

# BADGER VISION

SPRING 2025



Newsletter of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance





# Be Careful of What You Dream

By, Ron Lutz II

The photo on the cover of this year's spring newsletter was taken in early May of 2021. It was my first visit to the grounds of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant. The world was just coming out of the 2020 covid pandemic, and this was one of my first forays into somewhere unfamiliar. A few days prior to taking that photo, the Ho-Chunk Nation gifted me with the vaccine, something that I felt allowed me to venture from self isolation. I had kept away from everyone for fear of spreading the virus to the vulnerable folks I had in my life at the time.

Having decided to visit the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area, and having looked at maps online, I still couldn't figure out how to get into the property. Eventually I found a parking lot at the end of a Halweg Road, and then rode my bicycle along a trail that took me into the NE corner of the property.

Maa Wákačak (Maa = Earth, Wakacak = Spiritual/Sacred) was a blackened landscape, having been recently burned as part of the prairie restoration being conducted by the Ho-Chunk Nation Division of Environmental Health. My own personal world had also recently all gone up in metaphorical flames, leaving only swirling ash devils dancing on the horizons of my life. Like so many other folks around the world, the pandemic had taken much from me, but it hadn't killed me. As I rode along the border, I took a meditative moment near a few bushes near the road.

While lost in thought, this little bird landed next to me. I had brought my camera along, but it was still packed tight in its bag. Figuring it would be gone by the time I took it out, I chose to simply watch it hunt for food. Eventually I became very lost in thought as it tamely flitted about me closely. I daydreamt of the sort of jobs post-pandemic me might enjoy, and where I could best spend my energy. Eventually, I realized that this persistent, fearless, little bird wanted me to take its portrait, and patiently waited for me to do so.

It's now five years later, and so very much about my personal and professional life has changed. Those sort of jobs I had felt I could only daydream of doing are now part of my makeup. I cannot even begin to describe how grateful, and moved I am to have the jobs I now enjoy. My various roles as a substitute teacher for my local school district are important to me, but my role as your Executive Director is especially incredible to me.

Now here I am, a once broken man trying to heal a once broken landscape, doing what I had only imagined a few years ago, on the very grounds of where I imagined performing such a role. I've nothing but incredible gratitude for this opportunity for the better aspects of myself to exist outside of my own imagination, as well as for the incredibly wise, kind council of those I find myself now connected with. Although the odds seem daunting, and the tasks seem impossible at times, my determination, spirit, and energy is alive, thriving, and fighting for what I believe in most.

Thank all of you for your continued support, input, and efforts. I will do my best.



Ron Being Ron, Hillside Prairie. Trail Cam Photo by Kevin O'Connell



# BADGER APPLE CORPS

Apple Corps has opened the nursery after winter's passing. They've pruned trees in the field, and grafted new trees for the growing season ahead.

## A Future for Heritage Apples

By, Mimi Wuest

One of the most optimistic things we can do is to plant a tree. It's like reaching out to touch the future. We may not even be present in that future, but, with luck, the tree will be. So today my granddaughter and I planted a heritage apple tree along the driveway.

The little tree was grafted from one of the old apple trees at the old Badger Army Plant, which is located on the ancient Sauk Prairie. The old apple trees are monuments to the families who lived on that land before they were evicted by the Army in early 1942.

A wonderful group of volunteers has assembled to save the genetic heritage of these gnarled old veterans before they vanish. Members of the "Badger Apple Corps" have planted new generations of trees all around Sauk County, at parks, libraries, clinics, and on the Ho-Chunk Nation's Mą Wąkačak sacred lands. The descendants of the dislocated farm families have also received trees from their former family farms.

Apple Corps volunteers have located, mapped and labeled more than 150 trees on the property. Many predate the construction of the ammunition plant and provide a living connection to a century of farm life on the Sauk Prairie. You can get more information about this apple project and find out how to get a tree of your own by going to the website for The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance and clicking on Badger Apple Corps.

Our little tree is something of a mystery tree because it's parent tree has not borne fruit in recent years, so there is no record of what kind of apples it may bear. Very few of the trees have been identified as to the specific variety of apple. But the Corps does record the size and characteristics of the fruit, such as "small, red and yellow, juicy and sweet."

The new tree will join two other heritage apple trees along the driveway, Ginny and Marco. I plant them along the drive because it's the lazy woman's way. I won't have to haul water over hill and dale, I can just put 2 gallon jugs in the car and stop to water the trees as I come and go.

Over the years, I have planted scores of trees on our property. I tried antique varieties like Eopus Spitzenberg and Cox Orange Pippin, Sheepnose and Westfield-Seek-No-further. Almost all of them were consumed in their youth by thoughtless deer and rabbits and voles. I don't mind sharing the apples, but it is inconsiderate when my animal neighbors dispose of entire trees!

