

At Home in the Garden

A Q & A WITH PHOEBE WAUGH, 2014 MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Phoebe Waugh has been coming to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden for more than half a century. She has served on the board of the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden for 10 years, as board secretary and, since 2009, as historian for the Friends. In 2014, she was named Volunteer of the Year by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. Here, she talks about her love of the Garden and why it is so important to her.

Do you remember the first time you visited the Garden?

I first saw the Wild Flower Garden in the first half of the 1960s when, as a young couple, my husband and I explored many things in the Twin Cities on the weekends. My first memory is of [then-Garden Curator] Ken Avery talking about having showy orchids in the very wet wetland and pasque flower on the very hot mown grass of the upper Garden. I never saw either flower but did see the showy lady slipper.

My second memory is of a visit in 1969 when we had a young family. I remember our two-year-old daughter waving at the dwarf irises that were planted in the open circle in front of what is now the shelter.

How and when did you become a volunteer at the Garden?

In the mid-'90s I was between jobs and becoming more involved in caring for my aging parents. I returned to the Garden and found it to be a refuge from the stresses of my responsibilities and concerns. I also found large patches of lovely trout lilies and a glorious prairie on those high hills above the woodland. I started to visit every few weeks and soon was bringing a camera or camcorder to record what I had discovered.

I signed up as a volunteer in 1998. With the help and encouragement of Diana Thottingal and other naturalists, I began to take pictures of the grasses and, eventually, to collect information on and photos of the grasses in the Garden in a notebook that is in the shelter. Diana and I shared the view that it was much easier to study plants and mushrooms because they did not move as fast as other elements of our natural world.

You received a 2014 Volunteer of the Year award from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, after being nominated by naturalist Tammy Mercer, leader of the Early Birders group. Can you talk about your volunteer efforts with that group?

Tammy says I was one of the original Early Saturday Morning Birders, but we are both unsure when the group started. I have always been interested in bird song but frustrated with the difficulty in spotting the singer. (All birders have this problem in differing degrees.) So I easily slipped into the task of recording the birds seen and/or heard when it became a problem to



Phoebe Waugh (center) with Tammy Mercer and David Waugh

remember some of the many we had noted. A few years ago, I began to write up the phenology notes on our experience. [The phenology notes are compiled in a notebook in the shelter.] In 2014 I began including more descriptions of bird behavior. This year I have been compiling a list of when birds were seen in the Garden and South Wirth.

In a way I was surprised by the nomination, and both pleased and embarrassed by the recognition. There are so many who contribute to the success of the Garden as volunteers and professionals. The award included \$500 that could be designated toward a project or projects in a Minneapolis park. I decided my award money would go toward some books on birds and plants and to the Cary George Wetland Project.

What do you like most about the Garden?

What I enjoy most about my experiences in the Garden is the joy of exploration and discovery. Some of it is my own discovery of things, like a migrating Bachman's warbler, the spotlight of the ruby and yellow throats of our hummingbirds and common yellowthroats, and hearing a wood thrush one evening in the Garden. But I also enjoy sharing the joy with others in finding a mushroom or seeing a pretty bird.

—Donna Ahrens, copyeditor of the *Fringed Gentian*

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