As the memory of snow melts away and leaves sprout on trees, there is another evident change at Lorado Taft Field Campus this spring season. Most of the magnificent Bald Eagles have taken flight to the North, and an old guest population makes their mark along the Rock River shore line; Great Blue Herons have displayed their presence once again in strong numbers, and they are a sight to see.

Across the river from campus, there is an old rookery where the Great Blue Herons have made many nests of small sticks. Since early March they have once again renewed their claim to the area and it is another great reminder that spring is among us again. These birds stand as tall as four feet and meander the shoreline looking for their potential next meal. Bird-watching enthusiasts can identify Great Blue Herons in flight by their long necks curved into an ‘s’ and their impressive wingspan, which can be as long as six feet.

The return of the Great Blue Heron rookery is another constant reminder that warmer weather is near. So shake off the dreaded cabin fever, get outside and explore your own indicators of spring!

Sources: http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/conservation/lake-notes/lakeshore-birds.pdf
New Developments

Autumn finally got her walkway!
With hard work from the students of Washington Gifted School & with assistance from the Taft Staff, Autumn led an ambitious project to rebuild the stone walkways by Taft House & Poley. Built many years ago with bricks made sometime between 1890 & 1930, the paths had become almost completely obscured by the lawn. Now, thanks to the dedication of those involved, visitors & staff will once again be able to traverse the areas around those buildings mud-free.

We also thank the students of Indiana School who took part in our annual Garlic Mustard removal project. Each year we target this invasive species in order to ensure greater biodiversity in the campus ecosystem.

Fire! Returning staff Allison & Kyle have been spending their weekends volunteering at nearby Nachusa Grasslands. Besides gaining knowledge about native tall-grass prairies, the two have participated in brush cutting & are now certified to manage prescribed fires. This March, Kyle led a group of students from Mt. Carmel Academy on a service project removing invasive honeysuckle from areas on the main campus. Allison has also begun work restoring the Prairie Plot located near the Chimney meeting area. She removed woody brush with the help of students from South Middle School & plans to burn the plot in the fall. Also keep an eye on the garden plot located between the Dining Hall & Taft House; Allison has transformed it into a butterfly garden. Take a look at the butterfly bulletin board in the Dining Hall hallway to learn how to identify the flowers that she planted & the corresponding butterflies that they will attract this summer & fall.

Kyle’s Critter Cam... Many of the animals that live at Taft Campus are seldom seen; for example, although most of us have never seen coyotes here, we hear their howls, find their scat, & follow their tracks. Since early spring, Kyle has monitored a motion-activated camera hidden in the less frequented areas of the campus. The camera has photographed many an unsuspecting squirrel, but also raccoons, deer, coyotes, the Great Blue Heron on the bottom left, & the male Wild Turkey (left), who may have mistaken the camera flash for an opportunity to attract a mate with his impressive display of tail feathers.

...and Blue-Bird Boxes Bird lovers will be happy to hear that Kyle has also built & restored several bluebird boxes & placed them throughout the campus. While it may take time for Eastern Bluebirds to locate & begin nesting in the boxes, they have become home to 2 Black-capped Chickadee nests, each with a clutch size of about 5 eggs. This project will continue in the coming years, & all visitors are encouraged to help keep count of birds & other wildlife that they observe while visiting Taft Campus. See the opposite page to learn more about what we have spotted lately & our new system for recording wildlife observations.

Bat Update: Remember the little brown bats found hibernating in the Pioneer Cabin? On the first warm day of the year, we checked the shed that substituted as a hibernacula this winter, & it was empty; because “little browns” can fit through spaces as small as 1/4 of an inch wide, we believe that the transplanted bat found his or her own way out. Since early April, several of us have spotted little browns flying around campus & down by the river on warm evenings– this is a great sign that the bats are still going strong in the Rock River Valley!
**Spring Returns!** Migrating birds, hibernating or dormant mammals & ectotherms (cold-blooded animals & invertebrates), & spring ephemerals have once again returned to the Rock River Valley. Be sure to keep an eye out for the following critters, flowering plants & fungus popping up at Taft Campus & in backyards near you:

