



Friends of Thorn Creek Woods

# Thorn Creek News

August 2014

## Hummingbird Messenger



Hummingbirds are amazing simply because they are the only birds that hover in flight and can fly backwards, forward, sideways, up, down and even upside down. Their rapid figure eight wing movement requires tremendous energy to sustain. During the day at rest (e.g. perched) their heart may beat 250 times per minute (bpm), soaring up to 500 to 1250 bpm in flight, and dropping to 50 bpm at night when they enter a state of torpor to conserve energy.

Their long bill and hovering flight are adaptations to lap nectar from certain flowers, especially long, tubular-shaped flowers. The sugar in nectar is the major fuel that sustains their high-metabolism muscles to contract and move those wings so fast. And because they burn energy so quickly, they must feed every few minutes during the day. This constant need for flower nectar makes them easy to attract with special bottle feeders filled with solutions made from powder or concentrate containing the simple sugar, vitamins and other essential nutrients that are in flower nectar.

My hummingbird feeder quickly became the place to watch these amazing tiny little birds. It has been three years since I first set up a feeder station in the spring of 2010, and maintained it all summer long and into fall until they migrated further south. I hung the feeder at the south side of the house where it was visible both through the windows on the porch from my desk where my PC is situated, and also the window above the kitchen sink. This strategy resulted in many observations of hummers while I tend to tasks on the PC or wash dishes or prepare meals.

It was fascinating to watch them hover and insert their long beak into the hole at the base of the feeder and sip from this strange, new kind of flower – one which yielded so much nectar that they could fill their stomachs in a single visit. These visits usually lasted three to seven seconds before they flew off. I know this because I still have the notes from my 2010 observations where I recorded the time of each visit, the duration in seconds for each visit, as well as the number of “bill-dips” and “sip-pauses” observed on each visit. Armed with a stopwatch and a notepad, I was reliving my “Animal Behaviorist” days when I was a graduate student at Governors State University (GSU) and the study of animal behavior was an important goal in my life.

I could calculate the average interval between feeder visits, the average and range in duration in seconds per visit, and the average number of dips and pauses at each visit. But I could find no way to reliably recognize individuals, other than distinguish their sex, so my data was likely biased. This year I observed a hummer perch on the plastic ring that extends from the base in front of each port and feed for far longer duration - sometimes as long as 30 seconds. Natural flowers don't offer such luxury so hummingbirds have no choice but to hover while feeding. I didn't note any perched feeding in my 2010 notes and didn't

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make detailed observations in 2011, so I can only assume this is atypical behavior, but a behavior that rewards the discoverer with a far greater net energy gain per visit!

When more than one hummingbird has discovered the feeder, hummers frequently chase away other hummers. Later in summer, juvenile hummers are likely to be seen and observations of adults decline until the hummingbirds from up north migrating south pass through. Though these kinds of observations and behavior are always delightful, there have been two “mystery” observations that are at the root of this story.

The first occurred in 2010. It was cool and gloomy weather through much of that spring so I delayed hanging the feeder out - only the hanger hook suspended from the gutter over the winter was in its usual place. Then at 0715 hours on May 27<sup>th</sup>, while working at the PC I notice a hummingbird hovering around the empty hook; it flies to and hovers in front of the porch window, seemingly peering in straight at me, flying off after several seconds. This was a fascinating observation and I felt like this bird’s behavior was saying to me “What’s up? Where’s the nectar?” Later that morning I finally did get the feeder out, mix a batch of solution and hang it out, but I resisted the temptation to assign function or meaning to that hummer’s behavior, though it did get me wondering about other possibilities.



I have long been fascinated by the field of Animal Behavior. When I was far younger and pursuing my undergraduate and graduate degrees at GSU I had dreams and aspirations of becoming a field biologist who studied the behavior of animals. I can recall looking through the catalog with all the courses listed and couldn’t wait to take the Animal Behavior course taught by the late Ed Miller. Eventually I took that course and several other courses that Ed taught focusing on the behavior and methods used in the study of animals. He was also my advisor and ultimately my graduate thesis project did include the study of animal behavior – a study of the vocalizations of male bullfrogs and its role in female mate choice.