Now I erect sturdy fences and apply tree wrap to the trunks of my new recruits. Hopefully, some of my little trees will thrive and continue to bless the land with apples, just as their parents did. Their parent trees may have been blooming on the fertile Sauk Prairie before I was born, so with these little trees I can touch the past as well as the future. That's something to cherish.



## Apple Corps In Action!



### Transplanting Time!

Much of the activity of the Badger Apple Corps in the early spring is devoted to digging trees up from our nursery and preparing them for transplanting to their permanent homes. This spring a hardworking crew of volunteers dug up 66 trees.



Thank you to Dr. Curt Meine, Dan Bussey, Eric Gabriel, Phil Hasheider, Rob Nurre, Matt Pasteris, David Serafy-Cox, and Terry Steuber!

All Photos by Dr. Curt Meine (except the one of him) and illustrate recent activities



# An Old Friend Returns to Maq Wákačak

By, Mike Mossman



**Author with adult male prairie vole, Maq Wákačak. 09/12/2024. Photo by Ron Lutz II**

The prairie vole. (*Microtus ochrogaster*). I love that little mouthful of a name. It means “small ear, yellow belly”, which is true enough. But to me it means “rare grassland vole that was once abundant, and has a fascinating lifestyle, lovely grizzled fur and 5 plantar tubercles!” This Wisconsin Species of Greatest Conservation Need is hard to find, being restricted to open barrens, sandy fields and a few other grasslands in southern Wisconsin. I get excited whenever I peek inside one of my small mammal live-traps and see its characteristic pelage. I hadn’t found one at Badger since 2008 and had almost given up on them, but this year they were back! I found them in two prairie restoration sites on Maq Wákačak, managed by the Ho-Chunk Nation—one site in its first growing season, and the other in its 6’t.

Prairie voles look like meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), which are abundant and widespread in old fields, hay fields, meadows, marshes and prairies throughout southern Wisconsin. Both species have a short tail, short ears, small eyes, and live on the ground, beneath the litter and among shallow tunnels. They feed on seeds, plant stems, leaves, inner bark and occasionally invertebrates. They build small nests of grass in the litter or underground, are active throughout the day and night, year-round, and most die by age one. Their abandoned nests are often used by nesting bumblebees. Voles are eaten by raptors, snakes, and mammalian carnivores like weasels, badgers, foxes and coyotes. They play a crucial role in grassland ecosystems.



**Subtle differences between meadow vole on left, and prairie vole on right.**

Badger Lands. Photos by Mike Mossman



Thank you for your continued support!





The meadow vole is uniformly gray-brown with a lighter gray underside, while the prairie vole has a pelt peppered with mixed shades of brown, gray and black, and a yellowish cast below. And on the hind foot, “Meadows” usually have 6 pads, while “Prairies” have 5. Like many plants and animals that may look similar to us, these two have way different natural histories. Meadow vole adult males and females maintain independent territories and generally do not associate other than to mate. Prairie voles are somewhat colonial and form long-term, monogamous pair bonds with shared responsibilities for nests and young—quite rare for any sort of rodent (and even for humans, you might say).

Also odd how the status of these two species has changed. Back in the 1940s Aldo Leopold, his grad students and local naturalist Albert Gastrow studied farmland wildlife just across the river from Prairie du Sac. Mammalogist Harold Hanson ran trap-lines there and on the former Sauk Prairie in fall 1941 just before the Powder Plant began. He found prairie voles the most widespread small mammal in ag fields and grasslands, while the meadow vole was nearly limited to sedgy wetlands. He worried that with ongoing ditching, it would disappear.

Things change. Why and how? Like meadowlarks, the prairie vole seemed to adapt well to the low-intensity agriculture that replaced native prairies and savannas, then suffered with “clean” farming, the loss of grassy habitat, urbanization, woody succession and fragmentation. Was the meadow vole, like the generalist Red-winged Blackbird, luckily predisposed to adapt well to these same changes? I hope our monitoring of different management regimes at the Badger Lands can help us answer that. We do not want to lose another strand in this ecological web, another way of living, another friend.

#### **Prairie vole in hand (below)**

Gotham Sand Barrens along Lower Wisconsin River, 18 Sep 2021.

Photo by Mike Mossman

Acknowledgments: Thanks to Lisa Hartman, Dan Shawley, Ron Lutz II, Kristine Fisher and Angus Mossman for help in the field in 2024, and to the Ho-Chunk Nation and Randy Poelma for permission and encouragement to monitor the effects of their management on Maq Wákačąk.



**Prairie vole habitat in 1st-year prairie restoration planting.** Dan Shawley and Ron Lutz II in photo.

Maq Wákačąk. 09/12/2024. Photo by Mike Mossman (Top Photo of Mike & Dan by Ron Lutz II)





# Spring Royalty

By, Graham Steinhauer

While on a prescribed fire back in April, a crew member and I chatted during a lull in the action. We talked of plants, colleagues, and other usual topics when a fuzzy sphere floated into my periphery. “Queen bumble bee!” I said and pointed. It was my first bumble bee sighting of the year. If I use the word “queen,” the response from people is invariably, “how do you know it’s a queen?”

