

Spring Brings New Growth

by Matt Trokan

Spring is here and the Western Wildlife Corridor is full of new growth. The forests are covered in a carpet of wildflowers, the trees are blooming, and the wooded hillsides are a vivid shade of "spring green." The rabbits, foxes, skunks, groundhogs, and other animals have emerged with the longer, brighter, and warmer days. The beetles, ants, and other insects are also back. The Bluebirds, Robins, Warblers, and migratory birds have returned as well. The Ohio River Valley is a truly unique, beautiful, and special place in Springtime.

As the weather gets warmer, visitors have also returned to the Corridor to enjoy being outdoors again. John Muir once said, "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than they seek."



During this time of year, as we walk through nature, we are reminded about the cycle of life, renewal, and regrowth that occurs every Spring. Spring fills us with hope and aspirations for the year ahead.

In 2024, we are focused on growing too. This winter, we welcomed new board members, elected officers, and had a strategic planning retreat. We signed a new agreement with Delhi Township and grew relationships with local charitable giving organizations. Our volunteer efforts also grew, and we hope to set a new record for the number of volunteer hours this year. Finally, we plan to expand

the amount of land we protect by 10%, which is an increase of over 40 acres!

Today, nearly 400 acres of forest along the Ohio Valley are now permanently protected and the hundreds of plants and animals that call the Corridor home will always have a place to live, grow, and thrive. However, habitat destruction is still the leading cause of plant and animal extinctions. Our native forests are being cleared for new houses, roadways, and other development. Once the forests are gone, it is challenging to get them back because invasive plant species like the dreaded Honeysuckle will quickly colonize disturbed areas.

Right now, there is a unique opportunity to create three new forested preserves: The Muddy Creek Preserve, Riverside Community Preserve, and Saylor Park Sisson Preserve. Protecting and restoring these areas is one step closer to realizing the vision of a wildlife corridor stretching along the Ohio River from the Mill Creek to the Great Miami River. Spring fills us with hope for the year ahead, and thanks to our leaders, volunteers, and supporters, we are confident that together, we will continue to grow.



Virginia Spiderwort — Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson

Leadership Updates



Fawn at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

Western Wildlife Corridor protects a lot of land, but our greatest assets are people: the dedicated volunteers and passionate board members who tirelessly work to restore and protect natural habitat and provide educational opportunities. We are excited to welcome new board leaders Leesa Scudder, Caity Valley, and Joe Von Allmen to our team.

Leesa Scudder Leesa is an avid hiker, nature photographer, and amateur botanist. Land Stewardship is very important to her, and she brings a thoughtful and active spirit to decision-making for land preservation and the work of tackling invasive species.

Caity Valley Caity has experience as an institutional fundraiser for national environmental nonprofits American Rivers and Friends of the Earth and is currently enrolled in an MPA program. She supports our fundraising and volunteer events such as invasive species removal.

Joe Von Allmen Joe has professional skills in organizing, hosting, and facilitating volunteer events. Joe grew up on the west side of Cincinnati and has a personal connection to the Corridor that fuels his passion to serve others and organize community volunteer events.

We are also excited to announce new Executive board leaders: Jessee Smith as Vice President, and Joe Von Allmen as Treasurer. We are so grateful for the contributions of the outgoing leaders Mary (Molly) Hunter, Treasurer, and Mary Perkins, Vice President, who have helped us grow and continue to help lead the organization as members of the board.

Many of our 2025 organizational goals will be completed this year. In February, our board gathered for a retreat to create goals for the new 2030 strategic plan. The day was filled with team building, communication activities, and creative ideas. Thank you to our host, the Sisters of Charity, for providing a beautiful facility, and to our facilitators Connor and Ashley for providing the space for us to connect. We look forward to part two of the retreat this summer.



Our Board Retreat



Hikers enjoying the day at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

Volunteer Contributions Grow

by Matt Taylor

We have many dedicated volunteers who put in countless hours removing invasive plants, building trails, raising funds, organizing events, answering phones, checking mailing, etc. During the last 4 years, we have carefully kept track of volunteer hours and can compare last year to the previous 3 years. 2023 almost set a new record for volunteer hours and was just behind 2020 for the all-time spot.