What I learned about the field of animal behavior or Ethology is that it centers on making observations and describing behavior, collecting and quantifying observational data, and in an experimental context testing it with applicable statistical tests against your null hypothesis. There were two basic ways to describe behavior; empirical or functional. Empirical descriptions were simply describing behavior in terms of morphology, movements or postures (e.g. baring teeth). Functional descriptions made reference to the function of the behavior, whether, proximate or ultimate (e.g. bared teeth threat).

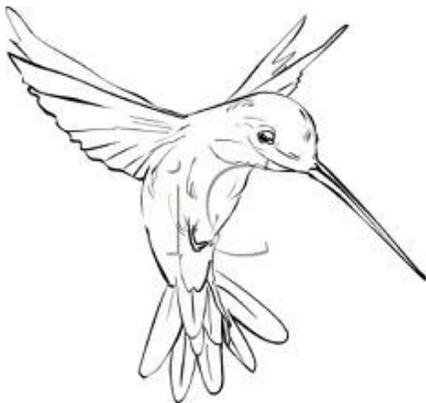
Ed’s lectures were always designed to elicit class discussion. Many of these discussions centered on the subject of bias, both intra and inter-observer, and how to eliminate or minimize it. Bias could be introduced by “error of apprehending” including characteristics of the environment that make it difficult to observe your subject, or “observer error” that resulted from inexperience of the observer or poorly defined behavioral descriptions. There was always “observer bias” rooted in the expectations or personal beliefs of the observer to contend with. There could be “observer affects” leading to altered behavior of the subject because of the observer’s presence. And there was always the possibility of error introduced by mistakes in recording data or during computational analysis.

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Ed was constantly reminding us that our descriptions of behavior should be objective and eliminate your own feelings and experiences. Our textbook noted that anthropomorphism – attributing human characteristics or personal interpretations to observations of non-human animals - was to be avoided and was considered one of the gravest sins that an ethologist could commit. This was the animal behavior background I come from and I still apply most of the principles Ed taught in the observations I make today.

I made my second mystery humming observation this summer. During an extended period of hot, sweltering days I had been filling the feeder sparingly with the intent to change it more frequently before the solution spoiled or mold growth built up. This time while working at the laptop PC located in the bedroom by the front porch, a hummingbird flies up and hovers facing the glass window, seemingly peering through the window glass and between the slats in the blinds at me. After several seconds it flew off.



The mysterious aspect of this observation is that there is no feeder hanging at the front porch. There are no flowers planted anywhere at the front of the house – only yew bushes along the wall that offer no source of nectar. So what reason would this hummingbird have to be there in the first place, let alone hovering in front of the window where it could be seen by me? What rational explanation could be ascribed to this bird's behavior? Was it simply coincidence? Was it a random act? Was it simply seeing its reflection in the window or was it actually looking at me? Was this bird trying to communicate some message to me? I knew the feeder still had solution, but to be on the safe side I went out a little later, cleaned the feeder and refilled it with a fresh batch of mix.

This story takes another twist when a few weeks later stopping at a jeweler's shop in Hoffman Estates, I notice this shop called *Styx & Stonz* a few storefronts down. It is one of those mind-body-spirit shops that sell incense, mood music, jewelry, polished rocks, crystals and spiritual books. I decided to check it out and while browsing the merchandise noticed this mini book called "Animal Speak Pocket Guide" on the counter by the register. I picked it up and started browsing through it and quickly found it an interesting perspective on how to interpret or find meaning in interactions with animals. The shop owner showed me another larger book by the same author (Ted Andrews) that was a far more expanded and detailed accounting of the animal speak subject. I am not sure exactly why, but I bought both copies.

