

## 2024 Highlights by Jeff Ginter

As we wrap up the old year and embrace the new one, it's a wonderful time to reflect and express our gratitude for all we've accomplished in 2024!

The Board of Trustees gathered for team-building retreats and worked hard to develop an exciting new five-year strategic plan. One of our key goals is to create a dedicated Land Protection Committee, separate from Land Stewardship, which will focus specifically on preserving more forests and woodlands in the Corridor. While we've always been committed to land protection, this new structure will allow each committee to focus more deeply on each part of our mission.

Speaking of land preservation, in 2024 we permanently protected five new forests totaling 34 acres, the biggest of which is the Sisson Nature Preserve. Patience can be a virtue in land protection, as it can take years to bring something to fruition. For 2025, we are working on the paperwork for securing another 17 acres in the corridor, with other possibilities on the horizon.

We also made spectacular progress on the Kirby Nature Playscape, thanks to the vision and leadership of Mary Perkins, Debbie Lutkenhoff, Matt Trokan,

and all of the volunteer committee leaders. A big thank you to the volunteer groups who have pitched in throughout the year too, including AmeriCorps, Duke Energy, Cincinnati Job Corps, and ENOS. The Playscape Committee made a conscious decision to leverage volunteers as much as possible, and it helped keep the project costs down by a factor of 10!

Speaking of volunteering, in 2024, volunteers dedicated over 6,000 hours to restoring our habitat and fostering connections with nature. This compares to an average of 4,917 volunteer hours from 2020 to 2023. Thanks to all our volunteers, without whom the Western Wildlife Corridor would simply not exist.

So much of what we do requires money, and 2024 has been a record-setting year for fundraising. I'm thrilled to report that we exceeded our aggressive 2024 targets for foundation grants, memberships, and donations. While our successes are very much a team effort, leadership matters, and thanks to our passionate Board and Staff, we have never been better positioned for the future. Many thanks to our members for your support to help Western Wildlife Corridor climb to new heights!



Swallowtail caterpillars



Kirby Preserve



AmeriCorps at Bender



Debbie Lutkenhoff



Shelter building station - Kirby

Matt Trokan

Matt Trokan

Abby Figart

Mary Perkins

# Leadership Updates

By Jeff Ginter

Molly Hunter stepped down from the Board in September 2024, having served two full terms (six years!) as Trustee and Treasurer. Molly's dedication and hard work often went unnoticed, but she played such a vital role in keeping our records in order. Thankfully, Molly's still around, as she continues to monitor the Delshire Nature Preserve and actively volunteers. A big thank you to Molly for all her amazing contributions and for everything she continues to do!

Stepping into the office of Treasurer is Joseph Von Allmen. Joe is in his first term as Trustee. Joe became our Treasurer in May 2024 after joining the Board in January. With his background, Joe is a great fit for the team and is already contributing on the financial side of things. Many thanks to Joe for stepping up for this critical role.

Volunteer Roselyn (Roz) Schloss, after years of checking the P.O. box and collecting, sorting, and delivering uncounted pounds of mail, has "passed the torch" to a new volunteer. Extraordinarily, Roz was involved when Western Wildlife Corridor was just a committee of Imago, some 35 years ago! Thank you, Roz, for over three decades of helping to run and build this organization, and your continuing support to realize our vision.



Beth Warmuth and Roz Schloss



Abby Figart and Jeff Ginter



Molly Hunter knee-deep in bluebells

A big thank you to Connie Heintz for her unwavering dedication in checking the phones and general e-mail for years. We are so grateful for all of your help.

Starting in May, Michelle Ginter graciously offered to help with our bookkeeping, collecting the mail, and depositing membership gifts. Michelle also works at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve, including performing some trail maintenance of her own right before Christmas. Thanks, Michelle, for all of your help; it is very much appreciated.

Administrative Coordinator and Events Specialist, Marie Finn, stepped down from her role in October 2024. Marie started volunteering in 2016 to help edit the newsletter and quickly became an important part of our team. We are sincerely grateful to Marie for her 8 years of dedication to restoring and protecting natural habitat and fostering connections with nature.

A warm welcome to our new intern, Abigail (Abby) Figart, who is an Environmental Science Major from Northern Kentucky University. Abby joined us in November and, while working just part-time, has already made a big impact by designing event graphics. You might spot her at events, taking photos and posting to our website and social media. Abby is scheduled to graduate from NKU in May, 2025!

