

# PARKVIEWS

A Publication of The Friends of Donald Park, Inc.

Spring/Summer 2020

## SPRING AND SUMMER AT DONALD PARK

### Reflections

By Barb Hartman

*Barb is the Friends Administrative Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator. She and her husband Don chair the Friends Events committee, and she is a member of the Bluebird Restoration Team.*

Donald Park has taken on new meaning for many of us this year. It is a place of pride for those of us who volunteer to keep the park a place of beauty and



Emma and Jack Tzeng at  
Mt Vernon Overlook

respice. For visitors, the park has become a place to get away from the restrictions of a COVID-19 shutdown that has kept us in our homes and away from people. The park has never been so popular! Users have been very respectful of its beauty and the rules set out by the County, following the regulations of an uncertain time.

### Friends Event Planning During a Year of Uncertainty

Each year begins with planning events to invite visitors to our park and share the many wonderful things the park has to offer. Just as we were ready to host our annual March Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, caution came from Dane County Parks (DCP) to reconsider hosting due to the Covid-19 virus, causing our first cancellation. Surely the next event, our Maple Syrup Demo, should be able to go on as it is outside in the open air? But our organizers and co-sponsors started to feel uncomfortable bringing people together so it too was cancelled. As days went on, soon the very popular 9th Annual Donald Dash

Trail Run was postponed from May until September 12th. Hopefully we will be back to some normalcy by then and can host this event! Our June Father's Day Picnic, where we share a day of music, picnicking, horse painting and the old fashion tradition of serving root beer floats and hot dogs (a menu Pat Hitchcock put together many years ago) is postponed until next summer. Looking ahead, August 12 is marked on our calendar to host a Stargazing event—hopefully when the stars come out that night, we can gather to relax and enjoy some beautiful skies and fresh air. Watch our website for updates.

All in all, Donald Park is busy with visitors enjoying the beauty, open spaces and fresh air. We're grateful for that simple opportunity these days. Monitoring a bluebird route recently I came upon a young family where the little ones were taking their stuffed animals out for a morning hike. Pink bunnies and tan puppies getting some fresh air in the safety of little hands holding them close.

Donald Park is a wonderful outlet and we are happy that people appreciate it. We thank all our volunteers for working hard to make it a safe place to visit in these uncertain times. To our visitors: Thank you, too. Be safe!

### Reflections from Facebook



Sweet serenity!



A new treasure spot for hiking, discovered when state parks close.



It's such a calming place.



My favorite park! Great bird watching, especially spring and autumn migrations.



Stay Safe

By Jennifer Tzeng

Donald Park remains open during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are so lucky to have a wonderful park to explore during these difficult times. When visiting the park, please remember these tips to stay safe and help others enjoy the outdoors.

- Keep 6 ft away from other groups
- Wear a mask if you are unable to maintain social distancing
- Keep dogs on leashes
- Avoid bathrooms and other high touch surfaces, such as tables, benches and gates. Wear gloves, wipe down surfaces or wash hands if you must touch these areas. (Bathrooms are currently closed)
- Avoid crowds by visiting in early morning or weekdays.
- Take the trail less traveled. Now is a great time to explore new sections of the park where you will encounter less people.
- If passing another group, call out “On your left/right” and keep a wide berth. Announcing that you are passing may allow others to step off the trail to maintain physical distancing.
- Carry out your trash and waste.

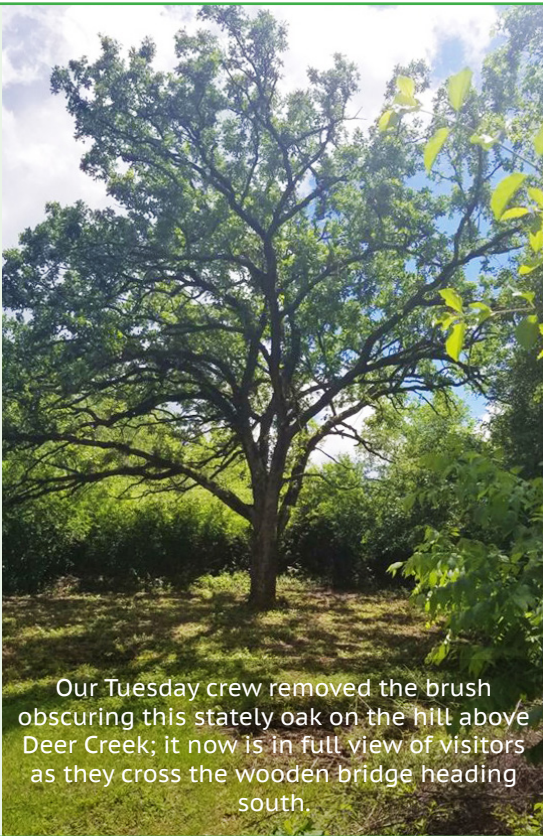
Read more about Dane County Park’s COVID-19 guidance, facility closures and updates on [their website](#).