The essential premise of these books is that animals can be "messengers" that may communicate something to us about ourselves and/or our lives. Discovering the meanings of such messages can be quite difficult, but encounters with animals can stimulate the primordial roots of our minds and imagination, and this includes not only encounters we experience in our daily life, but also in our dreams when we sleep. The books state; "*All animals in Nature are message bringers. Their appearance provides guidance in our life. They bring direction to us about situations, choices, decisions and activities we are involved in. Not only messengers in a general sense, they can also be personal power totems, protectors, teachers and healers.*"

Even though anthropomorphism may be considered the worst mistake an animal behaviorist can make, avoiding it entirely is impossible simply because we are human and our knowledge and thinking processes are shaped either directly or indirectly by our experiences. As Konrad Lorenz noted "*The observer who studies and records behavior patterns of higher animals is up against a great difficulty. He is himself a subject, so like the object he is observing that he cannot be truly objective. The most "objective" observer cannot escape drawing analogies with his own psychological processes. Language itself forces us to use*

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*terms borrowed from our own experience.*" (Lorenz 1935:92)

So as I retold my story of my two mysterious encounters with hummingbirds and how they prompted me to think of my education and those years and experiences with Ed Miller learning to be a competent animal behaviorist, a friend of the shop owner sitting nearby said, "Perhaps that hummingbird was Ed Miller bringing you a message!"



I won't go so far as to believe in reincarnation, but I cannot discount that this bird was bringing a message. Although my two observations may simply reflect some form of communication to check or tend to the feeder, there are other possibilities that go beyond rational explanation and functional behavior. Since that second observation was of an adult at the end of summer after breeding was finished, and occurred at a time when observations of adults had dropped off dramatically suggesting some of them may have already begun to journey back southward, perhaps it wasn't telling me to tend to the feeder, but rather a message to say, "Thanks for feeding me, goodbye and hope to see you next year."

I can't help but wonder what Ed Miller might think or have to say about such behavior and its meaning if he were still alive today for me to discuss it with him. So maybe that hummingbird was bringing me a different kind of message - maybe even on behalf of Ed Miller.

Perhaps the message is that there is far more to animal behavior than just describing and quantifying it – that the behavior or actions of animals may speak to us in other ways. The quest to understand animal behavior does not have to be restricted solely to scientific and rational explanation – that there is far more to nature than its elements and objects or as parts and pieces to be studied independently of our own feelings and beliefs. Observation of animal behavior is also an opportunity to converse with animals from a different non-scientific perspective - to listen with our animal ears and to see the world through our animal eyes and in that process reawaken our lost beliefs in the magic of nature, our dreams and the possibilities it brings to us.

Not surprising that the Animal Speak pocket guide indicates the hummingbird is a totem for renewal – that dreams of new joy are within reach and there are new opportunities for accomplishment. Not surprising that the expanded Animal Speak book states, "*No other bird can fly backwards. This reflects the hummingbird's ability to explore the past and to draw from it the nectars of joy. Its swiftness is always a reminder to grab joy while you can – as quickly as you can.*"



So the hummingbird messenger has spoken and prompted me to look back into my animal behavior past and to recognize now that there is more to it than simply science and method. Perhaps my outdated "Handbook of Ethological Methods" should now add an additional category – mystical and spiritual.

-Dave Mauger

2012

#### References:

Lorenz, K. 1935. Companionship in bird life: Fellow members of the species as releasers of social behavior. Pages 83-128 in C. E. Shiller, ed. *Instinctive behavior*. International Universities Press, New York. 328 pp.

Andrews, T. 2009. *Animal – Speak Pocket Guide*. Dragonhawk Publishing, Jackson, Tennessee. 95 pp.

Andrews, T. 2012. *Animal Speak: The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great & Small*. First Ed., 41<sup>st</sup> printing, Llewellyn Publications, Woodbury, Minnesota. 383 pp.



## **RAISE THE PLANKS & SINK THE PANS & PAINT THE NATURE CENTER**

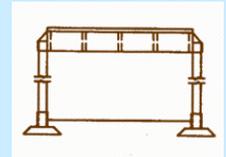
*Fundraising for a renaissance  
at Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve*

Help us raise funds for vital improvements  
on our trails and our Nature Center building

Contribute to our Capital Fund today

Our fundraising kick-off event **Picnic at Thorn Creek Woods** on May 10 raised over \$1200 !

