

# Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area

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**FNBWA**  
**BARRENS**  
**CONSERVATION**

[namekagonbarrens.org](http://namekagonbarrens.org)

## New Viewing Shelter Built on the Barrens!

By Kathy Bartilson

Neither rain nor snow nor paperwork stop our volunteers when there's a project to be done! This past October, a new viewing shelter with benches, display space, and a roof was constructed at the corner of Dry Landing Road and St. Croix Trail. Mark Nupen had the great idea over a year ago, and his original design from a cardboard model came to life in timbers and steel this fall.

Funding for the materials came from a DNR grant along with matching funds and volunteer hours from the FNBWA Board and members. Construction was led by Gary Dunsmoor and Mark Nupen, with help and tools provided by Matt Nupen, Allen Nelson, Dave Peters, Jim Marr, and Kathy Bartilson.

Vern Drake and Lynne Arneson prepared awesome lunches for the crews. Work was delayed a couple times because of rain and snow, but the roof was finished on October 28. Our next step is to produce maps and information to post on the display space above the benches.

The kiosk that was at this spot has been moved to the north side of the Barrens, giving us another entry point to share information, maps, and brochures.

When you're in the area, bring your lunch, park along the road, and take some time to sit back on the benches in the shade and look out over the Barrens. Hope lots of birds fly by to welcome you!



Left to right: Jim Marr, Allen Nelson, Gary Dunsmoor and Mark Nupen

## Kestrels

By Jerry McAllister, Larry Dau and Coralee Bodeker

Larry Dau is a renowned bird photographer from Boone Iowa. Jerry McAllister writes outdoors articles on bird dogs, upland bird hunting, and birding. Many of Larry's photos have appeared in the articles. Recently a pair of Kestrels fledged five chicks a few hundred feet from Larry's backyard deck. There were a number of extraordinary photos taken. These are the focus of this article.

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## Free for all eating breakfast



Kestrels continued from Page 1

Kestrels are widespread in the United States, the most numerous and smallest of the falcon family. Long thin wings allow them to fly really fast, 40 mph. A broad-fanned tail allows extraordinary maneuverability in flight. They often hunt from a perch at the edge of a grassland; however, when perches are not available, they can hover in place. They are seen most often along roads using an electrical line as a hunting perch. They share a huge hunting advantage with the larger Peregrine Falcon: malar stripes cut down on sun glare when looking out over a grassland. Also, they can see ultra-violet light which allows them to track rodents in the grass.

They eat almost anything. Their diet consists of rodents, flying insects especially grasshoppers, small reptiles (they love snakes), and birds.

**Kestrels often hunt from a perch at the edge of a grassland; however, when perches are not available, they can hover in place.**

My granddaughter, Coralee, saw one kill and eat a Cardinal. Larry Dau photographed the adults and fledglings from his backyard being fed live snakes. The majority of their diet is insects.

Kestrels are cavity nesters. While the species has been declining in the East for a number of years, the same phenomena has recently begun in the Upper Midwest. Row crops now go from former fence line to former fence line, and there are now many fewer kestrel perches. Also, millions of acres of grasslands have disappeared from the farm country. Worse, beyond loss of kestrel habitat, the corn/soybean monoculture has eliminated more than half the insect population. Kestrels can and do try living in town, but there they become the prey of Cooper's hawks whose main urban diet is larger birds like Kestrels and Cardinals.

The above information was compiled by Coralee Bodeker for a citizen science project a couple of years back. Also, as a part of the project, she auctioned her

colored pencil drawing of a male kestrel. Several hundred dollars were raised for an Iowa Kestrel conservation effort.

Kestrels are prime candidates for nesting boxes, just like wood ducks and bluebirds. Larry's neighbor has a box which is about 400 feet from Larry's deck, the location of Larry and his camera with a 500X lens when the attached photos were taken in spring 2022. Kestrels are very private about their nesting activities. The female's role is to sit on an inconspicuous perch near the box and signal the male and chicks when danger approaches. The males do 100% of the feeding. The same pair nested in 2021. That year, Larry built a blind much closer to the box than his deck, and the male never appeared when Larry manned the blind. This year the pair did not seem concerned with Larry on his deck. All of his photos are of adults and fledged kestrels.

Larry had a difficult time determining if there were



Male & female watching the kids eat



Male Kestrel; pencil drawing by Coralee Bodeker

4 or 5 fledglings. He solved the problem by first seeing 3 males and later 2 females in photos.