Trail guidelines sign posted by Dane County Parks

Our natural areas volunteers are back to work!

Leader Bob Dettweiler reports that after taking off about two months in March and April, the volunteers are back working on Tuesdays, concentrating on keeping safe distances and always wearing masks. With their usual industry, ingenuity and caring attention to needs on the trails, they have devised fixes for perpetually-wet spots on several trails---a short re-route of a portion of the trail from Pop’s Knoll to the bridge at Deer Creek; a nifty short board walk on the prairie experience trail; and a drainage system on the trail west from the Sutter Drive parking lot where standing water has been quite a problem in recent years. Visitors to the Little Spring site will notice a bright new cedar rail fence marking the entrance to the site---a replacement for the old falling-down fencing.



Our Tuesday crew removed the brush obscuring this stately oak on the hill above Deer Creek; it now is in full view of visitors as they cross the wooden bridge heading south.

Notes From Our Bluebird Team

The team will move some nesting boxes around to thwart takeover by wrens. Team leader Ray Glew



Bluebird with nest

notes, “Wrens may be small and cute but they can take over a bluebird’s nest even after the eggs have hatched.” Black flies are also a problem this year but there is not much that can be done to protect the chicks. A nice surprise has been the reduction in the number of English sparrows taking over bluebird nests.

Ray commented that although the team sometimes gets discouraged when problem species adversely affect bluebird nests, the bluebirds themselves never seem daunted. “What is amazing about bluebirds is their persistence. They can have as many as three clutches in one summer. If they loose a nest, they just keep on coming.”

From team member Jenny Sievert, while monitoring bluebird boxes this year:

“ It was simply so very good to be there. Back to cherished familiar and beautiful outdoor surroundings. And seeing other animal forms, like our birds, coming to life and thriving... without our particular human worries. ”

A big **THANK YOU to Jean Warrior**, who sold 119 Horse Trail passes totaling \$2,127 this year. All that money stays with the Friends, to help us maintain the trails. Awesome job, Jean!



MISSION STATEMENT

Friends of Donald Park, Inc. promotes and supports the development and passive use of Donald County Park through programs and activities that provide education, restoration and preservation of cultural, natural and historical resources representing Dane County’s rural heritage for present and future generations.





Grassland Restoration Project Update

Thanks to a restoration project whose first phase is now nearing completion, visitors to the southwestern corner of the park (near trail markers 19, 20 and 21), are now able to enjoy approximately 35 acres of a more open and expansive grassland setting---somewhat like that found in the early 1800s before settlement dramatically altered the vegetation. Vistas of the hills to the south are a nice bonus of the work that began over the winter.

Dane County Parks and the Friends have partnered with Mike Healy and his company Adaptive Restoration in this important undertaking that removed three fence lines choked with non-savanna trees and invasive shrubs. The Friends provided half of the overall project cost in the amount of \$5,200,



drawn from a specially designated fund earmarked to support ecological restoration. Future work in this area will include resprout management and seeding of cut areas.

Interpretive signage

In the coming weeks, look for two new interpretive panels with information about Donald Park’s history. This Land Was Used by Ancient Native Peoples, at the entrance to the Little Spring historic site, invites visitors to visualize how people have come to this spot and interacted with it in different ways over the past 11,000 years---and how the land itself has changed during that time. Donald County Park: the dream of two Visionary Women, describing the seminal contributions of Delma Donald Woodburn and Pat Hitchcock in establishing the park, will be placed at the Highway G trailhead. There is already one panel like it at Pop’s Knoll. The interpretive plan called for having this key part of the park’s story repeated in several locations, to reach as many visitors as possible.



Trail to Mt Vernon Overlook



Emma and Jack Tzeng climbing at Mt Vernon Overlook



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Grassland Bird Survey

An exciting offshoot of the grassland restoration project was the undertaking of the first grassland bird survey of the area, with the goal of determining if there is a change in breeding grassland birds due to the tree line removal work.

Why is this of interest? Two-thirds of American grassland bird species are declining in numbers. Habitat changes often result in encroaching trees and shrubs that provide cover for predators and competing bird species that adversely affect the ability of grassland birds to successfully reproduce. It is hoped that Donald Park’s grassland restoration project will re-establish the kind of grassland habitat that allows threatened and endangered grassland bird species to thrive.