Join with Friends of Thorn Creek Woods, Park Forest Environment Commission,  
the Thornton Township Historical Society, and the Garden Club of Park Forest  
and be a part of the renaissance of Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve.



## **Priority Improvements Needed**

- \* North Bridge Improvements - stabilize piers & add ramps
- \* Paint Nature Center exterior
  - \* Reroute Woodland Trail
  - \* Renovate old Boardwalk
  - \* Improve Owl Lake Trail
  - \* New South Bridge



## **Capital Fund**



Friends of Thorn Creek Woods established the CAPITAL FUND for improvements of the Nature Center building and in the Preserve itself over the years - vital projects for which there is no money in the preserve budget.



Acorn Donation up to \$249  
Seedling Donation \$250-499  
Sapling Donation \$500-999  
Oak Tree Donation \$1000 +



Over \$20,000 has been raised so far and funded the new North Bridge and Nature Center repairs  
**Thank you to ALL who have contributed!**

FRIENDS OF THORN CREEK WOODS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

Donations can be made out to and mailed to Friends of Thorn Creek Woods.  
If you have any questions please contact Judy Mendelson at thorn\_creek @att.net or call 708-747-6320.  
Ask us about all the projects completed using Capital Fund donations.  
And contact us to find out about other ways to help Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve.

## President's Message

July 3, 2014

Hi Friends,

New and exciting programs are underway at the nature center. The Wednesday Walker program adjusted their schedule somewhat to include a naturalist to accompany them at 9 a.m. each Wednesday.

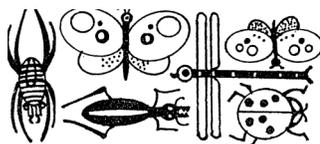
Speaking of naturalists, April and Ingrid are doing an awesome job considering their limited hours. They have set up new programs and are bringing back Summer Safari for children 8 to 10 years old in July.

I welcome you to come see our nature center upgrades and enjoy the woods with your family.

Thank you for your continued support of  
Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve.

Happy summer!

Penny



The Board of Friends of Thorn Creek Woods has regretfully accepted the resignation of Penny Chamberlain as President of Friends. After serving three years as vice-president, Penny was prevailed upon to accept the presidency in 2011. During her tenure, she not only guided us through some tumultuous times, but the energy she provided during this period was instrumental to the growth of Friends as an organization. Penny and the board coordinated the nature center and preserve volunteers, first without staff, and then with our new naturalists and new board members, creating a team. The board now meets regularly and is reviewing the bylaws and procedures to streamline the whole operation.

We are happy to report, however, that Penny is not leaving us: she will continue to coordinate all the Open Hours volunteers, and to provide her wealth of experience to the nature center and its programs. Thank you so much Penny.

To add to our dismay, we learned just recently that our erstwhile treasurer, Barb Stephens does not plan to run for re-election this fall. Barb stepped in as treasurer in 2009, and brought a welcome degree of professionalism to our financial operations. Barb needs to cut back on her outside obligations, but she has graciously volunteered to help train a new treasurer in our policies and procedures. Thanks, Barb, for all your hard work.

To address this void, the Board is acting on two fronts. First we are soliciting nominations for our two open officer positions. In the best of all possible worlds, we would have a full complement of officers in place after our annual meeting on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Second, we are looking to enlarge the Board of Directors with additional at-large directors. We feel that this is a great way to bring new ideas and new perspectives not only to Friends as an organization, but to the Nature Center, its trails and its programs. So many of our members have served as volunteers, helping with programs and maintaining these trails. Here is an opportunity to bring that wealth of experience to charting future directions for both Friends and the Preserve.