2020	5,242 volunteer hours
2021	4,692 volunteer hours
2022	4,546 volunteer hours
2023	5,187 volunteer hours

On average, volunteers have been putting in about 5,000 hours/year. That's a lot of hours, equivalent of more than 2 full-time staff persons! Thanks to everyone who contributed! And thanks to all of the anonymous volunteers whose contributions are not tracked.



Volunteers in the Prairie — Kirby Nature Preserve

A special BIG THANK YOU to the super-duper volunteers who logged more than 100 hours in 1 of the past 4 years: Davie Rudemiller, Debbie Lutkenhoff, Gary Rapien, Jeff Doering, Jeff Ginter, Jessee Smith, John Klein, Joyce Richter, Kathy McDonald, Mark Rudemiller, Mary Perkins, Matt Taylor, Molly Hunter, Roger Auer, Roselyn Schloss, Sally Anderson, Ted Ridder, Tim Sisson, Tom Malone, and Walt McBeath.



Volunteers at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

This year, you can help us break our record for volunteer hours by joining us for an upcoming habitat restoration event or committee meeting.

We also plan to host an AmeriCorps NCCC team comprising 7-10 individuals between the ages of 18-24 who are completing a year of volunteer service. The team will spend 6 weeks this summer and dedicate about 2,000 volunteer hours restoring habitat, building trails, installing signs, and coordinating volunteer events. To learn more about AmeriCorps NCCC, go to AmeriCorps.Gov/NCCC.



Volunteers at Delshire Nature Preserve

Tall Bluebells

by Sally Sisson Anderson

Artist in Residence – Western Wildlife Corridor

In late spring, the Tall Bellflowers bloom along the edge of our hill and also along the path up the hill in the woods near us. The Tall Bellflower has a flat, star-shaped flower in a light blue-purple color. The bloom is about one inch across. These flowers are arranged along a terminal leafy spike and bloom from June to August. From the center five petals, a stylus protrudes that drops and then turns upwards from the flower. The thin, long, pointed leaves have toothed margins. This plant likes to grow in moist woods and on hillsides. The Latin name of this species is *Campanulastrum americanum*.

In the Western Wildlife Corridor, the Tall Bellflower can be found at the Kirby Nature Preserve, Turkey Haven, Buckeye Trace, and Bender Mountain. The Tall Bellflower is native to eastern north America, and can be an annual or a biennial. Long-tongued bees and bumblebees are pollinators of the flowers, as well as butterflies and skippers. Deer like to eat the flowers and leaves, too.

A large central stem shoots up from the basal rosette to a height of about three to six feet. The stem is light green, grooved, and hairy. The primary root is a taproot. The Tall Bellflower has alternate leaves of light green. They are three inches in length, willow-like in shape, and pointed with toothed edges. The Tall Bellflower blooms are showy, but short-

lived. However, new flowers are produced higher up on the spike as time goes on. There are many flat-topped seed pods.

There are similar species of Bellflower. There is Venus's Looking Glass, which is more purple.

There is also a Creeping Bellflower, which is a Eurasian plant.

Tall Bellflower has some medical uses. Both the Native Americans and the early settlers used them as medicine. The leaves were brewed into a tea for treating coughs and tuberculosis. An infusion of the crushed roots was used for treating pertussis (whooping cough). You can learn more about the Tall Bellflower and other native plants on our upcoming Spring Wildflower Walks.

Spring Wildflower Walks

Wednesday, April 17, 10:00 a.m. at Buckeye Trace

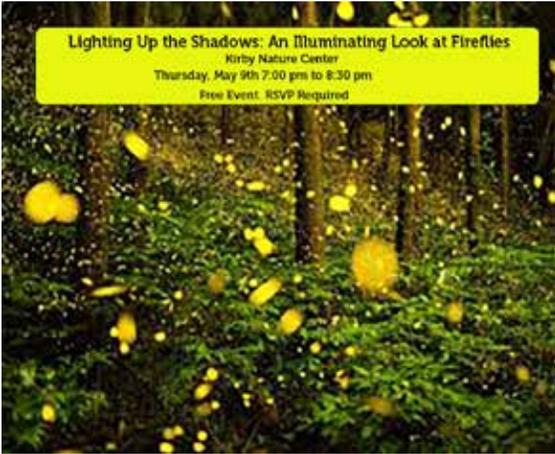
Sunday, April 21, 10:00 a.m. at Bender Mountain

