



# The Steward

Protecting and Preserving the Ohio River Corridor

Winter 2024

## 2023 Review and 2024 Outlook

by Matt Trokan

We hope this edition of *The Steward* finds you and your loved ones well. As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the passionate volunteers and supporters whose selfless contributions have made our success possible. We especially would like to acknowledge and thank three board members who retired in 2023: Ernie Ciambarella, Steve Johns, and Gary Rapien.

Last year was filled with milestones and victories. We received the largest land donation in our history, from the Sisters of Charity of Greater Cincinnati, which more than doubled the Bender Mountain Nature Preserve. This was one of five land acquisitions completed in 2023 bringing the total amount of land protected to just under 400 acres!

Also in 2023, dozens of free, family-oriented educational and volunteer events engaged hundreds of participants on topics ranging from Blue Ghost Fireflies to Fossil Hunts and trail building to habitat restoration. The Kirby Nature Center Playscape continued to grow. We also welcomed new volunteer leaders and our first Executive Director. We also had great success with fundraising, for example, receiving our largest grant ever, from the Clean Ohio Fund.

As we look forward to 2024, we are confident that,

with your continued support, we will accomplish our goals to protect 438 acres of land, grow to 300 members, and expand our educational and volunteer programs. We hope to protect more than 40 new acres of natural habitat in 2024, like the new 11.9-acre Muddy Creek Preserve which is home to riparian species including heron, ducks, and beaver. Your membership support is vital to

furthering our mission to protect and restore land and we only need 25 new members to reach our goal of 300, so please tell a friend or family member. Finally, we have dozens of informative educational programs, guided hikes, and fun volunteer events planned for 2024, and hope you can join us.

Finally, we are developing a new strategic plan and goals, and you can help. Our current plan guided us through the COVID pandemic, helping us overcome challenges

and find success. Now we are starting the process of setting new goals to help guide us through 2030 and have developed a membership survey to collect your opinions, thoughts, and feedback.

Please take a few minutes to complete the 2024 Membership Survey and tell us how we can continue to grow and improve. Your anonymous feedback, suggestions, and comments will be greatly appreciated and help guide our strategic planning efforts.



# Winter Membership Meeting & Silent Auction

Save the date March 9 for the Membership Meeting.

Please [RSVP here](#) due to limited space.

Here are a few examples of the artwork you'll be able to bid on.



Bald Eagle 21-½" x 18-½" framed print 464/950 by Harold Rigsby.



Killdeer 21-½" x 18-½" framed print 72/2000 by John Ruthven



Ruffed Grouse 29" x 35" framed print 534/1000 of Plate IX by John A. Ruthven



Dogwoods 21-½" x 16-½" framed print 229/500 by Ken Shulz A.W.S



Trillium 21-½" x 16-½" framed print 147/500 by Ken Shulz A.W.S.

# Upcoming Events

## Winter Adventure Hike

Saturday, January 27 — 2:00 p.m.  
(Rain Date Sunday, January 28 — 2:00 p.m.)  
Kirby Nature Preserve

Join us for a Winter Adventure Hike at Kirby Nature Preserve! The hike will begin at 2:00 p.m. through our prairie and into a beautiful cedar glade. Then we'll hike up a creek valley through an equally beautiful forest. Meet at Kirby Nature Preserve, 2 East Main Street in Addyston, Ohio. Cost: Free, no reservations required.

## Winter Bird Walk

Sunday, February 18 — 10:00 a.m.  
Kirby Nature Preserve

The focus will be on Sparrows, as well as any other birds we might find! Beginners are welcome! Dress for the weather; binoculars/camera, sturdy shoes, and water recommended. Meet at Kirby Nature Preserve, 2 East Main Street in Addyston, Ohio. Cost: Free. RSVP Kathy at [events@westernwildlifecorridor.org](mailto:events@westernwildlifecorridor.org).

## Backyard Herping with Dean Alessandrini

Friday, February 23, 2024 — 7:00 p.m.  
Kirby Nature Preserve

Over the past six years, Dean Alessandrini has converted his yard into a wildlife sanctuary, with emphasis on creating habitats for our native reptiles and amphibians. He now has five species of snakes, two species of salamanders, and six species of frogs and toads residing on his property. In this presentation, Dean will show us how he accomplished this, and discuss the habits and habitats of many of the "herps" that are native to the tri-state area. Cost: Free. Please [RSVP here](#) due to limited space.

## Winter Membership Meeting and Silent Art Auction

Saturday, March 9 — 1:00 p.m.

