

**ENDANGERED &
THREATENED
SPECIES IN LEE
COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**PRESENTED BY:
THE LEE COUNTY NATURAL AREA GUARDIANS
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[music at beginnning - lower music as script starts]

(1)

An endangered plant or animal, is a species which is in danger of extinction as a breeding species. Threatened means it is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. There are forty-six endangered and threatened species in Lee County - 35 plants and 11 animals.

(2)

To help you learn more about Lee County's endangered and threatened species we will (3) look at eight of them both plants and animals.

(4)

This presentation is funded in part by an Illinois nongame wildlife checkoff grant.

Do you wonder why plants and animals become endangered or threatened? The number one reason is loss of habitat. (5) Habitat is the type of area (6) a species needs (7) to provide them (8) a suitable home. (9) Some species become extinct naturally, others were never common to begin with because they are living on the edge of their range. And sometimes it's because of all those reasons!

(10)

Lee County is located in two different natural divisions in Illinois. The northwest corner is in the Rock River Hill County Division, (11) the remainder in the Grand Prairie Division with a portion along Green (12) River classified as the Green River Lowland Section. This area is of particular interest because of its (13) sands and wetlands. Lee County was once 92% prairie, some of it sand prairie, with two large swamps covering 50,000 acres. Some of the (14) remnants of these areas are still home to endangered and threatened species.

(15)

First meet the SHORT-EARED OWL. This state endangered bird is about 16 inches tall - crow sized. As you see he is tawny brown and heavily streaked. He has black patches around his beautiful eyes.

The short-eared owl got his name from short ear tufts (16) that are rarely visible. And here we have the opportunity to see them! Note again the black patches around his eyes. He is feasting on a dead rat. Rodents are their main food supply. You may like pizza, hamburgers, or French fries but meadow mice are their favorite!

(17)

Doesn't the short-eared owl have an interesting wing pattern? This pattern acts as camouflage on his prairie home.

(18)

This species is a ground nester. Usually silent, but they can give a variety of barks, hisses, and squeals. Listen as we hear the short-ear call near its nest. (Sound) (19) This young owl is well camouflaged in the nest. The short-eared owl is most commonly seen in the (20) late afternoon as it begins preparing for a night of hunting. Identification can be made at a great distance by its habit of hovering and erratic flight.

(21)

Wet prairies are their preferred habitat, but you may see them in marshes, open grassland prairies, and dunes. (22) They often roost in pines in open areas. Large acres of grassland (23) are needed for survival of the short-eared owl. Studies show they prefer areas 100 acres or larger. The farmers who are putting Conservation Reserve acres on their farms are helping this endangered bird, as well as other wildlife. (24) The Conservation Reserve Program is a 10 year program that assists farm owners and operators to establish permanent vegetation on his land.

Now let's take a look at a fascinating plant! The BROOMRAPE is found (25) in dry sand prairie blowouts. It is parasitic on the roots of various members of the (26) sun flower family. Parasitic means living at the expense of another. In our area it is found with the Golden Aster, (27) shown here with a butterfly enjoying its nectar. Broomrape is very difficult (28) to find if you have never seen one. Pictured here are two. (29) They grow from 1 1/2 to 4 inches tall.

Let's get a closer look. (30) This is last years plant. Look's like an old pine cone, doesn't it? (31) Sometimes two plants emerge in the same spot. The one on the right is just finishing blooming, the other is flowering. Two more close-ups. (32) Notice the delicate lilac color. The blooms are very soft (33) to touch.

Endangered in Illinois, there are presently 10 populations in 6 counties in our state. Remember when you look for broomrape, (34) dry sand blowouts with Golden Asters. Look for the blooming plant from July to September. The broomrape and its host species help stabilize the loose sandy soils. Their roots and leaves assist in preventing erosion by wind and water.

