prey and seek out that specific type of prey.

During courtship, the female flies slowly with fluttering wing beats. The male follows her flying higher while calling quickly, then he dives down to bring her food in flight. After the female has enjoyed a meal, or at least a snack, she selects a mate and a nest site. Kestrel's are cavity nesters that use holes in snags, or dead trees. If available they will also use holes in a dirt bank, cliff, or large cactus. Since they nest in cavities they will also use man-made nest boxes. They typically nest between 10 and 30 ft up but are commonly found at other heights as well.

On average, the female will lay 4-6 eggs that are white to pale brown with brown and gray spots. Incubation takes 28-31 days and is a task shared by Mom and Dad. When the eggs hatch the female remains in the nest while the male does the majority of the hunting. After 2 weeks, the female begins to hunt also. The chicks turn to fledglings after a month in the nest and the parents may continue feeding the young for up to 12 days after leaving the nest. Juveniles from multiple nests may also be seen gathering in groups.

American kestrels, most common predatory birds in U.S., can reduce need for pesticide use

by Cheryl Dybas, National Science Foundation

Farmers are reducing the environmental impacts of pesticide use by attracting birds of prey to their lands. In some areas, American kestrels—small falcons—are replacing chemicals by keeping pests and invasive species away from crops.

Results of a new study, led by Michigan State University (MSU) scientists and appearing in the current issue of the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, showcase examples.

"Our research demonstrates that predators like American kestrels consume numerous crop pests and reduce crop damage, which are important ecosystem services," said Catherine Lindell, a scientist at MSU who led the study. "These pest-eating birds can be attracted to agricultural areas through landscape enhancements."

Enticing kestrels to orchards

Lindell and MSU colleague Megan Shave spearheaded a move to bring more American kestrels to Michigan orchards. The researchers installed nest boxes to attract the falcons, the most common predatory birds in the U.S., to cherry orchards and blueberry fields.

Kestrels consume crop pests such as grasshoppers, rodents and European starlings. In cherry orchards, the scientists found, kestrels significantly reduced the number of birds that eat fruit. Results from a related study of blueberry fields are pending.

"These scientists have demonstrated a win-win situation for farmers and birds," said Betsy Von Holle, a program director for the National Science Foundation's Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems program, which funded the research.

"Increasing native predatory birds in agricultural areas can control insect pests that damage crops, and potentially reduce pesticide use. These efforts can help with the reproductive success of declining bird species such as American kestrels, while producing fruit crops attractive to consumers."

Kestrel: ecosystem service providers

The next steps for Lindell and her colleagues are to measure the effects of specific landscape changes. Nest boxes and perches may bring in predatory birds more effectively, for example, than providing food.

"Answering these questions will increase our understanding of the interactions of predators and their prey, the ways in which these interactions provide ecosystem services, and the role of humans in encouraging these interactions," Lindell said.

"There's also a strong economic aspect to this project. We're studying how these investments can increase Michigan's gross domestic product and affect job creation."



Top photo credit: Ron Batie, Macaulay Library, 2/20/2017

Middle photo credit: Noah Frade, Macaulay Library, 7/3/2016

Bottom photo credit: Jacob Drucker, Macaulay Library, 9/6/2016

The Prodigal Chick by Tom Scanio, member, Sun Oil Field WMA

I will now recount the tale of the prodigal chick. The second clutch of barn swallow chicks on the back porch produced a group of four. Things were going well with the chicks getting pretty close to flight time. Then, my wife, Susan, came in one morning and said that the nest had only three chicks but the fourth chick had not flown. It was sitting on the floor on the back porch.

This is not normally a problem as the parents know where the chick is and they can swoop down to the ground to continue to feed it. Indeed, this happened all that day. As the light was dimming in the evening, I looked out to check on the chick. It was doing fine but I noticed something strange in the grass near the porch. I asked Susan to look and she agreed so I went out on the back porch. About four feet from the chick was a rat snake that was lasered in on its supper.

As some of you know, I like snakes and I realize that, in order to survive, they must kill things. There are large numbers of frogs, toads, 6-lined racerunner lizards, anole lizards, geckos, skinks, mice, shrews and even smaller snakes around the house that they are welcome to. However, we work hard on bird production and this chick was off limits.

So, I asked brave Susan to stand close to the chick while I raced into the house for my weapon of choice - my trusty, time tested Harbor Freight three foot pickup tool. At that point, the snake and I had a meaningful discussion about what was to transpire in the next few minutes. That rat snake that was about five feet long which is not unusual around here. At the end of said discussion, the snake was captured on my pickup tool and I escorted it around the front past the berm area before it escaped.

I rejoined Susan on the porch and we stared at that chick and discussed our options. The snake might not return but there are any number of other snakes, raccoons, possums, skunks, bobcats, coyotes, etc. that might happen upon it in the night. So, we decided to capture it for the night if we could.

I approached it and kept my left hand in front of it to occupy it while I snuck around the back with my right hand. I got it and it screamed bloody murder until it calmed down. We put it in a puppy kennel for the night. In the morning, it was at the door of the kennel with a quizzical look on its face. I took it out to the back porch and released it. Unfortunately, due to a mental lapse on my part, it skittered across the back yard and came to rest right near a brushy area.

We were afraid that it could bake in the sun or that a snake could come through the brush unseen and get it. So, I circled around it, came through the brush and (much to my surprise) managed to capture it again screaming blood murder. This time, I faced it into a corner of the porch and very slowly released my grip. It hopped out into the corner and stayed there. So, I backed off and we watched it throughout the day.

Feeding proceeded as normal until late in the day. Then the parents stopped feeding it. It got pretty frustrated watching everyone else being fed. I thought that the parents had abandoned it but they actually had a good idea. I was doubtful that I could capture it a third time to spend the night with us as, by now, it was pretty street smart.

After another feeding run not including it, the parents flew off into the trees at the edge of the back yard. The chick had had enough and it started running and flapping its wings across the back porch floor. At the edge of the porch the lawn sloped down and so did the chick for a few feet but it gained altitude and finally flew up into the trees looking for its parents. I guess they knew it was time for it to test its wings.



Susan and I breathed sighs of relief and went back into the house.

The remaining chicks stayed in the nest that day. The following day, Susan told me that there were four chicks in the nest. The prodigal chick had returned! After a few more days, all four took off into the great outdoors.

See photo left "The Four Amigos".

"In all things of nature there is something marvelous."

~Aristotle