We all knew that Bender Mountain had an amazing diversity of plants, but we didn’t dream how extensive it was. We found out over the last two years through a plant survey which found an amazing 393 species of vascular plants, most of which are native species! This plant survey is still in progress and we are sure that many more species will be added to the list.

This diversity is due primarily to three things: the area was never extensively farmed, there is a great variety of ecosystems, and Western Wildlife Corridor has removed invasive alien plants that threatened to destroy it in recent times.

Certainly it was mostly logged in the nineteenth century, and the early settlers practiced subsistence farming, but there was not the intense concentrated agriculture that destroys plant populations. In addition, the “mountain” and immediate surrounding area include dry rocky ridge tops, warm fertile south-facing slopes, cool fertile north slopes, alluvial benches, wetlands and riparian zones. These different ecosystems support populations of plants most suited to them. Plants like the uncommon blue-eyed Mary that grows in profusion on the gentle slope above Rapid Run Creek; northern red oak, shagbark hickory, great yellow wood sorrel and poverty oat grass that prefer the upper slopes; and bulrushes, jewelweeds, scouring rush, and great blue lobelia that prefer wet areas.

This original diversity flourished through most of the twentieth century. Then a threat arrived that could have decimated the plant communities — invasive. Invasive alien plants began to appear in significant numbers in the mid-twentieth century. The botanist Lucy Braun, for example, noted in “The Woody Plants of Ohio”, published in 1961, that Amur honeysuckle had escaped from cultivation in Hamilton County. By the year 2000, Amur honeysuckle covered most of the mountain with a blanket of foliage that blocked the sun. Underneath this, aliens such as garlic mustard and winter creeper, which are more shade tolerant, were gaining a foothold. When Western Wildlife Corridor began managing the preserve in 2004, there were many who said it was just too hard to fight the aliens — they were here to stay. Our volunteers wouldn’t accept that and through the years chipped away at honeysuckle bushes, garlic mustard and others. The result was control of the invasives, so that now Bender Mountain has a truly amazing number of plant species.

It’s not just the number of species that is notable — it’s the number of plants. Take a hike through the preserve in the spring and the term “carpet of wildflowers” immediately comes to mind. As the season progresses the types of wildflowers in bloom changes. Blue-eyed Mary, trillium, Jack-in-the-pulpit, wood poppy, and waterleaf bloom in the spring; zig-zag goldenrod and a variety of asters bloom in late summer and fall. In addition to the wildflowers and forest trees found on Bender Mountain, there are many native shrubs and small trees such as spicebush, black haw, bladder nut, wafer ash, shrubby dogwoods, and paw paw.

Yes, we know Bender Mountain is special. You can feel it as soon as you set out there to hike. Now, thanks to the plant survey by Dr. Denis Conover, we have one more way to show people why it’s so special.
**A Newbie’s Guide to Hiking Bender Mountain Preserve, Part 1 (Sisters’ Hill Trail)**

By Jeff Ginter

So…you’ve heard that there are some nature trails near Mount St. Joseph University, and you’d like to explore a bit. Great! You’ve come to the right place. Let’s get started!

**What:** Sisters’ Hill Trail, Bender Mountain Preserve, Western Wildlife Corridor.

**Degree of difficulty:** easy to moderate. Distance if you go the entire way is about two miles round trip.

**Why visit:** Bender Mountain has over three miles of hiking trails, some with a fantastic view of the Ohio River. This is a lovely restored nature preserve supporting hundreds of plant and animal species.

**Things to remember:** Don't hike alone, dress for the weather, and wear suitable shoes.

**Where:** Drive west to the end of Delhi Avenue in Delhi Township, Ohio; you can park at the guardrail. There is also regular bus service via Queen City Metro, route 32.

**GPS Coordinates:** 084.64381°W, 39.09625°N

Okay, dear newbie, head west on Delhi Avenue until you can’t go any further. You can park right there. If you are not familiar with the area, the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Motherhouse is off to the right (as you face west). The parking lot and buildings of Mount St. Joseph University are behind you.