Eventually all seven were in a single frame. Kestrels have a difficult time raising 3 or 4 chicks, much less five. The male of this pair was a very productive hunter. He brought small snakes regularly which the fledglings devoured quickly. Second, he was attentive to each of the five individually. He knew when one or more of the fledglings was not getting a sufficient share.

The three photos show a breakfast free-for-all, the entire family of seven, and

the group in feeding frenzy over a vole seen in the bottom right-hand corner. Securing these kestrel photos is a difficult undertaking due to the secretive manner of feeding shared by both parents. Larry was lucky to get them and we are lucky to see them.

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# Artifacts From the Sands of NW Wisconsin

By Allen Nelson

For thousands of years humans have lived in North America. Modern archeology tells us that people started coming up from Central and South America 15,000+ years ago and have been down from Alaska, along the Pacific Coast for about 13,000 years and moved into the Arizona and Colorado areas about 12,000 years ago. I'm not sure when they came here but these carved stones prove that several groups lived in this area. As you experience these artifacts think about the level of technology that went into each. Are some from the same groups? Are they all from different groups? Did I guess the right usage?



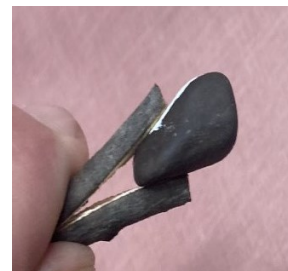
Starting out our list of artifacts is a stunning selection of “rock” finger knives. These knives come in both right-hand and left-hand versions. As you work your way through the set notice how some are very smooth and polished and some are very rough shaped and others are in-between. Each knife, while working basically the same way, show extreme differences in the work put into making the knife “pretty”.

## Finger Knives

NB01 is a stone finger knife. It is left-handed and polished to be very smooth on all edges except the cutting edge. It is sized for a smaller hand than mine, a cherished woman or child maybe? A lot of work went into this knife!



## Arrowheads



The type of artifacts most people are interested in are arrowheads. The group we have comes from many different levels of technology.

NB11 is an arrowhead for small game. I wouldn't shoot an expensive arrowhead at a rabbit or a squirrel and neither would they shoot small game with a point that took a long time to make.

## Scrapers and Shapers



NB28 is a sandstone disc shaped to polish wooden shafts.



The excerpts on this page have been taken from the document *Artifacts of the NW Sands*, by Allen Nelson. The artifacts are currently in use by the Crex Meadows' Education Department. To view the article in its entirety, please follow the link: [Artifacts of the NW Sands](#)



# Many Thanks to Mark Nupen, Long-time FNBWA Board President and Barrens Enthusiast

By Kathy Bartilson

*"Ever hear of the creosote bush? Sweet fern reminds me of it! I grew up in the desert southwest, and that's why I like the Barrens!"*

*"We have to make sure local people and visitors get out to see and appreciate the Barrens – many don't realize it's there in the middle of the Northwoods."*

*"How can we reach the schools?"*

The quotes above show that Mark Nupen is a Barrens supporter extraordinaire and has constant enthusiasm to promote the Barrens. Another frequent "Mark" quote is "no one knows about the Barrens" and he was always finding ways to do something about it.

Mark recently decided to retire from the FNBWA Board after serving as President for over 8 years and tirelessly promoting the work of our organization. Mark would always respond when called upon to lead a wildflower hike, help with a building project, and even travel to Madison to testify to the Natural Resources Board for barrens protection.



To help visitors find the Barrens, Mark led a project to get official signs posted on State Highways 77 and 35. He helped with construction and maintenance of our information kiosks and picnic shelter and promoted and designed our newly-built viewing shelter at the corner of Dry Landing Road and St. Croix Trail. He has also worked hard on cabin maintenance and improvements – especially getting the wood stove and the new sand art sculpture behind it. He and his wife Rita kept our traveling display board up to date with beautiful photos and current information. He was champion of involving youth and shared photos taken by young photographers in the area. He recruited his son Mark to partner with former Board member Bruce Pankratz in updating our website.



Mark also had a great idea – instead of a stuffy Annual Meeting, why not a picnic? How about holding it when the blueberries are ripe? Our "Blueberries on the Barrens" annual picnics and summer nature hikes have since been easy for our group to organize and a big success in bringing our friends and supporters to the Barrens.

For the last two years, Mark and Vern Drake have welcomed a Hudson artists group to the Barrens, making sure the cabin site was ready and that the participants had meaningful opportunities to enjoy the Barrens and the area. Mark has also worked closely with teacher and curriculum specialist Wendy Rubinyi to develop a 5-lesson middle school curriculum guide to the Barrens (soon to be completed).