### Birds:
- Bald Eagles
- Buffleheads & Cormorants
- Canada Goslings
- Baltimore Oreole & Catbirds
- Eastern Bluebirds, Phoebes, Towhees, & Wood-pewees
- Herring Gulls
- Loons & Mergansers
- Purple Finches
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Great Blue Herons
- Indigo Buntings
- Mallards & Wood Ducks
- Red-winged Blackbirds
- Short-eared Owl
- Turkey Vultures

### White Pelicans
### Wood Cocks (dancing!)

### Mammals:
- Little Brown Bats
- Chipmunks & Woodchucks
- Raccoons & Skunks
- Virginia Opossums

### Ectotherms:
- Garter & Milk Snakes
- Green, Chorus & Bull Frogs
- Crayfish, Minnows & Fish
- Bees, Butterflies, Crickets, Dragonflies, Gnats, Mosquitoes, Moths, Slugs, Wasps, Caddisfly Larva, Predacious Diving Beetles, Scuds, Water Boatmen, Water Scorpions

### White Pelicans
### Wood Cocks (dancing!)

### Asian Beetles, Box Elder Bugs
### Wolf Spiders

### Plants & Fungus:
- Garlic Mustard & Poison Ivy
- Orange Mycena & Morel Mushrooms, Brown Jelly, Scarlet Cup, Stink Bomb & Purple Shelf Fungus

---

**I spy...**

**Phenology** is the study of plant and animal cycles. Starting this spring, visitors to Taft Campus can record plant and animal sightings on the new phenology bulletin board in the Dining Hall. Sights and sounds can be noted according to the four plant and animal categories listed above, along with the date, location, and name of your school. Thank you to all who have already contributed to our phenology. Your observations will help us learn more about what the Campus looks like now, compared to the past, in order to know what it will look like 10, 50, & even 100 years from now.

http://www.niu.edu/taft/
Teacher Tidbits:

**Local Road Construction:** Route 2 will be closed from just north of Oregon to Byron until the fall. Traffic will be detoured to River Road, which is where we are located. Kishwaukee Road near the Rockford Airport is also closed for a bridge repair. For those of you coming to Taft this spring or next fall, you may want to let your bus drivers know of these possible detours.

**Health Form Revision:** Nurse Teresa and Melanie, the Outdoor Education Coordinator, have been working on revisions to the health form to help parents who need additional documentation due to their child’s diabetes, EpiPen prescription, or medical P.E. exclusion. The new forms will have a backside that will need to be completed if the students have any of those medical issues. We plan to start using the new forms next school year. Just a reminder, the most current health form must be used and cannot be altered. Teresa will send the most current health form to the schools, and it can also be found on our website. Thank you for your continued cooperation!

---

**Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame!**
Everyone who comes to Taft Campus works hard to reduce their food waste. We would like to acknowledge those schools who reached the promised land of “Zero Ort” this spring:

- Claremont Academy
- Galena Middle School
- Gary School
- Holy Family
- Illinois School for the Deaf
- Mount Carmel Academy
- Rollins Elementary
- Seth Paine
- South (East) Middle School
- St. Mary’s
- St. Raphael
- Washington Gifted

---

**Taft Times Contributors**

- **Shawna Reilly,** Sr. Education Program Specialist, Design, editing, articles, some photographs
- **Tom Wallenfeldt,** Education Program Specialist, "Signs of Spring" feature article
- **Kyle Rauch,** Education Program Specialist, Photographs

---

Becky has worked 2 years as an instructor and 6 years as an assistant coordinator at Taft Campus. She is expecting her first child this September, and she plans to stay home with him for a few months before finding a new position in the winter. When asked what she will miss the most about Taft, Becky responded, “Taft itself. It has been my home away from home for so many years. I will miss all the staff and teachers I worked with year after year. I hope everyone enjoys Taft as much as I did. I will miss it a lot!”

Autumn worked for 3 years as an instructor at Taft before becoming an assistant coordinator this past fall. She is looking forward to moving closer to family in Michigan, where she will remain in the field of outdoor education. Eventually she plans to pursue a Master of Arts in Teaching degree through the University of Michigan. Autumn says, “I will mostly miss the family that I have made here while away from my own...oh, and the food! I will DEFINITELY miss the food! Thank you to all of the wonderful teachers and Taft Staff members (past and present) who have helped guide me in my professional career. They are what make Taft such a special place for so many people!”