## Membership Meeting

**Saturday, February 15**

**1 p.m. – 3 p.m.**

Everyone is invited to join us for a fun gathering at Kirby Nature Center, where you can catch up with old friends and meet other members of the Corridor! At the meeting, we'll dive into our goals for 2025 and share the results from our membership survey. Plus, you'll get updates from our various committees. We're thrilled to have Chris Clements, the Executive Director at Imago Earth Center, as our keynote speaker. He'll be sharing his amazing experiences in environmental education and the creation of playscapes. We can't wait to see you there!



Abby Figart



# Volunteer Spotlight and Volunteer Events

## Another Volunteer Loving the Outdoors

By Matt Taylor

A key volunteer of the Western Wildlife Corridor, Ted Ridder, loves spending time outdoors, and especially loves restoring the nature preserves and helping native plants grow.

Ted joined the Western Wildlife Corridor in 2012, right after retiring. He wanted to spend time outdoors, wanted to make a contribution, liked what the Western Wildlife Corridor was doing, and was inspired by Tim Sisson. He quickly became a regular at the mid-week hikes and Saturday projects and can be counted on working until exhausted! He has volunteered at virtually all our nature preserves, dedicating about 100 hours every year, and is particularly fond of Bender Mountain and Kirby Nature Preserves.

Ted is yet another long-time West Sider. Born and raised in Cincinnati, he attended Elder High School and Cincinnati State and served in the Marine Corps. He delivered letters for the U.S. Post Office for 33 years. (That's outside work!) Ted is an avid line dancer and music lover. He likes rhythm and blues, old rock 'n roll, and even played piano as a kid. Line dancer? Now we know why he cuts honeysuckle in such straight lines!

Ted is happy to help the Western Wildlife Corridor because he gets to meet other great people and do such important nature restoration. As we remove the invasive plants, native plants and wildflowers return, which provide food and habitat for wildlife. The efforts of volunteers like Ted Ridder are critical to this effort. And Ted loves doing it!



Tom Malone

Ted Ridder



Tom Malone

Ted Ridder

## Volunteer Events

Join Ted and other amazing volunteers at a habitat restoration event this Spring to make a difference at one of our neighborhood nature preserves! If you've never attended a volunteer event with us before, we encourage you to join us for a fun event this fall to help cut invasive species, install signs, repair trails, and collect litter. We will provide the tools, and no special skills are required. Please RSVP on the website to let us know that you are coming.

### **Buckeye Trace Nature Preserve**

Saturday, March 8, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

### **Kirby Nature Preserve**

Tuesday, March 18, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Rapid Run Nature Preserve**

Saturday, March 22, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

### **Kirby Nature Preserve**

Tuesday, March 25, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Kirby Nature Preserve**

Tuesday, April 1, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Sisson Nature Preserve**

Saturday, April 5, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

### **Kirby Nature Preserve**

Tuesday, April 15, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Whitetail Woods Nature Preserve**

Saturday, April 19, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

### **Kirby Nature Preserve**

Tuesday, April 22, 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Please RSVP and learn more online: <http://westernwildlifecorridor.org/calendar/>



Tom Malone

Kirby Preserve

## Mid-week hikes

Did you know that we offer fun mid-week habitat restoration hikes? The locations and activities change from week to week, but we always have a lot of fun.

E-mail [staff@westernwildlifecorridor.org](mailto:staff@westernwildlifecorridor.org) to be added to the distribution list.



Mary Perkins

Kirby Preserve

# The Red Fox

By John Klein and Sally Sisson Anderson

Have you ever called someone “sly as a fox,” or better yet, been called that yourself? Well, the fox has been admired for thousands of years for its intelligence and cunning behavior.

The red fox is a member of the dog (canid) family and is the largest of the true foxes. They are very agile on their feet, can run 31 mph, and are best known for their pouncing ability. While in the dog family, the red fox also has many catlike characteristics in their whiskers, teeth, paws, and vertical-slit pupils. They get their name from their reddish fur, but they also have black socks and a white-tipped tail.