The annual cycle of a bumble bee colony begins in May or April with a single queen. She’ll emerge from an abandoned rodent hole or another cozy space that’s protected from predators and harsh weather, and set out in search of fresh blooms. This is a critical time in her life. Native spring flowers have become sparse on our modern landscape. The young queen buzzes about in search of wood betony, shooting star, and gooseberry flowers. Dutchman’s breeches, an early spring flower that covers the woods adjacent to Hillside Prairie, is one of her very favorites.

Over the next couple of months, the queen will select a nest site, raise workers (all female), and take refuge in the nest more often than not for brood rearing and for her own safety. Drones (males) and new queens emerge in late summer. The males do not reside in the nest which is why you may find a sleepy bumble bee tucked into a flower on a cool morning in September. After the new queens and drones mate, the new queens will find a snug spot to hibernate in the same way their mothers did the previous year. Every bumble bee will perish as winter approaches besides the new queens.

I’m no expert. I just happen to know that all spring bumble bees are queens. If you see one of these fluffy creatures before summer begins, stop to consider her importance and her journey ahead. Besides being generally cute, she is responsible for producing more of the charismatic insects that we know and love for the rest of the growing season. And give her some Dutchman’s breeches for her troubles.

Graham Steinhauer is the current Resident Land Steward at Goose Pond Sanctuary. Graham grew up exploring Wisconsin’s diverse landscapes, from northern hardwoods to southern marshes. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a degree in Forest Ecosystem Restoration and interned at Goose Pond in summer 2017. He is particularly interested in fire ecology, wetland soils, and amphibians. Graham values science communication and reconnecting people with nature. In his spare time, he enjoys kayaking, gardening, reading, and exploring the countryside.



**Brown-belted bumble bees** (*Bombus griseocollis*) -two males courting a new queen- Photo by Graham Steinhauer



**Dutchman's breeches** (*Dicentra cucullaria*) Photo by Graham Steinhauer

## Monarchs of Maa Wákačak Southern Wisconsin Milkweed Sampling Project

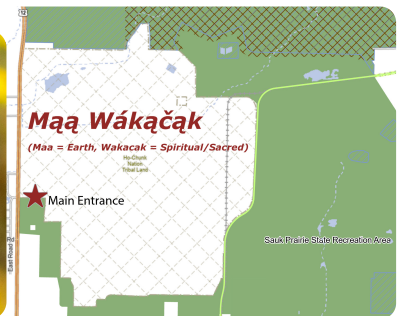
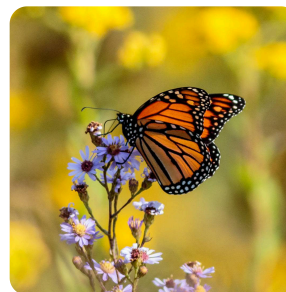


## Monarch Larva Monitoring Project

The Ho-Chunk Nation Division of Environmental Health, which manages the restoration of Maa Wákačak (Maa = Earth, Wákačak = Spiritual/Sacred), has invited Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance volunteers to participate in this year’s Monarch Larva Monitoring Project. This project is a partnership of the Monarch Joint Venture and the University of Wisconsin–Madison Arboretum. While we are coordinating this specific project on Ho-Chunk Nation lands, the project organization stems from the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project.

To participate please contact us at this email: [info@saukprairie.org](mailto:info@saukprairie.org)

Information about the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project:  
[WWW.MLMP.ORG/about](http://WWW.MLMP.ORG/about)



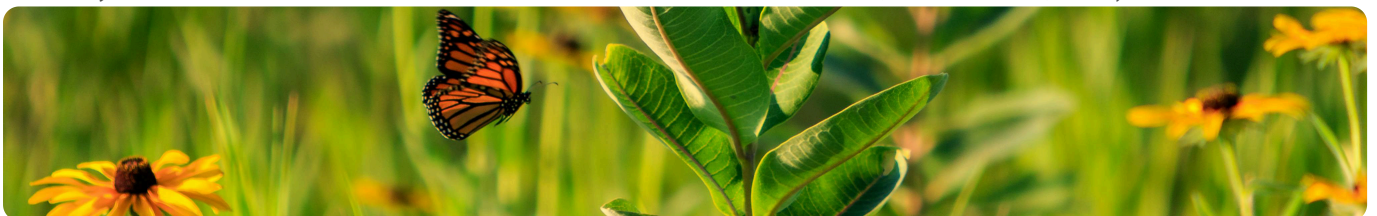
**MONARCH  
JOINT VENTURE**



Photos by Ron Lutz II

Ho-Chunk Nation Division of Environmental Health, Monarch Joint Venture, University of Wisconsin–Madison Arboretum

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To Support  
Ecological  
Health!