Mark used all the tools he could find to promote and educate about the Barrens, through local tourism postings, our website, newsletter, calendar, and Facebook.

Nancy Christel, DNR Property Manager and Wildlife Biologist shared her appreciation for Mark's contributions to the group:

*"I remember when Mark first called me. He knew nothing about the Barrens. He had driven through the property on snowmobile... I have always been amazed that the chance drive-through, his curiosity, and his phone call started a 10-year friendship and brought so much to the Friends group and the property. He has been one of the most active board members. He obviously always has NBWA on his mind... The Friends group accomplished so much more than what I always intended, and Mark is a big reason why that occurred."*

Mark shared these thoughts with the Board when letting us know he was "retiring." *"It has been an absolute pleasure to be part of this board and witness what the Barrens is all about and the people of the board who promoted the NBWA!"*

Mark, thanks so much for all you and your family have done for the Barrens and FNBWA over the past decade-plus. Keep in touch!

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Sand Art, showing animal tracks, was recently installed behind the cabin woodstove.



# Accomplishments 2022

By Gary Dunsmoor

The Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area accomplished a number of smaller projects outside the new sheltered kiosk in 2022, again, thanks to the generous contributions of our many members dedicated to the conservation of pine-oak barrens. The Friends group not only receives membership donations through PayPal and checks, but also through Amazon Smile and five charitable giving funds. Donations are also received for the beautiful calendars sent to members, use of Sharp-tailed Grouse viewing blinds, the annual Blueberries on the Barrens picnic, and through memorials.

The metal campfire ring that was run over near the cabin and picnic shelter was replaced with a new metal and landscape block ring. This fire pit is much sturdier and permanent than the metal ring, so should last a long time. Just be sure to remember to look before backing up anyway.

The old corrugated, leaky, metal roof on the lean-to on the south side of the cabin was also replaced with a nice new, blue, metal roof that matches the cabin. This will help keep firewood, generators, and other materials dry that are stored and used under the lean-to.

As part of the grant to build the new sheltered kiosk the Friends also purchased a new Champion generator to power the well pump, cabin lights, annual picnic, and any other electrical needs at the picnic shelter and cabin that may arise. The well pump is especially important to provide water for the many horses and canines at the several dog trials held on the Namekagon Barrens each fall.

Due to the Friends group working on a new website with the domain name changing to namekagonbarrens.org we also purchased a new FNBWA banner. The banner not only has the new domain name, but we also added beautiful pictures of a Sharp-tailed Grouse and Wood Lily flower. Look for the banner at the annual picnic and other events in the area.



on canvas which currently hang in the Barrens cabin. Larry also donated 12 - 8x10 prints for fundraising at the annual picnic silent auction. You can view some of his excellent bird pictures in the 2023 FNBWA calendar. Thank you again Larry!







Photo Courtesy of Kevin Hagen

## Blueberries on the Barrens Picnic Recap

By Kathy Bartilson

Our annual Blueberries on the Barrens picnic was held on July 16, with around 75 enthusiastic friends and berry pickers attending. Don Monson, retired DNR Forester, spoke on the history of the area and in particular, the historic bridge crossing over the Namekagon (featured in our [June FNBWA Newsletter](#)). Joan Jacobowski of Hayward shared a table of reference books, cookies (!) and specimens of wild edible plants. DNR staff also provided a property management update. We were joined by about 22 Boy Scouts from Rice Lake, and were surprised at how excited they were to win door prizes! Thanks to our speakers, Board Members, DNR staff, FNBWA members and supporters and our visitors for help making this gathering a big success. Please plan to join us next year. We even got some coverage in the local Inter-County Leader newspaper!

## A Great Morning with Dogs and Birds!

By Kathy Bartilson

On August 19, a few of us met at the cabin for our last field day of the season, which we call "Sharp-tails and Bird Dogs." We were treated to watching Board Member Allen Nelson's Gordon Setter named Jasper run effortless and enthusiastic circles through the North Unit. Jasper put up 10 birds for us to see! We also flushed one ourselves when walking back to our cars. There were a few straggler blueberries left, and lots of blazing star in bloom. Many thanks to Allen and Jasper, and to all our friends that attended.



Photo Courtesy of Allen Nelson



# A Sandhill Crane Adventure

By Larry Dau

Crex Meadows Wildlife Area near Grantsburg is part of the Northwest Sands Region of Wisconsin, much like the Namekagon Barrens. Crex Meadows has large areas of marsh land mixed in with barrens and prairie. Every fall, large numbers of Sandhill Cranes migrate to the area for a short stay, while on their way south from breeding grounds in Canada. They reach their peak numbers in late October and early November. This fall the DNR counted over 17,000 cranes in the Grantsburg area.