Like us, they are omnivores and eat a wide variety of foods. Their diet includes small mammals, birds, eggs, insects, vegetation, and carrion. However, their favorite snack is a meadow vole. These small rodents tunnel under the grass in fields and meadows. Like most dogs, foxes hunt by smell, sight, and sound. Once they smell a prey item underground, in grass, or in snow, they will sit patiently, listening for the sound of movement. With cat-like quickness, they pounce or dig quickly to catch the prey.

They breed in February or March, resulting in 4–7 young called “kits” in late April or early May. The den is usually on the side of a hill near a stream or river, with one or more entrances.

One of my (John’s) fondest memories while working in the County Parks was discovering a red fox den in Shawnee Lookout Park and being lucky enough to view the kits playing and wrestling with each other near the entrance!

There is another fox that calls the Corridor home. That is the grey fox! Besides its greyer color and its lack of the white-tipped tail, there are other distinct differences. The grey fox is the most arboreal canid and can climb trees to escape predators or find prey. They also have a stockier appearance, shorter legs, and oval pupils. Because they have nearly twice the chromosomes as the red fox, crossbreeding between the two is virtually impossible.

Since the return of bobcats and the migration of coyotes into our area, foxes now have more competition for territory and prey items. However, if you are lucky, during a hike in the Corridor at dawn or dusk, it is still quite possible to catch a glimpse of one of these beautiful animals!



Red Fox  
Sally Sisson Anderson



## Upcoming Spring Events



Waterfall at a protected property



Wild Hyacinth - Buckeye Trace



Spring treetop flasher, recently eclosed from its pupa and still darkening

Leesa Scudder

Matthew Speights

All of our events are free, family-friendly, open to the public, and led by experts in our local environment. Visit the website to learn more or register!

### **Bird Walk with Kathi Hutton**

**Sunday, February 16, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Come join us for a delightful winter bird walk! We will spot all kinds of winter birds, like cardinals, jays, nuthatches, woodpeckers, juncos, and chickadees. We might even catch a glimpse of red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, and other birds of prey! We'll take a leisurely stroll so that we can search for birds along the way. Feel free to stay for the whole event or leave whenever you'd like. Beginner birders are welcome!

### **Our Local Wildflowers with Meg Riestenberg**

**Friday, February 28, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.**

Join us for a fun and informative discussion about our local wildflowers with Dr. Meg Riestenberg! We'll explore the many plant species that grow on or around Bender Mountain Nature Preserve and highlight their fascinating medicinal, toxic, and edible uses. Meg has graduate degrees in Biology and Geology from the University of Cincinnati. She taught courses both disciplines for 34 years at Mount St. Joseph University.

### **Backyard Herping with Dean Alessandrini**

**Friday, March 14, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.**

For the past 7 years, Dean Alessandrini has transformed his backyard into an incredible wildlife sanctuary, passionately focused on creating perfect habitats for our amazing native reptile and amphibian friends! His property boasts a diverse collection of 5 snake species, 2 species of salamanders, and 6 different types of frogs and toads. In this captivating presentation, Dean will take us on a journey through his inspiring process, share tips on how you can create an inviting habitat for herps in your own backyard, and dive into the fascinating habits of many of the incredible "herps" native to our tri-state area. Don't miss this chance to discover the wonders of wildlife right at your doorstep!

### **Bird Banding with Adam McCosham**

**Saturday, March 22, 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Whether you are just learning to ID birds or want to learn more about nesting or migration, observing a bird banding session is an incredibly informative and fun experience. Join us for this interactive outdoor program 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, and you'll see how bird banders age, weigh, and sex the birds, as well as how they affix the band.

### **Spring Tree-Top Flasher Firefly Hike with Matthew Speights**

**Saturday, May 3, 7:45 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.**

Join Matthew Speights for a nighttime hike on Bender Mountain to discover the hidden world of fireflies and the amazing diversity of their species, behaviors, and lifestyles. We will see the first glowing firefly species of spring and 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.



Flower-A-Thon, April 26, 2025!

# Flower-A-Thon



18th Annual  
Wildflower Survey

Join us for a fun nature scavenger hunt to find blooming spring wildflowers in the Corridor.

Learn more about local spring ephemeral wildflowers, discover the beauty of some hidden nature preserves, and help raise funds for future land preservation with each wildflower species we discover.

