

Final Report

Wildlife Preservation Fund – Small Projects FY 05

Project Title: Learn About Reptiles and Amphibians

Grant Number: 05-001W

Ballard Nature Center
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The Ballard Nature Center has completed the FY05 Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Small Project #05-001W, titled *Learn About Reptiles and Amphibians*.

The general public has an overall misunderstanding and lack of appreciation for reptiles and amphibians in Illinois. The development of educational programs and projects that promote the benefits and importance of reptiles and amphibians is needed to increase the public's perception of these species. In an effort to create awareness of Illinois' reptiles and amphibians, the Ballard Nature Center constructed several examples of reptile and amphibian habitats that can be developed on both public and private lands. These habitats provide an example to landowners that are interested in conducting similar practices on their properties. Furthermore, these habitats will be incorporated into the environmental education programs offered by the nature center. They are located along existing interpretive trails, providing visitors an opportunity to learn more about these habitats as well.

During June 2005, a local heavy equipment operator, with the use of a bulldozer, constructed 2 reptilian hibernaculas, 2 shallow water wetlands, approximately 1/8 acre each, in prairie habitats, and 2 vernal pools in woodland communities. They were constructed following guidelines for habitat development in several publications including, Illinois Landowner's Guide to Amphibian Conservation, Habitat Management Guidelines for Amphibians and Reptiles of the Midwest, and A Guide to Creating Vernal Ponds. These shallow water wetlands and vernal ponds average 15" to 20" in depth. Logs and other woody debris were added to each pond to provide escape cover and stems for egg mass attachment by reptiles and amphibians. The berms were seeded to wheat, redtop and prairie grasses for dam and bank stability. In December 2005, a backhoe was used to construct 2 reptilian hibernaculas, by digging a hole 8' deep by 4' wide. The hibernaculas were then filled with concrete blocks. Entrance pipes were placed for snakes to gain access into the hibernacula. The excavated dirt was then mounded over each hibernaculum for protection from freezing. The attached map shows the location of the shallow water wetlands, vernal pools and the hibernaculas.

The Wildlife Preservation Fund provided funding for the earthwork needed to construct the shallow water wetlands, vernal pools and to excavate the hibernaculas. The Ballard Nature Center was responsible for seeding the wetland berms, placing woody debris in them and constructing the hibernacula.

As part of the grant, the Ballard Nature Center installed six interpretive signs along the center's trails describing these habitats and their associated flora and fauna. The nature center provided the signs, posts, and labor to install the signs as part of the match for this grant. In addition, field guides, such as *A field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools* and *A Beginners Field Guide to Dragonflies*, were purchased to assist environmental educators when leading programs about the life found in shallow water wetlands and vernal pools. See invoices attached for complete listing of field guides purchased.

Ballard Nature Center will be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the reptile and amphibian habitats, the interpretive signs and the availability of the field guides. The center would like to thank the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund for the funding for this project.



Newly constructed shallow water wetland, showing the woody debris.



Vernal
Pool



Constructing
a vernal pool.



Construction of
the reptile
hibernacula.



Shallow water wetland.



Example of the interpretive signs the nature center provided as match.