For this first hike, we’re walking the now-abandoned Delhi Avenue right-of-way that bisects the preserve, called Sisters’ Hill Trail. This is a heavily used walking trail with a gradual downward slope, and it’s common to see other hikers and their dogs along the way. This is a paved area, but blocked with a guardrail so that cars cannot proceed down the hill. Although it’s paved, note that the pavement is occasionally broken in places, so take care as you walk. And by the way, this is public right-of-way, so don’t worry that you might be trespassing. Folks have been hiking here for decades! Much of the trail is shaded by tall trees, which makes for an especially pleasant walk in hot weather.

As you head down Sisters’ Hill Trail, you’ll be passing wooded areas that are owned by various entities (some private, some public); The Western Wildlife Corridor (WWC) owns a number of plots along the slope on the south side of the trail. Some of the wooded areas along the trail are crowded with honeysuckle, while others have been cleared of such invasive species. This is a good illustration of the “before” and “after” of habitat re-storation. The “after” areas are more open, much prettier, and during the spring, you’re more likely to see wildflowers.

As you head down the trail, please remember the return will be up the hill! It’s a gentle slope, with an elevation change from 891 feet to 537 feet, according to my GPS. If you don’t do a lot of walking, you might want to go only a short distance a few times and build up to longer distances.

If you continue along for about nine-tenths of a mile, you’ll see Hillside Avenue. Feel free to turn around if you like; however, the trail doesn’t actually end here, but instead becomes a narrow footpath to the right. Look closely, and you should see the trail continue into the woods, following along the right side of Hillside Avenue. If you are feeling very adventurous, continue on the trail 400 feet, keeping the street in sight at all times, and soon you’ll come to a big welcome sign for the Bender Mountain Preserve, showing a trail map. Check it out! You’ve reached the junction of Sisters’ Hill Trail and South Paw Paw Gap Trail.

But now, dear newbie, we’re turning around and heading back. As you return, you might see a few native creatures. Depending upon the time of day and time of year, I’ve seen hawks many times, and the occasional frog, deer, snake, turtle and other animals. You may also occasionally notice stacked logs, the remnants of fallen trees that were cut and removed by the dedicated WWC volunteers. It goes to show that even a trail like this needs maintenance.

Thanks for hiking the Sisters’ Hill Trail at the Bender Mountain Preserve -- we hope you come back! Look for Part 2 of this article in a future WWC newsletter elsewhere on this website, discussing a different trail at the fantastic Bender Mountain Preserve.

In the meantime: please pass this newsletter [link] along to a friend!
UPCOMING EVENTS - Enjoy the Western Wildlife Corridor - Learn why it's so important!

Sunday, January 31, 2 pm
Winter Adventure Hike
Bender Mountain

No need to stay inside all winter. Join us on our annual winter hike for some fresh air and exercise. Meet at the barrier at the end of Delhi Pike near the Mount St. Joseph University. The first part of the hike will be on the portion of Delhi Pike that was closed years ago due to hill slippage, but still makes a nice hiking path (commonly called Sisters’ Hill). Those who prefer moderate hiking can turn around at the end of this part and return to our meeting place.

Those who are interested in a strenuous hike can continue on a trail we’ve constructed up from Hillside Avenue to the top of Bender Mountain to reach old-growth forest and a nice view of the Ohio River. Signs of the meanderings of wildlife in winter will probably be found – especially if there’s snow on the ground! Dress for the weather and wear sturdy hiking boots. Contact Jeff at 513.451.1737, or John at 513.941.4877 for more information.

Tuesday, March 1, 7 pm
Winter Membership Meeting
EarthConnection

Speaker Tim Sisson will present a program entitled “The History of Bender Mountain – How it Became the Best Place in Hamilton County to See Spring Wildflowers”.