**April 26th**

**8:30-3:00**

**Kirby Nature  
Center**

2 E Main St.  
Addyston Ohio  
45001



**For Registration and More Information Visit [www.westernwildlifecorridor.org](http://www.westernwildlifecorridor.org)**



# Thank You to Our Supporters

## Membership Gifts

### Black Walnut (\$1,000+):

Anonymous, Jean F. Bergstein Fund at Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Daniel Temming Esq., John & Kim Kraft, Joe & Trish Baker, John & Betsy Betagole, Ed Gemperle, Liz Maxwell, Walt & Susan McBeath, Midwest Native Plant Society, Tim Sisson, and Christopher & Mary Perkins

### Red Oak (\$500+):

Anonymous, Tom & Mary Croft, Deborah Jordan & Bill Cahalan, John & Nancy Trokan, Allen & Kay Bornemann, Jaqui Brumm, Bill & Beth Burwinkel, Anita Gale, Diane Gerwin, Connie & Bob Heintz, Mark & Julianne Rudemiller, Bob Streicher, Mary Tenover, and Larry & Jan Tepe

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### Paw Paw (\$100+):

Anonymous, Liz Maxwell, John & Carole Snape, Ted Ridder, Ray & Ann Schlinkert, Bill & Janet Berger, Bruce Cortright, Patrick & Janet Kumpf, Donna Langenbrunner, Ann Oliver, Joan Smith, John Toerner, Andrew & Sylvia Trokan, Matt Trokan, Marc & Barbara Alexander, Roger Auer, Jim & Kaye Bono, Ken & Bonnie Borisch, Lawrence Brassie, Joe Bunke, Matthew Cornell, JoAnn Dirr, Nancy & Charlie Fehr, Pat Frock, Michael Gabreleski, Mary Kay Gilbert, Teri Gilligan, Cindy & Roger Grant, Judy & Bob Helmes, Western Hills Garden Club, Cathy Kappa, John & Paige Klein, Betty & Christine Mersch, James & Kim Neil, Mary & Darren Orloff, Elizabeth Radigan, Tom Rennegarbe, L. Richard Roedersheimer, Bob Schaefer, Jon & Jacqueline Seymour, Chris Sweigard, Geri Walsh, Jim & Joyce Williamson, Jonathan Wood & Cheryl Grant, and William & Denise Zumvorde.

### Gifts in Memoriam

Jimmy Bruening and Earl Nelson Dailey

### Gifts in Honor of

John & Paige Klein, Tim Sisson, and Liz Maxwell

## Grants and Scholarships

Special thanks to the foundations Pfau Family Foundation and Greater Cincinnati Foundation for their support of our Nature Playscape and Bilingual Signage projects.

### Correction

In our last newsletter, we shared some exciting news about the Playscape and our plans for five fun learning stations! We wanted to let you know that we've decided to change the name of the fort building station to the shelter building station. We think this new name better reflects the creativity and teamwork we want to encourage.



Kirby Nature Preserve

# Land Preservation

## The New Sisson Nature Preserve

By John Klein



There is a new Nature Preserve in Saylor Park called the Sisson Nature Preserve, named after Tim Sisson and his family! Tim, as most of you know, has been the driving force behind the Western Wildlife Corridor for many years. He was our President for many years and remains very active in land preservation and restoration! Why, he even recruited two of his sisters: Sally Anderson, who is our Resident Artist, and Rebecca Sisson, a former Board Member. Tim's parents, Ray and Peggy, donated land to us many years ago, which became the Turkey Haven Nature Preserve in Addyston. The example they set really motivated Tim to become involved in Western Wildlife Corridor.

Tim grew up riding his horse, Dynamite, along the wooded hillsides that are now part of Turkey Haven and Kirby Nature Preserves. Tim's background as a Mechanical Engineer steered him towards a hobby of restoring cars in his younger years. Restoring things has always been in his blood. As time passed, he became even more passionate about restoring natural areas. The local wooded hillsides overlooking the Ohio River have become his focus. There are many, many people who Tim has inspired with his dedication to land preservation and habitat restoration. I know, because I'm one of them!

This new 19-acre preserve, formerly known as the Pessler Farm, was recently purchased thanks to generously donated funds from many of our members. An adjoining 4.3 acres is being purchased in the spring of 2025 with a grant from the Clean Ohio Fund for a total of 23.3 acres! The new preserve is located near the intersection of Monitor and Hillside avenues in Saylor Park. It can be seen from the Saylor Park Elementary School, the Cincinnati Recreation Center Swimming Pool and adjoining ballfields, and the newly developed Winding Walks of Saylor Park.