Though noted for the Crane migration, Crex is a great place to view wildlife and birds. Many waterfowl species are present including large numbers of Trumpeter Swans.

Most of the Cranes at Crex leave the marsh each morning to feed in the nearby picked corn fields. Each evening at sunset they return to the marsh to roost for the night. Watching the Sandhill Cranes leave and return to the marsh is quite a spectacle, especially the evening flight.



Photo courtesy of Larry Dau

I was determined to not only view the cranes this year, but to also watch and photograph the Cranes in both the early morning and evening flights. Since our cabin is near Minong, about 60 miles from Grantsburg, it was advantageous to stay at a motel in the area.

Driving down from Minong to Grantsburg, the first stop always has to be the Burnett County Dairy Cooperative and Cheese Store in the little town of Alpha. The store is a great place for ice cream, cheese or a sandwich. Returning to the truck with my yogurt twist cone of vanilla-orange dream, I could already hear the rattle calls of the Cranes with a small group flying overhead. There is another great reason to stop here. If you follow the maze of little twisting roads around the buildings in back of the store you will eventually get to an open field and a little pond. There will usually be Sandhill Cranes in this area that allow close viewing and photos. That day was disappointing with no Cranes present, but there were some very late season Wilson's Snipe and Greater Yellowlegs in the pond. I traveled the final 12 miles to Crex Meadows and arrived at the marsh around 3 PM.

I surveyed the many roads winding through the wildlife area, already seeing and hearing good numbers of Cranes. Along Main Dike Road I noted a few photographers had



Photo courtesy of Larry Dau

already picked their spots for the evening Crane flight and were setting up cameras and tripods. I picked a nice spot and joined them. As sunset approached, the number of viewers and photographers grew right along with ever increasing Crane numbers.

The Cranes start returning to the marsh in good numbers from about 4PM until sunset. As their numbers increase, their rattling calls get louder and louder until almost deafening. There is no mass flight. Instead, continuing small to medium sized groups just keep stringing everywhere across the sky in a seemingly endless parade. Many Cranes landed right in front of my position, while most flew deeper into the marsh. Near sunset, the golden and purplish tones of light highlighted the birds, making for beautiful viewing and photos. Seeing the silhouettes of the Cranes flying across the orange and then pink sky at sunset is almost indescribable. I even saw a few flying across the full

moon (regrettably I missed that photo opportunity).

I returned to the marsh at sunrise the next day. Cranes were present in large numbers, with some groups even standing right in the middle of the road. There were many great views and photo opportunities that morning. The cranes do not leave their roosting area in the marsh at any certain time. The process is drawn out, starting at about 8AM and continuing through about 10AM. You will be watching a larger group of Cranes on the marsh when suddenly 1 or 2 take flight. Then in an orderly fashion over the next 5 minutes the rest of the group takes flight in small numbers.

Viewing the Cranes in late fall is an awesome experience. It is something you can do when much of the north land has already gone into slow down mode for winter. For the evening viewing, remember to wear your winter gear and bring binoculars, camera and lots of coffee. Arrive around 4PM to pick your perfect viewing spot. In saying that, I am not sure there are really any bad viewing spots. The Cranes are everywhere.

**Seeing the silhouettes of the Cranes flying across the orange and then pink sky at sunset is almost indescribable.**

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Photo courtesy of Larry Dau

## How Many Plants per Square Meter of Barrens?

By Kathy Bartilson

Biologically, the more native plant species in an area, the more healthy and rich the habitat supporting them. Again this year, a small group of wildflower and plant enthusiasts gathered on July 30 to identify and quantify barrens plants. Our expert leader, Botanist Paul Hlina led us through the survey protocol. Paul brought an armload of excellent field guides. We started off with a short “meander survey.” Each of us took a separate path through the barrens west of the cabin and picked leaves or twigs of the plant species on our route. We then compared what each of us had found. Some of us didn’t find as many species, as we were delayed picking ripe blueberries, but we identified 25 different species from what we collected.

Next, we did two “square meter surveys,” walking into a sunny, open area northeast of the corner of Dry Landing Road and St. Croix Trail. Paul placed a square meter PVC frame on the ground, and we sat around it listing off the flowers and grasses, etc. that we knew and searching the field guides for the ones we didn’t (even though Paul knew them all!). Next, we decided what percentage of the square meter was taken up by each species found. We also tried a second shaded area a bit farther east.