(35)

Another interesting plant is the DOWNY YELLOW PAINTED CUP. It is a (36) "cousin" to the Indian Paintbrush. It, too, likes dry sand knobs (37) and ridges, usually gravelly soil. It was well distributed across Northern Illinois, but agriculture and urban development has severely reduced its population. Let's take a closer look at it, too. Here are (38) three young plants just finishing blooming. Blooming occurs from May to July. Plants grow from 5 to 12 inches tall. For a better look -(39) - they sort of remind you the the broomrape. (40) But notice their green leaves, you didn't see any green on the broomrape.

A perennial (meaning lasting through the year), it is endangered in Illinois. By-the-way, the plants we are looking at are from seeds that were sown in 1988 in the restoration effort at (41) Nachusa Grasslands. They bloomed in May 1992. The seed was obtained from a site on another knob at the preserve.

Since Nachusa Grasslands is privately owned, (42) the owner may pick and replant seed from endangered species. You can not do that unless you have a healthy mature stand, have the owners permission, and you must not take too much seed. You do not want to harm your existing plant site.

(43)

While we are still in sandy soil let's look at a reptile that loves blowouts! Meet the WESTERN HOGNOSE SNAKE (44) who is recognized by his wide neck, thick body, and black belly blotches. Bare sand, such as blowouts, appear to be essential for the species occurrence in Lee County and Illinois. (45) The pine plantings eliminated much of their required habitat. This intriguing snake gets his name from his snub (46) hog-like nose which is used to burrow for toads, (47) one of the main items in their diet. Growth ranges from 1 1/2 to 3 3/4 feet in length.

(48)

"Clown of the reptiles" might be a title you could give these snakes. When you invade their territory they put on a great show to frighten you. They hiss and lunge, puff up their body, and flatten their neck.

If all this carrying-on doesn't scare you away, (49) they roll over and play dead. Even to the point of hanging out their tongue. All this hissing and puffing is the reason for one of their common names - the Puff Adder.

(50)

Eggs are laid in damp places, such as under a log, in early summer. Although this is not a Western Hognose Snake egg, their eggs are similarly shaped. Up to a dozen, white, leathery, elongated eggs are laid. Hatchlings, about 6 to 8 inches long, appear in late summer or early fall. (51) Maintaining habitat is probably the best management procedure to help this state threatened species. Don't kill snakes. We have no poisonous species in Lee County. The largest Western Hognose Snake on record in Illinois was found in Lee County. It was killed on one of our roads.

What is thought to be one of the rarest animals in Illinois is also found in Lee County. A dweller of sandy wetlands - (52) it's the ILLINOIS MUD TURTLE. Several have been found in Lee County.

(53)

Shallow, sandy bottom ponds are home for this endangered reptile during the spring and early summer. Loss of habitat is the major reason for their endangered status. (54) Draining of sloughs and ponds and planting pines on the sandy areas nearby cause loss of water for food foraging and the soft sandy nest sites.

(55)

A triangular shaped 9th marginal scute on the turtles carapace will identify this rare critter. Carapace is the name of the turtles top shell and marginal scutes are the sections around the edge. (56) A hooked claw on the end of the males tail and 4 barbells (whiskers) on the under neck also help identify the Illinois Mud Turtle. (57) They are dark brown to black with very soft to the touch skin on their neck, legs, and tail.

(58)

Eggs are laid in early summer and hatch in the fall. This nest contains at least two eggs. Hatchlings are tiny, (59) this one

is compared to a nickel. After one season's growth it's (60) "off and running". Hatchlings may stay in the nest site all winter. Until 1992 a hatchling has never been reported in Illinois, but a number were discovered in Henry County in that year. (61) Very interesting things are going on at that site. Turtles are equipped with radios so they can be monitored. (62) Hopefully, many of the turtles secrets will be learned so we will know how to help them survive in our world today.

(63)

While we are in the wetlands, let's look at a plant called QUEEN-OF-THE-PRAIRIE. (64) Along with the cattails it likes its feet wet. It is threatened here in Illinois. Found in fens, mesic sand prairies, and seeps, there are presently 7 populations known to persist in our state. At least one of those sites is in Lee County.