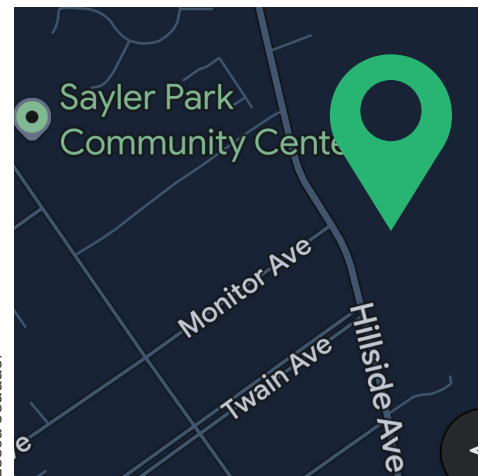
Having lived just a block away for 35 years, I've always admired this wooded hillside and hoped that someday it would be preserved. Thanks to Tim and others at Western Wildlife Corridor, that day is finally here!



Tim Sisson



Star Chickweed



Sisson Preserve - approximate location



## Land Preservation Makes a Lasting Impact!

Since 1992, we have been working passionately to conserve forested hillsides along the Ohio River Valley. Now we protect over 400 acres of woods that are home to hundreds of plant and animal species. Thank you! This remarkable achievement was made possible by the unwavering support of passionate individuals in our community, like you.

In 2024, we dedicated \$294,000 to protect 34 acres of forest and create two new nature preserves. In 2025, we aspire to raise \$150,000 to add another 17 acres of forest to the wildlife corridor. By safeguarding these forests, we will not only strengthen our oldest and newest nature preserves but also move closer to our vision of a new Riverside Nature Preserve.

**Delshire Nature Preserve (4.1 acres):** We have an incredible opportunity to expand our oldest nature preserve, Delshire, by 25%, securing an additional 4.1 acres of breathtaking woodland. The Delshire Preserve showcases a stunning array of perennial bluebell flowers and is home to majestic bur oak trees that have stood for over 200 years. Protecting these woods will also ensure year-round access and public parking for the Nature Preserve.

**Sisson Nature Preserve (4.3 acres):** We are thrilled that a Clean Ohio Grant has been awarded for the expansion of the Sisson Nature Preserve in 2025. This will allow us to add 4.3 acres to the newly established preserve. The addition includes a marshy field often visited by wild turkeys and red-winged blackbirds. Expanding the preserve will also create parking, enhance trail access, and enable us to install welcoming signage. However, the grant only covers part of the costs, and we need to raise the remaining 26% to permanently secure these woodlands.

**Riverside Nature Preserve (8.3 acres):** We currently protect over a dozen wooded properties along Hillside Avenue in Riverside, with a vision to unite these areas into a new nature preserve. This location offers breathtaking river views and a semi-mature hardwood forest that is home to diverse wildlife, including whitetail deer, wild turkeys, and red-tailed hawks. Last year, our members helped us secure 2.4 more acres of woods with parking access! This year, we are determined to continue our efforts by protecting another 8.5 acres of woods, hopefully realizing our vision of a new nature preserve.



At Kirby Nature Preserve

Leesa Scudder



Virginia Bluebells - South Pawpaw Gap, Bender Mountain

Leesa Scudder



## Help Us Raise \$150,000 to Preserve Our Forests!

If you make a gift to our Land Preservation fund we'll show our gratitude by recognizing you at the Flower-A-Thon event on Saturday, April 26th. And for those who donate \$500 or more, we'll proudly display your name on the Tree of Honor at the Kirby Nature Center.

100% of your gift will be used to preserve land. You can give to the general land preservation fund or choose to give to a specific project.

- Delshire Nature Preserve 4.1 acres
- Sisson Nature Preserve 4.35 acres
- Riverside Preserve 8.3 acres
- General Land Preservation Fund

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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- Webmaster:** Jeff Doering
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  - Newsletter Contributors:** Jeff Ginter, Matt Taylor, John Klein, and Artist in Residence: Sally Sisson Anderson
  - Design, Editing, and Production:** Leesa Scudder, Jessee J. Smith
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