# 2025 Volunteer Stewardship Dates

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Brush, GM, DR,  
Wild Parsnip  
Saturday, June 14, 2025 9am -12pm

Huber Farmstead - Garden Valerian control  
Wednesday, June 25, 2025 10am - 1pm

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Saturday, July 12, 2025 9am - 12pm

Northeast Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Saturday, August 9, 2025

Huber Farmstead - Tasks TBD  
Wednesday, August 20, 2025

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Saturday, September 13, 2025

Northeast Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Wednesday, September 24, 2025

S-Curve Nursery - Maintenance/Collecting  
Saturday, October 11, 2025

Northeast Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Wednesday, October 22, 2025

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Saturday, November 8, 2025

Hillside Prairie/Savanna - Tasks TBD  
Saturday, December 13, 2025



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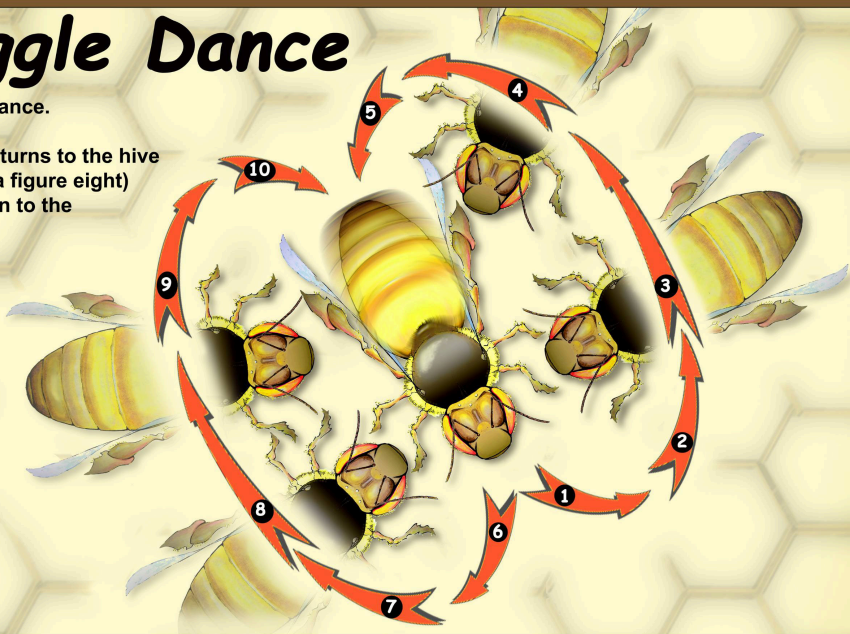
Go to [www.SaukPrairie.Org/Events](http://www.SaukPrairie.Org/Events) for more information & to sign up.

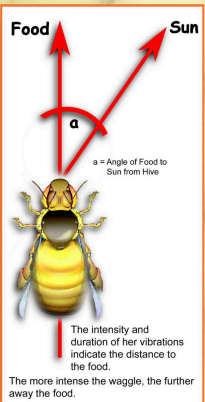
## How honey bees use dance to communicate

### The Waggle Dance

Bees communicate through dance.

When a bee finds food, she returns to the hive and does a *waggle dance* (in a figure eight) that reveals the food's location to the other bees.





Food

Sun

$\alpha$


$\alpha$  = Angle of Food to Sun from Hive

The intensity and duration of her vibrations indicate the distance to the food.

The more intense the waggle, the further away the food.

The inside of the hive is dark and the other bees cannot see the dance.

Crowding around the dancing bee, they sense her movements with their antennae.

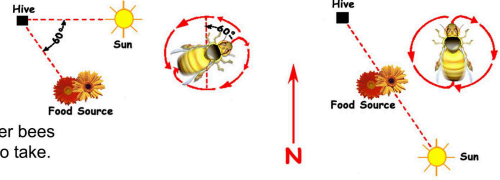


She lets each bee taste and smell the food so they may identify its source.

Do A Little Dance,  
Find A Little Food,  
Chow Down Tonight...

Within the choreography lies navigational information.

Upon leaving the hive, the other bees will know exactly which route to take.



Hive

Sun

Food Source

60°

Hive

Sun

Food Source

60°

N

The angle at which she dances on the hive indicates the direction (in relation to the sun) that they must fly away from the hive.

They use the sun as a compass and travel at the precise angle prescribed by the scout bee's dance to find the food.





## Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

P.O. Box 403  
Baraboo, WI 53913

### *Your Help Matters*

You can help our efforts via the secure donation form (QR code to the right) or by USPS mail.

Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance  
P.O. Box 403  
Baraboo, WI 53913



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