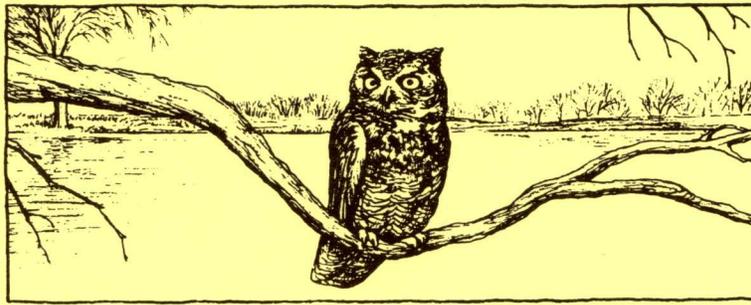


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



©SUMMER 1999

THE GINKGO TREE: Planting a Fossil

--Mark Spreyer

It's rare that a scientific name for a tree enters the contemporary lexicon but *Ginkgo biloba* certainly has. No, we're not going to discuss how the extract of ginkgo leaves is being used to treat everything from senility to retinopathy. Instead, let's investigate the history of this ancient tree species.

Ginkgo is the only surviving genus of a prehistoric order of plants having characters of both conifers (cone-bearing trees such as pines) and ferns. In fact, another common name for the ginkgo is the maidenhair [fern] tree. The leaflets of the maidenhair fern, which grows here in the Midwest, are smaller but otherwise quite similar to ginkgo leaves.

Ginkgo leaves are unparalleled in the tree world. The veins in a ginkgo leaf, however, are not parallel. Instead, much like a fan, they radiate out from the base of the leaf. Unlike oak or elm leaves, the ginkgo leaf lacks a central vein or midrib. Upon close examination, the ginkgo's fine veins will fork as they approach the leaf's edge.

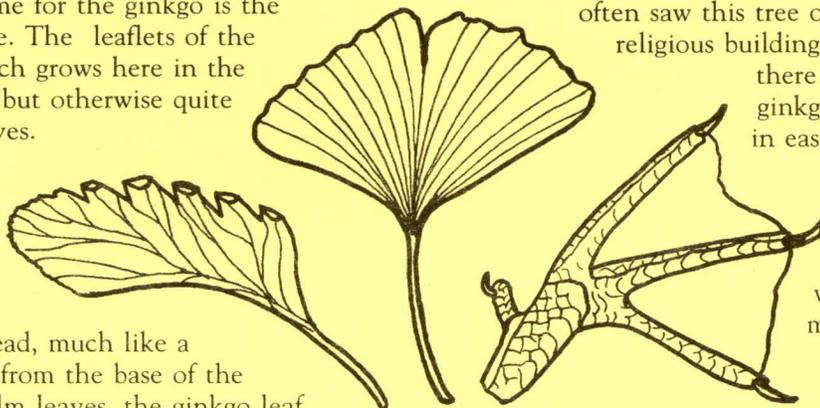
The species name, *biloba*, refers to the fact that the leaf usually has a narrow notch or sinus that divides the leaf into two lobes. Centuries ago, this lobed look inspired another descriptive name for the ginkgo. The author of the great Chinese Herbal, issued in 1578, calls this tree Ya-chio-tzu, which means "the tree with leaves like a duck's foot."

As this reference suggests, the ginkgo that has

been widely planted in North America originated in China. The ginkgoes brought to this country, after being first brought to Europe, can trace their origins to trees planted in China, Japan or Korea. It was once thought that none were to be found growing in the 'wild' and, were it not for the arboricultural skills of Buddhist monks, none would have survived. To a certain degree, this is true. Early visitors to the Orient, such as Engelbert Kaempfer who was the first European to publish an account of the ginkgo, often saw this tree on the grounds of important religious buildings, palaces or tombs. Today, there is good evidence that the ginkgo occurs in a truly wild state in eastern China.

Before the last ice age, when much of Eurasia and North America were buried under glaciers, maidenhair trees could be found growing across the northern hemisphere. It is thought that the glaciers eradicated the species from this continent while a few hung on in Asia.

Given its near global extinction and a revival dependent on human cultivation, you might think the ginkgo is a fragile tree that needs to be handled with care. Nothing could be further from the truth. While it does grow slowly, it is practically immune to disease and insect pests and is little-harmed by pollutants. Gangly at first, the older ginkgo develops into one of the finest street trees in the temperate



From left to right: maidenhair fern leaflet, ginkgo leaf, and duck's foot.

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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PROGRAMS

world. I don't know about you, but these last two paragraphs give me reason to pause. How is it that a species perfectly suited to an urban landscape evolved during an era when no such landscapes existed?

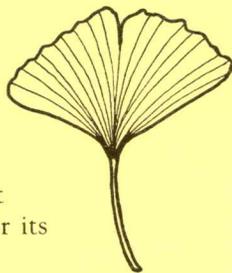
That's a question that remains unanswered. I do know, however, that a wonderful example of a large suburban ginkgo can be seen growing in the parking lot of the Olive Garden near Spring Hill Mall in Dundee. This gorgeous tree is over 100 years old and is doing well despite having been "malled."

The maidenhair tree does have one trait that must be kept in mind, it is a dioecious species. This means that rather than having male and female flowers on the same plant, there are separate male and female trees. The females bear the fruit which gives the tree its name. Ginkgo is a transliteration of the Chinese symbol of yin hsing meaning "silver apricot." Who wouldn't want a tree that bears silver apricots? You wouldn't. Unless, of course, you want a yard full of acrid, putrid-smelling pulp that reminds some of rancid butter and has earned the female tree the nickname "stinko ginkgo." If you choose to plant a ginkgo, make sure it's a male.

