

Spoiler alert

Seeing green in fall may ruin your ACRES visit

Our eyes feast on changing forest colors this time of year. In a few weeks, once fall leaves drop, as much plant life is dying back, going to seed, it's not unusual to scan a forest and see thick patches or spots of green.

Green in mid-November?

If you manage land, these green plants are telltale signs of your ongoing fight against non-native invasive plants. This extended growing season gives these plants a significant advantage over our native plants that would be growing in their place if only they could compete.

If you're familiar with this epic battle against non-native invasive plants, perhaps engaged in it, these tenacious, still-green, still-thriving plants may rob you of your enjoyment of an otherwise casual walk through the woods. You know what you're looking at and you wish you didn't; removing these plants to make room for diverse,

native plants to thrive requires regular attention and challenging manual labor. (Spoiler alert: if you still want to enjoy your walk in the late fall woods, you may wish to turn around here.)

Many of the species — autumn olive and multiflora rose, for example — are thorny, thick, tenacious and grow amid a variety of natural obstacles. To fight autumn olive, for example, you dig in with chainsaws, handsaws, heavy boots and



LETTIE HAVER

long heavy sleeves even in the heat of summer. If you're spraying herbicide, you're lugging a 40-pound backpack sprayer that is likely digging into your spine. You dodge mishaps and mosquitoes all day — only to turn around, realizing you've barely covered any ground. You do battle knowing these plants will fight hard to return next season — and that you've got to come back, too.

ACRES is deeply engaged in this fight and gearing up for more. This year, our land management staff and interns logged over 250 miles on foot fighting these plants this summer (enough to make it from our office in Huntertown to Louisville). Thanks to donors and funding programs, we've purchased heavy equipment and hired new staff to increase our efficiency and expand our



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Volunteers pitched in to cut down non-native invasive plants on ACRES' Hathaway Preserve at Ross Run near Wabash earlier this year.

effort. Here are some notes on a few places near you where you can watch the landscape transform over the next several years.

Ropchan Memorial Nature Preserve, near Orland

Evan Hill and Matt Dunno, ACRES Land Management Specialists have put on their backpacks and selectively sprayed about 20 acres of this preserve near the entrance. If you walk the trails at 6830 N. C.R. 750W, Orland, before everything turns totally brown, you'll see the extent of the non-native plants in that part of the preserve — they'll be dying. Many thanks to the Ropchan Foundation's continued support of ACRES' efforts in land management and preservation.

Wing Haven, near Angola

As part of a three-year Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, our team is eradicating invasive brush at this preserve. Now in its third year of management, the team reports progress. First year non-native invasive brush management takes the most effort. Last year, they cleared 20 acres by hand to plant native hardwood trees; this year, they are fighting off non-natives that sprouted between rows of the tree planting. This work is taking place far off the trail of this much-loved preserve, but contributing to its ecosystem and habitat no less.

James P. Covell Nature Preserve, south of Auburn

Our summer land management interns fought a variety of non-native plants in this preserve during much of their time with us. Next spring, ACRES will plant about 17 acres of native hardwood trees, reforesting some of the agricultural land here. You can watch as this forest expands, with new trees growing along C.R. 427.

Fighting non-native invasive plants is part of ACRES' promise to protect natural places for good. This lesser known side of our work may not be what comes to mind when you think of ACRES. But actively managing land is essential to re-establishing native plant life and supporting the biodiversity that thrives when people engage in the battle.

You can join the fight on an upcoming ACRES Workday: 10 a.m., Saturday on the Tom and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve, 1802 Chapman Road, Huntertown. Invest some sweat equity on the land you love: help fight Autumn Olive. Tools and gloves will be available, but feel free to bring your own.

ACRES LAND Trust is responsible for protecting 7,000 acres on 100 properties in the tri-state area.

OUR MEMBERS join ACRES to play a part in protecting our local, natural heritage and working lands. You can explore the trails of an ACRES preserve near you, then join the effort if you're inspired. Visit acreslandtrust.org.

Grosbeaks' beaks are very unique

Grosbeaks are birds with big beaks.

Not long beaks, short, and strong enough to draw blood if you let one get hold of you.

I know that from experience. I've handled two species of grosbeaks, taken them out of traps, banded and released them. I learned, painfully, from the first one I took in my hand that I needed to hold a grosbeak so it couldn't bite me.