(65)

Queen-of-the-prairie blooms from July to August. These beautiful pink flowers bloom on flat-topped clusters on tall stalks. They grow from 2 to 6 feet tall. (66) The leaves are large, toothed and deeply divided. This is the only species of the meadow sweet group native to North America. Aren't they queenly?

This plant has been used for its medical content. It contains an acid that resembles the action as well as the chemistry of (67) aspirin. It has been used for treatment of numerous illnesses. American Indians sought out the plant for treating skin rashes and diseases.

(68)

A feathered inhabitant of wetlands is the YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD. Once a common breeding bird in large marshes of Northern Illinois wetlands it is now endangered in Illinois. Again the cause is loss of habitat - draining and development on wetlands.

(69)

Cattails and bulrushes adjacent to open water are required for it's nest site. Nests are usually near areas of open water. (70) They are woven of soggy blades of dead grass, when the grass dries, the nest fabric tightens and improves the nest's stability. The female lays usually 4, sometimes 3 to 5, tan eggs with fine darker brown markings.

The male Yellow-headed blackbird is unmistakable and should be easy to identify with his bold colors. (71) He does, however, have the habit of sitting just low enough in the vegetation to be concealed most of the time. His song sounds like a rusty hinge. (Sound) This species (72) has been recorded in Green River State Wildlife Area.

(73)

Maintenance of open marshes is critical for nesting colonies. Prescribed burning can be used to keep open areas in marshes. What is meant by prescribed burn? (74) A prescribed burn is a controlled fire to manage habitats that benefit from fire, such

as prairies and wetlands. The fire is planned and carried out according to a burn plan. In the plan many elements are considered, such as - (75) how much fuel you have, wind speed and direction, temperature and humidity, time of the year, and needs of the habitat. Proper preparations are made before a site is burned. Many times local firemen participate. A prescribed burn in the fall on the Yellow-headed Blackbird's marsh would help keep the marsh open. The burn will slow down (76) the growth of willows which sometimes like to take over a site. (77) Be on the lookout for this yellow head!

Let's take a look at our last species. (78) Here's hint to its humorous name. What's its name? Did you guess? KITTEN TAIL!
(79)

This interesting plant is found on dry prairies and open woods in sandy, gravelly soil. It blooms in May and grows from 8 to 16 inches tall. (80) A thickened rootstock is the source of the stem that's covered with short hair. If you return to the site in July (81) you find the seed heads loaded with seeds for the future.

Leaves that grow at the base of a plant are called basal leaves. (82) Kitten Tails have mostly basal leaves lying flat on the ground. You'll find them on the driest part of the prairie, usually on a north facing slope, many times in large colonies. There is evidence that moderate grazing benefits this species.

Kitten Tails are threatened in Illinois and are know from 17 populations in 6 counties (83), and one of them is Lee County. Be watching for Kitten Tails, the plant!

With this information you will be better able to identify these eight rare species in Lee County. (84) A hand out to help you remember how (85) to identify these precious guests is available if you are interested. Also available is a card for you to return if you are able to find any of these rarities in Lee County. (86) Just answer the questions and include your name, address, and phone number and send to the address on the card. In this way you can help add to the data of Endangered & Threatened Species in Lee County.

Would you like to know how you can help endangered and threatened species in Lee County? (87) Report where and when you find one of these rare species to the Endangered Species Protection Board with the card you can pick up. Encourage preservation of grasslands and wetlands. Remember habitat is the number one reason for endangered and threatened status. Enjoy endangered and threatened flowers in their home. Picking flowers removes the seed for future plants. Digging and moving plants is a bad practice, too. You may injure the root system and remember they must have the right habitat to grow and thrive. Don't try to "improve" habitat unless improvements are known to help. Don't bother nesting areas, sometimes just

getting too close can cause a nest to be abandoned. Finally, get to know, recognize, and enjoy Lee County's endangered and threatened species.

[music - louder]

Credits:

(88) Thank you

(89) narrator