Saturday, April 27, 10:00 a.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve



We are offering a series of free guided wildflower walks at our preserves, which have some of the most spectacular native wildflowers in the region. You could see Tall Bellflower, Trillium, Blue-Eyed Mary, Dutchman's Breeches, Wild Hyacinth, Miami Mist, Fernleaf Phacelia, and many more. In addition to wildflowers, our native trees and shrubs will be leafing out among an abundance of wildlife. Space is limited. Get free tickets and register on our website.

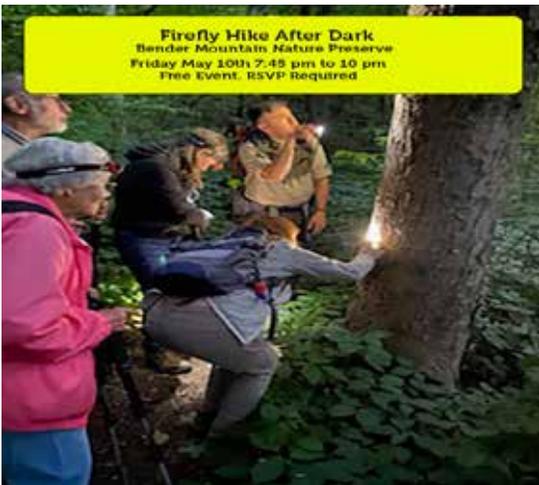
Upcoming Events



Lighting up the Shadows: An Illuminating Look at Fireflies

Thursday, May 9 — 7:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve

Catching fireflies on warm, summer nights was a favorite part of my childhood. I learned that male fireflies flashed and glowed to find a mate, but I never knew there were hundreds of kinds of fireflies, including ones that were poisonous, venomous pack hunters, mimics, or even cannibals! Join me to discover the hidden world of fireflies and the amazing diversity of their species, behaviors, and lifestyles. We'll discover the strategies fireflies use to survive snow, avoid predators like bats, or share information as they flash with yellow, green, and even orange lights. In the process, we'll learn why fireflies are disappearing, what their environmental needs are, and what we can do to help them survive. Get free tickets and register on our website.



Spring Treetop Flasher Firefly Hike After Dark

Friday, May 10 — 7:45 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at Bender Mountain

Join us for a nighttime hike on Bender Mountain to see the first glowing firefly species of Spring. Hikers will need a red headlamp/flashlight to preserve their night vision, as well as sturdy shoes/boots and a hiking stick to hike steep trails in the dark (fireflies will not come out until approximately 10:00 p.m.). Space is limited. Get free tickets and register on our website.



Bird Banding with Adam McCosham

Saturday, May 18 — 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve

Whether you are just learning to ID birds or want to learn more about nesting or migration, observing a bird banding session is incredibly informative. Join us for this interactive outdoor program for a chance to watch bander Adam McCosham in action, while getting a chance to see various bird species up close and personal. You will learn how to identify birds as well as see how bird banders age, weigh and sex the birds as well as how they affix the band.

Adam is currently a Conservation and Parks Manager with the Great Parks of Hamilton County. He has a degree in Natural Resource Management. Adam has spent the last four years training to band birds and loves passing on his knowledge of natural history to others. Register on our website to save your spot.



Bird Walk with Kathi Hutton

Sunday, May 26, 8:00 to 11:00 am at Kirby Nature Center

The focus will be on songbirds, as well as any other birds we might find! Beginners are welcome! Dress for the weather; binoculars/camera, sturdy shoes, and water recommended. Visit our website to sign up.

Blue Ghost Firefly Hike After Dark with Matthew Speights

Friday, June 28, 8:30 to 11:00 p.m. at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

Join Matthew Speights for a nighttime hike on Bender Mountain to see firefly species like the Little Gray Firefly, Chinese Lantern Firefly, and Blue Ghost Firefly. Hikers will need a red headlamp/flashlight to preserve their night vision, as well as sturdy shoes/boots and a hiking stick to hike steep trails in the dark (fireflies will not come out until approximately 10:00 p.m.). Please register on our website.