Currently, the Friends Board consists of vice president (Jon Mendelson), secretary (Judy Dolan Mendelson), treasurer (Barb Stephens) and two at-large directors, Carolyn Gann, who serves as assistant secretary, and Diane Kozlowski, our membership coordinator. Friends Annual Meeting Sunday, November 2 will include election of officers and a wonderful program on the Preservation History of our Thorn Creek Woods (2014 is the 45 year anniversary of the incorporation of Friends).

So we are asking members now – can you serve on a Nominating Committee? Would you like to be on the slate for president position? Or the treasurer position? Would you like to be appointed as a director (one year appointments) – to sit on the Board and share your ideas on Friends projects?

The next Friends Board Meeting is Wednesday, September 10, 1 p.m. at the nature center when we'll continue our review of Bylaws. Come to our meeting if you are interested in serving on the Nominating Committee or becoming an officer or director, or if you would like to know just what the duties are or how you can contribute. You can also call or email Judy at [dolanmendel@aol.com](mailto:dolanmendel@aol.com) or 708-747-2759 for more information. Members are always welcome at Friends monthly Board Meetings.

## Fall at Thorn Creek Woods

247 Monee Rd

Park Forest

708-747-6320

[Thorn\\_creek@att.net](mailto:Thorn_creek@att.net)

New website: [tcwoods.org](http://tcwoods.org)

Nature Center open  
Friday-Sunday, noon to 4 pm

Wednesday Morning Walkers	Wednesdays 9 am Call for info
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Junior Ecologists Club Ages 9-12 noon-3 pm	Saturdays September 6 October 18 November 1 December 6
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Thorn Creek Chamber Players	Friday September 5 7:30 pm \$10
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Prairie Sampler Workday	Monday September 15 9:30-noon
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Know Your Oaks Hike	Saturday September 20 1-3 pm
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Fall Workday Noon– 4 pm	Sunday September 21
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Garlic Fest \$5/car \$1/bike	Saturday October 4 Noon-3 pm
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Magical Moon Night Hike Ages 16 & younger	Friday October 10 7:30-9 pm
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Autumn Night Hike Adults & over 16 yrs	Saturday, October 11 8-10 pm
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Fall Colors Hike 1-3 pm	Sunday October 19
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Skull & Bones 1-2 or 2:30-3:30 pm	Sunday, Oct 26 \$5
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Afternoon with Friends	Sunday, Nov 2 1 p.m.
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Pie in the Sky Night Hike	Saturday November 8 6-8:30 pm
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Newsletter editor:  
Judy Dolan Mendelson  
Friends: P.O. Box 159,  
Richton Park, IL 60471,  
[dolanmendel@aol.com](mailto:dolanmendel@aol.com)

## Be a FRIEND OF THORN CREEK WOODS

\_\_\_ Membership \$10 \_\_\_ Organization & Business \$50 \_\_\_ Life Membership \$150

New Member \_\_\_ Renewing Member \_\_\_

\_\_\_ I'd like to help as a volunteer at Thorn Creek Nature Center, please call me.

\_\_\_ I am donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the **Thorn Creek Woods Capital Fund** for improvements in the Nature Center building & in the Preserve.

In memory of \_\_\_\_\_ In honor of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I am donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the **Jim Marzuki Memorial Fund** - to make a difference in Thorn Creek public programming.

\_\_\_ I am donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to **Friends** general purposes.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Enclosed

Name \_\_\_\_\_

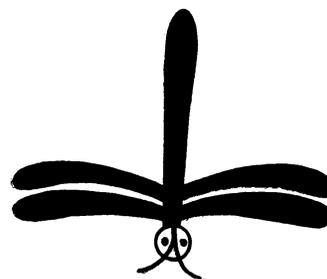
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THORN CREEK WOODS, Box 159, Richton Park, IL 60471