This year’s survey creates a baseline of current bird species and a protocol for volunteers to track breeding grassland birds in the years to come. In this initial endeavor, the Friends were lucky to be able to contract with Kevin Thusius, director of land conservation for Wisconsin’s Ice Age Trail Alliance, who has more than 20 years of experience with volunteer management and bird ecology. Kevin created a user friendly study design, one that can engage citizen scientists to undertake the survey work in the future but that is also rigid enough to have meaningful results.

In accordance with his protocol, Kevin visited twice during breeding season between May 15th and June 15th. As was to be expected this time around, the number and abundance of edge-loving species

were high and the grassland bird numbers were low in the study area, with only three individual Eastern Meadowlarks and one breeding pair of Eastern Bluebirds observed (Note: according to the online database eBird, Bobolinks and a

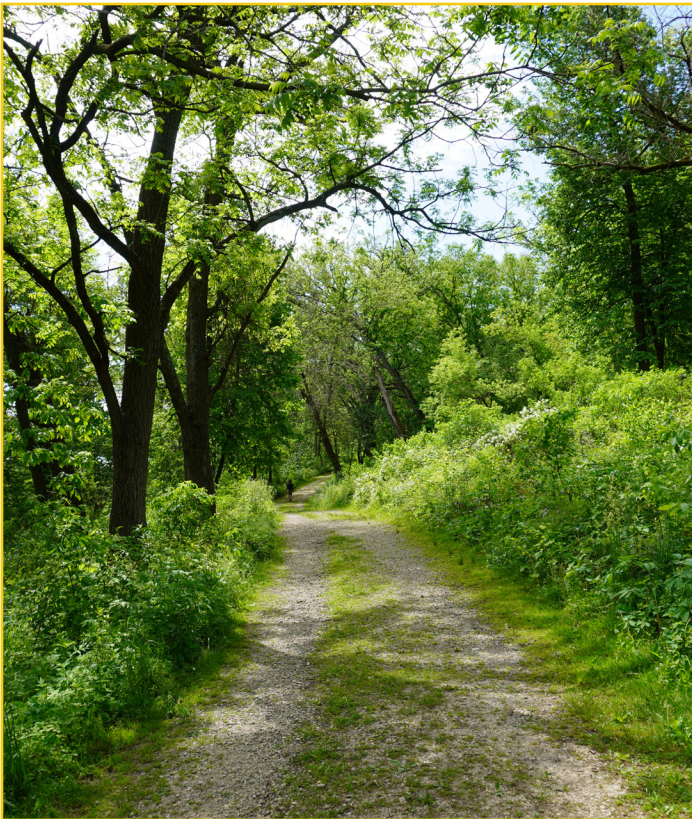


Eastern Meadowlark

Grasshopper Sparrow also were observed by others, either in or near the study area). In coming years, the Friends will look to develop a volunteer birding cadre to repeat the study, to look for the presence of new grassland bird species and an increase in abundance of grassland birds.

*“There is strenth in the hills and peace in the valleys.”*  
Delma Donald Woodburn, Donald County Park Co-Founder





## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!

Volunteers make it possible for the Friends to support Donald County Park in so many ways!

We invite volunteer participation in all that we do—from natural areas restoration to writing and research.

Among special current needs, people to help with a variety of outreach tasks.

For more information, contact:  
[contact@donaldpark.org](mailto:contact@donaldpark.org)

***“We can do this!”***

*Pat Hitchcock, Donald County Park Co-Founder*

# Friends of Donald Park

Partners with the Dane County Adult Conservation Team



## 2020 FRIENDS BOARD

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Horse Trail Workdays:** Several Saturdays. Call Roger Parr, 608-832-4410, to put your name on a call list.

**Natural Areas/Trails Volunteer Workdays:** Every Tuesday 8:30am—Noon, some weekends, other times by request. Call Barb Hartman, 608-437-5210, to confirm location.

**Friends Board of Directors:** Meets quarterly and additionally as needed. Contact Barb Hartman, 608-437-5210, for dates, location.

**9th Annual Donald Dash Trail Run:** Saturday, Sept 12, 9am. From Pop's Knoll. Registration now open! Go to: [donaldparktrailruns.com](http://donaldparktrailruns.com)

**Stargazing Event with Madison Astronomical Society:** Saturday, August 15. Check Friends website or [madisonastro.org](http://madisonastro.org) for details.