Upcoming Events continued



Landscaping with Native Plants & Native Plant Sale

Tuesday, July 16 – 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve
Scott Peak will give a presentation on landscaping with native plants. Using native plants is one way to attract beautiful birds and butterflies to your yard or conservation project. This will be an informative program for the beginning and experienced native plant gardener. Join us to learn why native plants are beneficial, and how they feed, shelter and support our local wildlife.



On the Wing: Butterfly Walk with Glenn Crisler II

Saturday, August 10 – 10:30 to 12:00 p.m. at Kirby
Admired the world over, butterflies are treasured for their beauty and grace. The Butterfly Walk will focus on finding and identifying butterflies on the various plants found at Kirby Nature Center. You will learn how to best attract them to your yard too.
Dr. Glenn Crisler II, Ph.D., is an amateur lepidopterist who hails from Brookhaven, Mississippi. He moved to Cincinnati, OH after completing his Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry in 2019. Some of Glenn's work is published in the journal *News of the Lepidopterist's Society*, a journal dedicated to the study of butterflies.

Habitat Restoration plus:

What's our habitat restoration all about? It's one of the most important things we do! If you've never done one of these before, we encourage you to join us, as it doesn't require any special skills.. For more information, please go to <http://westernwildlifecorridor.org/habitat-restoration/> and read the document *Habitat Restoration: Frequently Asked Questions*.

- Saturday, May 4, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Whitetail Woods. Leader: Tim.
- Saturday, May 11, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Kirby Nature Preserve. Leader: Matt.
- Saturday, May 18, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Buckeye Trace. Leaders: Tim and John.
- Sunday, May 19, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration with Elder High School at Bender Mountain. Leader: Roger.
- Saturday, June 1, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Shady Lane. Leaders: Matt and Ed
- Saturday July 13, 9:30 to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration Bender Mountain with AmeriCorps NCCC.
- Saturday July 20, 9:30 to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration Bender Mountain with AmeriCorps NCCC.
- Saturday July 27, 9:30 to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration Bender Mountain with AmeriCorps NCCC.
- Saturday, September 7, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Delshire Nature Preserve – Hillside Avenue entrance. Leaders: Molly and Jeff S.

Mid-week hikes

Did you know that Western Wildlife Corridor volunteers do a mid-week hike almost every week? This is where we might do some light habitat restoration or trail building. E-mail staff@westernwildlifecorridor.org to be added to the distribution list.

Turtle Report

by Tim Sisson

My interest in Box Turtles was first kindled by the many turtles I found as I wandered around the woods near my boyhood home in what is now the Turkey Haven Preserve of Western Wildlife Corridor. We would pick them up, check out the beady red or brown eyes, let the dog sniff them, and put them back on the ground.



This one for reference shows the typical yellow squiggles the we see on most of the turtles we find. I found it at Delshire in September of 2018.

The Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene Carolina Carolina*) is one of 6 extant subspecies of the common box turtle. The brown shell has markings which can be orange, yellow, or red or any combination of these colors, which provide camouflage among the leaves on the forest floor. The Eastern Box Turtle is classified as a vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, being threatened with extinction unless the circumstances that



This one was found by Tom Malone at Kirby in August of 2021. I call it the polka-dot style. This style has been encountered several times, but is not common.

are threatening its survival and reproduction improve.

Years ago, I began taking pictures of the animals and wildflowers that are found in our preserves. This, of course, included Box Turtles. In 2014, I learned that the complicated designs on Box Turtle shells could be unique for each turtle, just as fingerprints are for humans. I organized my pictures so that I could develop a listing of the number of turtles we had found in each preserve and could determine the number of times I had seen the same turtle. Now, this isn't a detailed rigorous scientific experiment, but it is a careful listing of observations that can give some idea of the number of Box Turtles we have in our preserves.