Grosbeaks are birds of the finch family, the biggest family of birds, and grosbeaks occur in two different divisions of the family. Rose-breasted and blue grosbeaks are in one division, with the cardinal. Evening and pine grosbeaks are in another division, with the purple finch.

I've enjoyed being outside, seeing nature, particularly birds, since I was a boy. By the time I was old enough to have learned to read I had already seen and learned the names of most of the birds that occurred around my home in northwest Iowa. But I'd missed the one grosbeak that nested in the area, the rose-breasted grosbeak.

One day, while looking in a bird book, I read that grosbeaks ate insects and seeds and that the rose-breasted was often seen in gardens, on the plants. Just a few days after I read that I saw a rose-breast in the neighbor's garden.

It was a male, a strikingly colored bird, black with white patches in its wings, a white rump and belly and a bright red triangular-shaped bib. A female, which I saw with a male a few days later, is brown and streaked, sparrow-like in color. After that I saw rose-breasted grosbeaks regularly, male and female, sometimes together.

It was years later before I saw another species of grosbeak. I was a graduate college student at Cornell University in New York. There I met a lady who worked at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and was studying evening grosbeaks, observing, trapping and banding them. I asked if I could see her traps and watch as she banded

evening grosbeaks which were common in winter in upstate New York when I was at Cornell.

The lady, Sally, not only let me watch, she had me help. There were evening grosbeaks in her traps when she took me to them and she told me to get one for her and she'd show me how to take measurements and band it. I stuck one hand in a trap, grabbed a bird, and hollered, "OUCH." I had the bird but the

bird also had me. "Here, let me show you how to hold a bird so it can't bite you," Sally said. Then after it was banded she cleaned and bandaged my wound.

Rose-breasted grosbeaks are summer birds, nesters, in the north-central and northeastern states of the U.S. I saw them in Iowa every summer, after I learned where to look for them and what they looked like. I saw them in New York in summer and I see them now in Indiana, in summer. They come to my bird feeders.

Crimson-collared and yellow are birds of south of the border but are seen occasionally in Texas. The blue grosbeak is another bird of Mexico and of Texas and southwest Louisiana along the Gulf Coast. There's a black-headed grosbeak, a bird of Mexico and in summer of central and western North America, from western North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas to the Pacific Coast.

The pine grosbeak is another bird of the north, primarily the far north, northeastern Canada, north-central Canada and Alaska, and of the Rocky Mountain states south into northern Arizona and New Mexico.

All grosbeaks have declined in numbers, beginning before I moved to Indiana. Evening grosbeaks have declined drastically. When I first moved to Indiana I saw a small flock now and then almost every winter. I haven't seen an evening grosbeak in more than 20 years.

NEIL CASE is a retired Indiana Natural Resources naturalist.



OUTDOOR NOTES

Neil Case



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Snider High School students fight the good fight against Autumn Olive, a non-native invasive plant that crowds out native diversity, during a work day on the Tom and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve.

Project FeederWatch is citizen science for wintertime bird lovers of all ages

KPC NEWS SERVICE

People who enjoy watching birds through the winter months could help collect scientific data through Project FeederWatch.

FeederWatch is a winter-long, from November to April, survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas and other locales in North America. Participants periodically count the birds they see at their feeders and send their counts to Project

FeederWatch.

Your bird counts help you keep track of what is happening in your own backyard and help scientists track long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. With FeederWatch, your observations become part of something bigger.

Anyone interested in birds can participate. FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms,

retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs. You can count birds as often as every week, or as infrequently as you like: the schedule is completely flexible. All you need is a bird feeder, bird bath or plantings that attract birds.

New participants are sent a research kit with complete instructions for participating, as well as a bird identification poster, calendar and more.

You provide the feeder and seed. Then, each fall

participants receive a 16-page, year-end report, "Winter Bird Highlights." Participants also receive access to the digital version of "Living Bird," the Cornell Lab's award-winning, quarterly magazine.

Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by its participants. The annual participation fee is \$18 for U.S. residents, \$15 for Cornell Lab members. The participation fee covers materials, staff support, web design, data analysis and the year-end report.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Big fish

Shelby Pogue of Kendallville caught this 5-pound, 3-ounce, 21-inch-long bass in a private pond with a night crawler.

Sunday LIFE

Enjoy the Life Section every Sunday. Subscribe today! 260-347-0400

THE HERALD REPUBLICAN THE Star THE NEWS SUN

RECIPES

WEDDINGS & ANNIVERSARIES

TIPS

LOCAL STORIES

HEALTH