This year, thanks to a generous donation of trees from an anonymous donor and the money to plant the trees from **The Garden Club of Barrington**, Stillman has planted four young ginkgoes. If you want to see them, they're just a brief walk from the parking lot.

O.K., some skeptics are thinking, how come you're planting a non-native tree? If you define native as what was growing here last century, just as Europeans settlers arrived, ginkgoes are non-native. With a smile planted firmly on my face, I would ask, why stop at the 1830s? If we go way back before any humans arrived on this continent, when dinosaurs were still stumbling into tar pits, the fossil record clearly shows that members of the ginkgo clan thrived in North America. Imagine, for a moment, a pterodactyl perched in the branch of a 100-foot tall ginkgo, searching for easy prey.

Unfortunately, we don't have any dinosaurs to go with our maidenhair trees but if we did....Well, let's put it this way. If that pterodactyl found itself perched in the Dundee ginkgo, it wouldn't have to look very far for its next snack!



Program Basics: PLEASE CALL or fax us at 428-OWLS(6957), or email Stillman at: stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses). Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending. *Please, no scout groups.*

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the program) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

BIRD BANDING OPEN HOUSES

Watch Mark Spreyer (a licensed bird bander) measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Catching birds is not always predictable, so come prepared to hike the trails. If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays, June 6 & July 4
Time: 9:00AM to Noon
Fee: None

FATHER & SUN CELEBRATION

Father's Day comes just one day before the summer solstice, the year's longest day which marks the beginning of summer. Join the two Susans (Allman and Hargreaves) as they lead fathers and sons in activities designed to celebrate the sun's role in fueling life on planet earth. If your son is the light of your life, then you won't want to miss this! Of course, mothers and daughters can join the fun as well.



Date: Sunday, Father's Day, June 20
Time: Noon
Fee: None

POND LIFE: From the Bottom Up

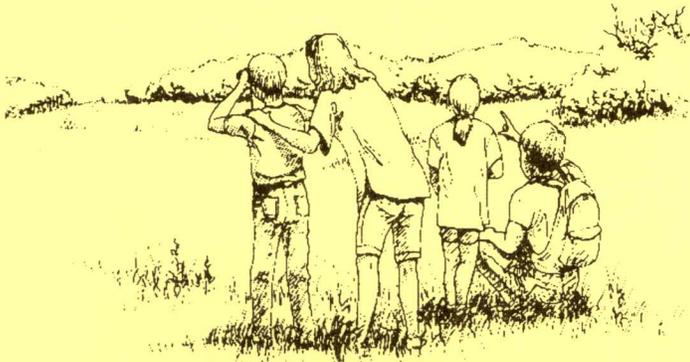
This afternoon, with the help of long-handled dip nets, visitors will scoop into our pond in hopes of catching crayfish, dragonfly larvae, tadpoles and other rarely seen pond inhabitants. Dress in clothes and shoes you don't mind getting muddy.

Date: Sunday, June 27
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Sunday: June 13, July 18 & August 1
Time: 8:00AM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up



SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS EVENT

Regular readers of this newsletter have seen the **Harper College** Arboriculture class mentioned in our "thank you" columns. Under the supervision of **Professor Edgar Metcalf**, this class has 'sharpened' their tree trimming skills while keeping our trails clear of dangling limbs and fallen trees.

So, in honor of "Doc" Metcalf, we are hosting our second annual outdoor meeting. We'll provide the main course and beverages. We'd like you to bring along a side dish. **ALL** of Stillman's members, volunteers and their families are invited. Feel free to come any time between 4:00 and 7:00PM.

Early on, while the food is still on the grill, **Cyndi Duda of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** will give a brief presentation about how to landscape your property for wildlife. If it's raining, we'll reschedule this picnic to an autumn date. *Please call 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend and what kind of dish you'll be bringing.*

Date: Sunday, June 27
Time: 4:00 - 7:00PM

COMPOSING COMPOST

Organic yard and kitchen byproducts used to account for over 15% of the solid waste produced each year. Now, thanks to composting, more and more people have learned how to transform organic waste into a useful garden fertilizer. Join us as volunteers **Diane Greening** and **Vicki Klein** demonstrate ways that you can transform leaves and grass clippings into a rich soil conditioner.

Date: Sunday, July 11
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

WATER QUIZ: Ponds and lakes are, of course, filled with freshwater. So, *how much freshwater is there?* Answers appear at the bottom of the quiz.

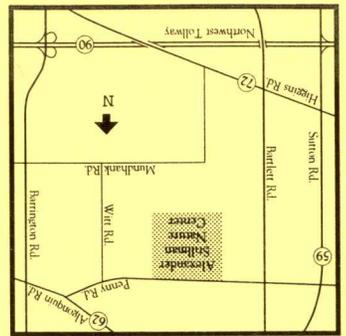
- 1) How much of this planet's water is saltwater?
A. 67% B. 75% C. 85% D. 97%
- 2) How much of the freshwater on earth is frozen in ice caps and glaciers?
A. 67% B. 75% C. 85% D. 97%
- 3) Of the freshwater that is not frozen, how much of it is underground?
A. 67% B. 75% C. 85% D. 97%
- 4) How much freshwater is in a form we can use? That is, how much of it is found in clouds and surface water?
A. .67% B. 1% C. 3.33% D. 5%

Answers. 1) D. 97% 2) D. 97% 3) D. 97% 4) A. 67%

PLEASE LOOK AT YOUR MAILING LABEL.

If you see an '8' after your last name, we have not received your dues for 1999. So, unless we hear from you, this will be your last newsletter.

To remain on our mailing list and get the Stillman Newsletter, simply complete the form on the back side of this page. Then, send the form with your check to Stillman Nature Center. Thanks, in advance, for your continued support.



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If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
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