**In the two square meter plots surveyed, the group averaged 16 species — a typical forest survey results in 6–9 species per square meter plot. A total of 22 species were recorded and dominant species were identified based on these two square meter surveys.**

Paul shared these results in his summary of the day’s work: “These surveys are designed for measuring species frequency, density and dominance of all barren species encountered during a survey. In these surveys all vascular plant species are identified. In the two square meter plots surveyed, the group averaged 16 species – a typical forest survey results in 6-9 species per square meter plot. A total of 22 species were recorded and dominant species were identified based on these two square meter surveys.

If you would like to view more of my photos of the Cranes, you can go the links listed below.

[Evening/sunset Crane photos:](#)

[Morning Crane photos:](#)



Photo courtesy of Larry Dau



Photo courtesy of Kathy Bartilson

Additionally lichens and moss were noted as large groups as species identification was beyond the ability of the group, but these non-vascular organisms were recorded as well.

Paul went on to say that continuing these surveys will provide useful information and trends over time. “The square meter surveys require one to look very closely at all the plants in the meter square, which often doesn’t occur when you are above the barrens looking down and ahead in meander surveys. Fine details of each plant are observed and oftentimes, insect relationships with plants are found – whether it’s chewed leaves or pollen gathering by bees.”

Many thanks to Paul for all the survey work he has done on the Barrens over the years, and his enthusiasm for sharing his love of plants with us! On the following page is the combined list of the species observed in the two square-meter plots.

*Continued on next page*



Common Name	Scientific Name
Sand Cherry	Prunus pumila
Upland white goldenrod	Solidago ptarmicoides
June grass	Solidago speciose
Wild strawberry	Koeleria macrantha
Hoary frostweed	Fragaria virginiana
Woodland rose	Crocianthemum bicknellii
Big bluestem grass	Rosa aicularis
Few leaved sunflower	Andropogon gerardii
Yarrow	Helianthus paucif brus
Thimbleweed	Achillea millifolium
Long branched frostweed	Anemone cylindrical
Naked stemmed and western sunflower	Crocianthemum candadense
Pennsylvania sedge	Helianthus occidentalis
Sky blue aster	Carex pensylvanica
Hawkweed	Symphyotrichum oolentangiense
Kentucky bluegrass	Hieracium sp.
Prairie cinquefoil	Poa pratensis
Smooth blue aster	Drymocallis arguta
Poverty oat grass	Danthonia spicata
Common ragweed	Ambrosia artemisifolia
Woodland strawberry	Fragaria vesca

## Can You Help Us with Our Website?

By Kathy Bartilson

Over the past two years, dedicated volunteers Matt Nupen and Bruce Pankratz have completely revamped our website. Many Board members also provided input, updated stories and photos. Thanks to everyone involved!

Currently, we have need of some skilled help in the “behind the pages” website functions, such as keeping our domain name and url intact, making sure our WordPress functions keep operating, and keeping links working with other social media. If any of our members or supporters have these skills and are willing to help, contact Kathy Bartilson at [oh2paddle@gmail.com](mailto:oh2paddle@gmail.com), or through the “[Contact Us](#)” form on our website.



Photo courtesy of .... (Help me! Let us know who took this great shot.)

## Looking for Lupines and Karner Blues

By Kathy Bartilson

Each spring, we host a hike up the steep, south-facing slope in the South Unit to see what we believe may be the northernmost stand of wild lupines in Wisconsin. And, each year we also hope to find Karner Blue butterflies, but we haven’t found signs of them yet. The lupines were in full, glorious bloom during our hike on June 4, 2022 along with many other wildflowers and bog flora. In 2021, the lupines had been hit by the frost and the blooms were not as prolific.

Our hike was sponsored through the [Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin](#), and will be offered through that organization again next year on June 3, 2023, along with our spring Rare Birds field trip on May 20th. Watch their website early in the year to register as their trips fill up fast! Other FNBWA field trips that we sponsor ourselves will be scheduled early in 2023 and posted on our website, and do not require advance registration.

## The 2023 Viewing Blinds Are Open!

Sharp-tailed grouse viewing is available each April and May. Registration opens mid-late January. To learn more about this opportunity please visit [Reserve a Blind](#).

A BIG thankyou to membership and supporters for helping the Friends Group continue educational outreach for barrens habitat significance (exciting news on education in the next issue!) and ongoing conservation efforts. [Renew Membership or Donate](#) here.



Photo courtesy of Kathy Bartilson