

BRAS and LCCC to Celebrate Partnership Agreement

By Harriet Alger

On April 20th Audubon and LCCC representatives will meet in the campus Meadow Preserve to celebrate a new partnership agreement, one that recognizes the 21-acre preserve as an important resource for the college ecological curriculum and serves as an example to the community of the need for conservation of meadow environments.

In 1999, Jack Smith, President and founding member of the Black River Audubon Society, and Joe Strong, board treasurer, observed that bobolinks, which were on Ohio's Audubon Watchlist, appeared every spring in the northeast corner of Lorain County Community College's campus. They realized that if the area was not mowed until September, ground nesting species like bobolinks, meadowlarks, and Savannah sparrows would be likely to mate and breed in the meadow. They also saw that LCCC was blessed with a small wooded trail adjacent to the meadow with about 80 species of trees, plants, bushes and early spring wildflowers.

Jack and Joe met with LCCC President Dr. Roy Church to suggest preserving and developing these areas to stimulate more public interest in conservation and to serve as resources for college courses. The meeting resulted in an agreement that the meadow would not be mowed during nesting season from April to September except for a trail for marathon runners. President Church also agreed that these areas would be known as the Black River Audubon Society/LCCC Meadow Preserve and Flora Interpretive Trail, with college permission required for any additions or changes. The Stocker Foundation provided matching funds for a display case in the meadow and a fence and guide boxes for the trail.

Healthy colonies of bobolinks and meadowlarks and small families of Savannah sparrows began to nest in the grassland meadow in increasing numbers each year. Endangered butterflies and bees also flourished, attracting neighborhood walkers from the retirement center on the northern boundary. Boxes were provided for cavity nesters allowing them to benefit from insects, seeds and other food in the meadow and providing plenty of space in which to fly. Tree swallows and bluebirds occupied those boxes. Recently, a large kestrel box has become the successful nesting site of another beautiful species in decline. Many other bird species nest and/or feed in the meadow and in the trees along the eastern boundary. Migrant birds also find respite and food before continuing their journey.

Students from Ruby Beil's ecology classes aided Jack, Joe, Dick Lee, Wayne Shipman, and botanist Dorothy Hagerling in maintaining the trail, display case, and nesting boxes as the preserves developed. Recently, Penny and Fritz Brandau, Larry Wilson, and volunteers from the bluebird and kestrel conservation programs have assumed responsibility for the nesting boxes. Andy Lance has recruited ecology students to help with the meadow and trail.

Unfortunately, an invasive species of shrubs began appearing a few years ago in areas that could not be mowed in the fall because of extremely wet weather. They gradually spread into nesting areas of

meadowlarks and bobolinks and then throughout more and more of the meadow. Tim Gadomski of the college plant grounds staff identified them as gray dogwood, native but a serious problem, almost impossible to control or to eradicate when they begin spreading into areas where they are not wanted. Meadow nesting birds need grasses. Other birds and wildlife need a healthy source of food from a diversity of plants in a meadow.

Representing the BRAS Board, I met with college representatives to address the problem. Kate Pilacky, of the Oberlin Office of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, helped with research and advice. Keith Moran, of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History identified 66 contractors capable of permanent eradication treatment, not harmful to wildlife, and the reseeding of affected areas. A contractor was chosen; invaded areas have been treated, reseeded, and are beginning to recover. Kate and Andy have also been providing seeds and plants in recovery areas. As a result, meadowlarks returned to nest last year. Savannah sparrows were seen again. We hope that bobolinks will return this year, along with more signs of a renewed and thriving meadow.

Before his retirement, President Church approved a new partnership contract between LCCC and BRAS to provide better collaboration and communication in the future. On April 20th we will gather at the new display sign as you enter the meadow to celebrate the new partnership agreement and the work that has been done. All are welcome to join us!