Annual Renewal Date is May 1st

### So What Can You do?

- Help staff **Open Hours** on Friday, Saturday & Sunday 12-4 p.m.
- Be a **Trail Watcher** and/or **Trail Repair** person. Trail Watchers are our eyes & ears on the trails.
- We have trail & boardwalk building **projects** for groups like Eagle Scouts
- **Bake** and/or **make soup** for our events
- **Assist** at programs & nature hikes
- Donate **moneys** for nature preserve projects
- **Scan** our photograph/slide/graphics collections
- Help with our **Fundraising!**
- Become a **member** of Friends.
- **Update** our mailing and volunteer lists
- **Bird Seed** -When you buy bird seed or suet for your backyard feeders this fall, get an extra for the nature center. Bring it Fri-Sun noon to 4 p.m. and relax with a cup of coffee or tea at our bird viewing corner.
- Join the team—the **Friends Board**.

### Pileated Woodpecker

We had an exciting Spring Friends Membership Meeting in May. It was a wonderful roundtable discussion on the Pileated Woodpecker. Check out the woodpecker display wall in the bird window at the nature center featuring the Pileated Woodpecker display created for us by Aura Duke.

More on the Pileated in a winter newsletter.



### Treasurer's Report for Friends of Thorn Creek Woods as of June 30, 2014 Treasurer Barb Stephens

—**Friends General Operating Funds** = \$6046.85  
which includes:

Membership funds = \$2342.47

General donations = \$1658.12

Eugene Schwartz Library Fund = \$2046.26

—**Prairie Chapel Print income**

(Artist Marikay Peter Witlock donated prints which Friends sells for \$75 each, and these funds are then given over to TC Management Commission annually)  
= \$256.73

—**Jim Marzuki Fund**

(to support Thorn Creek public programming)  
= \$188.04

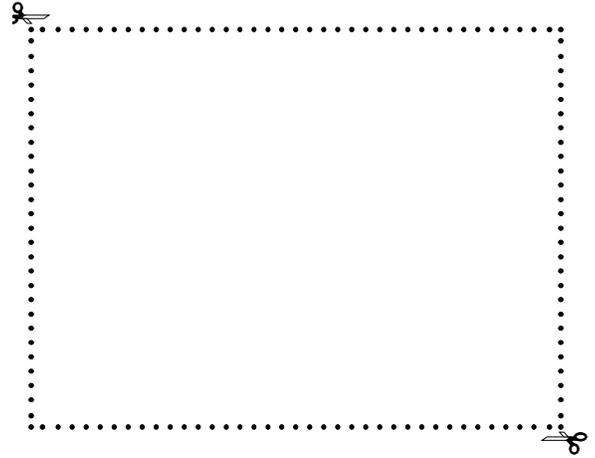
—**Capital Fund**

(for vital improvements to the trails & the historic nature center building)  
= \$9,521.33

**For a total of \$16,012.95**

Friends of Thorn Creek Woods  
Box 159  
Richton Park, IL 60471

Please clip commemorative stamps  
& bring to Nature Center for  
Audubon Stamps  
for Wildlife Habitats



Want to receive  
*Thorn Creek News*  
only via email-  
then email editor  
Judy Dolan  
Mendelson at  
dolanmendel@aol.com

**Renew Now!**



## Garlic Fest at Thorn Creek Woods

Saturday, October 4

Noon -3 p.m.      \$5 per car, \$1 per bicycle

Celebrate the wonders of the garlic bulb and the world of organic growing.  
Come taste different varieties of garlic, and gather information on garlic, its uses,  
planting techniques, organic gardening and garlic cooking.

Enjoy demonstrations on garlic preparation and try your hand at garlic braiding.

Organic garlic bulbs of over 30 varieties for sale.

And a bake sale-many selections with garlic!

Bring the entire family out for a day of fun.

*We will need bottled water & baked goods and raffle baskets & items  
plus people to direct parking,  
help with activities, braiding, raffle, & selling refreshments and garlic.*

***Can you help? Call 708-747-6320 or email [thorn\\_creek@att.net](mailto:thorn_creek@att.net)***



*At our Fall Work Day, Sunday, September 21, noon-4 pm,  
we'll have trail work to do & also we'll have Garlic Fest preparations. Come help!*