Individual Box Turtles found in our preserves:

Buckeye Trace	77
Kirby	80
Whitetail Woods	17
Delshire	15
Bender Mountain	48
Total	237

The numbers show that the Eastern Box Turtle population is doing very well in the Western Wildlife Corridor, and we have even observed baby turtles in recent years. The large population indicates that our preservation efforts are working and the Eastern Box Turtle will always have a home here. By protecting and preserving the wooded hillsides that turtles find so welcoming, we assure their survival into the future.



This one that I found at Buckeye Trace in April 2021 is mostly covered in yellow.



Thank You to Our Supporters



Blue-Eyed Mary — Kirby Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson

Black Walnut (\$1,000+): Anonymous, Jeff & Michelle Ginter, Joe & Trish Baker, and John Wiener

Red Oak (\$500 to \$999): Anonymous, David & Ally Nurre, Injoo Kim, Robert & Mary Lee Busam, Stuart Golder & Margaret Rhein

Beech Tree (\$200 to \$499): Millie Schafer, and Howard & Karen Rechel

Paw Paw (\$100 to \$199): Anonymous, Marie Salem, Elizabeth Smallwood, Mike & Amy Lind, Paul and Jill Staubitz, Peter Stiver, Sonya Thielmann, Kay Bornemann, Arlene Coffaro, Fernbank Garden Club, JoAnn Dirr, John Getzendanner, Monfort Heights Garden Club, Richard Curry, Rick & Diana Veid, Robert & Jean Willis, Kiwanis Club of Riverview - Delhi Hills

Thanks to Delhi Township for continuing to grow our partnership. In January, we signed a new three-year agreement to help maintain Bender Mountain Nature Preserve and Story Woods Park



Special Thanks to the Duke Energy Foundation for their support of the Kirby Nature Center Playscape. Their gift will help us provide children with access to the outdoors by completing the construction of the ADA prairie pathway, creating children activity stations, installing signage, and more.



Round Leaved Ragwort — Kirby Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson



False Rue Anemone — Kirby Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson



Sessile Trillium — Kirby Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson

Gifts in Memoriam

We would like to give special thanks to John Weiner in Memory of Tom & Terry Wessler and Kathleen Wolfram in Memory of Jim Wohlfrom.



Make a gift to permanently protect our forests!

100% of your gift will be used for land preservation

Name: _____

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2024 Land Preservation Efforts

- General Land Fund
- Muddy Creek Preserve 11.9 acres
- Riverside Community Preserve 10.3 acres
- Saylor Park Sisson Preserve 19.0 acres

Donate online



2024 Land Preservation Efforts

Because of supporters like you, over 400 acres of forest along the Ohio Valley are now protected forever and the hundreds of plants and animals that call the Corridor home will always have a place to grow and thrive. This year, we have a special opportunity to preserve an additional 40+ acres.

Muddy Creek Preserve (11.9 acres): The new preserve is in Saylor Park, along the banks of the Muddy Creek near the Ohio River. The riparian floodplain consists of a mixed-age forest, with some large trees, and provides critical habitat for fish, waterfowl, Great Blue Heron, snapping turtles, beaver, and many other animals and plants. A Clean Ohio Grant was awarded to protect the property, and your gift can help us with the remaining \$6,000 in matching funds.

Riverside Community Preserve (10.3 acres): Riverside is one of Cincinnati’s oldest neighborhoods, and yet there is very little greenspace that is accessible to the community. We currently protect over a dozen different wooded properties in Riverside along Hillside Avenue. Our vision is that we can connect these to form a new 15-acre preserve that will provide a corridor for wildlife and a place for people to enjoy nature. The area has scenic river views and a semi-mature hardwood forest that is home to whitetail deer, wild turkeys, and red-tailed hawks. This year, we plan to protect an additional 10+ acres adjacent to our current preserves at an estimated cost of \$45,000.

Saylor Park Sisson Preserve (19.0 acres): In 2023, the owners of this beautiful, wooded hillside approached us about preserving the forest rather than selling the land to a housing developer. The land is near the Buckeye Trace Preserve and has a mature hardwood forest, home to many plants and animals. We are excited about permanently protecting this important piece of the Corridor. Your gift can help us with the estimated \$170,000+ needed to purchase the land and ensure that it remains a forest forever.



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