Western Wildlife Corridor’s plans for the coming year, including creating a nature center at our new 30-acre preserve in Addyston, will also be discussed. Light refreshments provided. The public is invited.

Saturday, April 9, 2 pm
Delhi Bicentennial Hike
Bender Mountain Preserve

This preserve is gorgeous in the spring! Hillsides are carpeted with many species of beautiful spring wildflowers. For more on this event, part of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Delhi Township’s founding, contact Tim at 513.922.2104.

Saturday, April 30, 9 am to 6 pm
Twelfth Annual
Wildflower Extravaganza
Kirby Nature Preserve

We are combining our Flower-a-thon and Wildflower Festival into a true Extravaganza this year. The Flower-a-thon hikes will give you a great chance to learn about the wildflowers of our region. Experts will lead us on hikes through several preserves in the corridor, showing us the amazing variety of plants there.

Have fun and learn about nature at the Kirby Nature Center. A native plant sale, hand-crafted items for sale, displays by local environmental organizations, and activities for children will all be included. Contact Rebecca at 859.512.1983 to learn more about this enjoyable event or to inquire about participating.

Habitat Restoration plus:

Saturday, March 19, 9 am to noon
Trail work at Bender Mountain to get ready for the Delhi Bicentennial event on April 9.
Leaders: Tim 513.922.2104 and Robert 859.572.9661.

Saturday, April 2, 9 am to noon
More trail work at Bender Mountain to get ready for the Delhi Bicentennial event on April 9. If the trails are ready, we’ll whack honeysuckle.
Leaders: John 513.941.4877 and Gary 513.941.5414.

Saturday, April 16, 9 am to noon
Trail work at Kirby Nature Preserve.

Why habitat restoration?

Many times the biggest threat to our preserves is invasion by alien plant species. Plants such as Amur (or bush) honeysuckle, euonymus and garlic mustard can produce such a dense cover of foliage that native plants cannot survive. We’ve been told that Amur honeysuckle even secretes a toxin that kills native plants!

When we restore the habitat in one of our preserves, we remove these invasive alien plants so that native plants and animals can thrive. Contact Tim at 513.922.2104 for more information.
When I was growing up and still today in early spring, I like to walk in the woods looking for the first wildflowers. This is usually the harbinger of spring or bloodroot. But not long after that, the mottled leaves of the trout lily appear. First I will see the spears of the leaves in large beds. Plants with only one leaf will not bloom. Plants with two leaves will bloom. In late March or April, the nodding heads of the trout lily flowers can be a lovely sight, but don’t look for them on a cloudy day or in the evening. They close back up!

The trout lily has many names: fawn lily, adder’s tongue, dog’s tooth violet, lamb’s tongue, and others; perhaps because they are found across most of the United States and Canada. The trout lily grows wild from Ontario to Minnesota, south to Kentucky and Oklahoma and throughout the Appalachians and on to Florida and Alabama.

It can be cold in the March and April woods, and the trout lilies seem to huddle together for warmth. Then when the sun comes out, we can have a lovely display. But the flowers will last only a few days. This is why wildflowers are often called spring ephemerals. They are like old friends that we only see once a year.

It is the green foliage which draws gardeners’ attention. The mottled leaves can be any size up to seven inches, and mottled with greenish or maroon spots. The flower stalk may be eight inches long, and bears a single nodding yellow or white bloom. The light green seed capsules develop in the six week period after flowering. If you wish to collect seeds, put a bright marker by the blooming plant so that you can find the seed pod later. The trout lily will wither and other plants will spread over it.

Don’t try to dig up the corm because it is common for corms to be seven to eight inches deep. You would only kill it trying to get it out. Open the seed capsule when it begins to yellow and if the seeds are dark, collect them. Don’t let them dry out or they will take a year to germinate. It is best to plant them right away and keep the seed bed moist. Tiny new plants should be left alone until fall when the leaves have withered. Then the small bulbs can be moved to their permanent location. Trout lilies may not bloom for four years.

Like bluebells and spring beauties, trout lilies add color and pattern to a woodland garden. When the trout lilies go dormant in May or June, it is best to have some late blooming wildflowers to cover the area, like wild ginger, ferns or waterleaf. A rock garden is a good place for a wildflower garden.

Welcome New Board Member Mark Rudemiller

I am a lifelong Westsider who has had a love for nature since a young age. I have been an avid birdwatcher for many years. I have been a family physician on the Westside for 35 years. I have four grown married children in the area and am a proud grandpa. I have been married to my wife Julie for 35 years. My connection with WWC started when we donated our land for permanent greenspace and began removing invasives. I am so impressed with WWC and the many people who make it an incredible organization. I am lucky to be on the WWC Board of Trustees.

Welcome New Board Member Jeff Doering

I’m a lifelong Westsider, University of Cincinnati graduate, and design professional. Growing up, I spent my summers in the woods of Delhi, hiking around Rapid Run Creek and building tree houses and forts with the neighborhood kids. I remember feeling like I’d stumbled upon a forgotten world when I rode my bicycle down the closed portion of Delhi Pike as a teenager in the 90s; a route I still like to hike with my wife, two children and two dobermans. I first connected with the Western Wildlife Corridor around 2007 and soon began the task of re-envisioning the WWC website. That is still an ever-evolving mission, currently focused on improving our property descriptions and mapping. Most recently, I’ve been able to incorporate my day-job skills to take on a leadership role in redeveloping the house at the Kirby Preserve into our new nature center and home office.
Perpetuating your annual support can be as simple as adding a bequest to your estate plan, naming Western Wildlife Corridor beneficiary of a life insurance policy or of a deferred compensation plan, or via some other deferred gift vehicle that designates a certain amount or percentage from your estate to Western Wildlife Corridor.

Thoughtfully crafted gift plans offer benefits to the donor as well as to Western Wildlife Corridor.

For more information on how to accomplish your goals and leave a lasting gift for nature, please contact WWC at 922-2104 or tsisson@fuse.net.

Please indicate how you would like to help!

JOIN WESTERN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR 2016-2017

☐ New Membership ☐ Renewal

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution at the following membership level:

$20 Individual $30 Family $75 Supporting

$50 Organization $100 Patron $500 Sponsoring

Other ______/month Guardian

*NEW!! BECOME A MEMBER ONLINE! www.westernwildlifecorridor.org

DONATE TO THE LAND ACQUISITION FUND

☐ Enclosed is my tax deductible donation for the land acquisition fund $_____

VOLUNTEER YOUR SERVICES

☐ May we contact you with volunteer opportunities? ☐ Yes

☐ Help with Habitat Restoration ☐ Help with Outreach and other needs

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

☐ I would like to know more about including the WWC in my estate plans.

Name________________________ Phone Number________________________

Address_________________________ Apt.________________________

City, State, Zip________________________ Email________________________

Please mail to:
Western Wildlife Corridor, Inc.
PO Box 389077
Cincinnati, OH 45238

Thank you for supporting the Western Wildlife Corridor’s mission to preserve the scenic beauty and natural resources of the Ohio River Valley!

Western Wildlife Corridor is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization.
**Western Wildlife Corridor**

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**Volunteers Needed**

Western Wildlife Corridor is in need of people to act as monitors and visit our main preserves once a month to:

1) Check for trash and remove it.
2) Check for honeysuckle, garlic mustard and winter creeper and either remove it or call Tim so that our faithful group of volunteers can remove it.
3) Check for anything else that might need attention or that we need to be made aware of.

The main preserves that need monitoring include: Bender Mountain, Sisters' Hill, Delshire Preserve, Whitetail Woods, Turkey Haven, Kirby Nature Preserve and Anders Court.

Also, we are always looking for volunteers to join our faithful group of volunteers on a weekday or a Saturday morning to clear invasive species from our properties. Could you join us? We need you!!!

Please call 932.2104 to get more information or to volunteer.