Introduction by President Jeff Ginter, a brief history of WWC by Tim Sisson and updates on what is happening around WWC and what is planned for the future by Executive Director Matt Trokan. This will be followed by a Silent Art Auction (see examples on page two), and snacks and drinks. Cost: Free. Please [RSVP here](#) due to limited space.

## Spring Wildflower Walks

Saturday, April 6, 10:00 am — Bender Mountain. Leader: Joyce Richter and Teri Gilligan. Please [RSVP here](#).  
Saturday, April 6, 10:00 am — Delshire Preserve. Leaders: Molly Hunter and Debi Wolterman. Please [RSVP here](#).  
Saturday, April 13, 10:00 am — Bender Mountain. Leader: Denis Conover. Please [RSVP here](#).  
Saturday, April 13, 10:00 am — Delshire Preserve. Leaders: Molly Hunter and Jessee Smith. Please [RSVP here](#).  
Sunday, April 21, 10:00 am — Bender Mountain. Leader: Tom Borgman. Please [RSVP here](#).  
Saturday, April 27, 10:00 am — Kirby Nature Preserve. Leader: Tim Sisson. Please [RSVP here](#).

As Spring approaches and nature brings new life to our landscapes, most of us will be ready for a hike or two. We are offering a series of wildflower hikes on our preserves. WWC nature preserves offer some of the best places in Hamilton County to view our spectacular native Ohio wildflowers. We could see Cut-Leaved Toothwort, Sessile and Drooping Trillium, Wild Ginger, Woodland Poppy, Blue-Eyed Mary, Greek Valerian, 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. You will likely see a migrating warbler or two! Cost: Free. Registration links will be on our website events page in February.



Wood Poppy - Delshire Nature Preserve



Dutchman's Breeches - Delshire Nature Preserve



Blue-Eyed Marys - Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

# Dog Etiquette

At Western Wildlife Corridor it puts a smile on our face when we see people using the trails. We strive to make our nature preserves as safe and accessible as possible while also protecting the ecological integrity. Not only do we welcome people, but we also invite our furry best friends to enjoy the trails too. It is important that when you do decide to bring a dog with you to use a leash and clean up after your pal.

Our priority is to make sure each visitor has a meaningful and positive experience. Here are some good reasons to always keep your dog on a leash:

1. Encounters with unleashed dogs can be unpleasant and stressful for other people trying to use the trail
2. No matter how much your dog has been trained they might act differently in a new environment. Not only that, wild animals can be unpredictable around your pet.
3. If your dog goes off trail, they can disturb and harm the plant life that we are trying to protect in our preserves.
4. You can get fined by law enforcement.

We want to make sure that our members enjoy what our preserves have to offer. Let's make it safer for the animals, plants, and us by remembering to leash our dogs.

## 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. No registration is necessary, but please contact a project leader to make sure it hasn't been cancelled. For more information, please go to <http://westernwildlifecorridor.org/habitat-restoration/> and read the document *Habitat Restoration: Frequently Asked Questions*.

- Saturday, March 9, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Kirby Nature Preserve. Leaders: John 513.304.2310 and Matt 513.604.6728
- Saturday, March 23, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Bender Mountain. Leaders: Jeff G. 513.451.1737 and Ed 513.919.5186
- Saturday, April 13, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Habitat Restoration at Whitetail Woods. Leaders: Tim 513.607.2599 and Gary 513.304.4303
- Saturday, April 20, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. – Habitat Restoration at Bender Mountain. Leaders: Tim 513.607.2599 and Roger 513.446.1790

## 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 Tim Sisson at [hikertim419@gmail.com](mailto:hikertim419@gmail.com) to be added to the distribution list.

# The Eastern Bluebird

Sally Sisson Anderson — Artist in Residence, Western Wildlife Corridor

During October and November, we saw a pair of Bluebirds bathing at our bird bath three different times. They looked so beautiful splashing in the water.

Did you know that there is a Bluebird society in Ohio? The Eastern Bluebird is the most wide spread of the three blue bird species native to the United States. There are also Mountain Bluebirds and Western Bluebirds.

Bluebirds like to live in open country around trees and shrubs, but not in heavy forests. Their original habitat probably included open, frequently burned savannas, beaver ponds, mature but open woods, and forest openings. Today they are most common along pastures, farmland, parks, backyards, and golf courses.

A Bluebird's main food source is insects caught on the ground or in the air much of the year. Major prey includes crickets, caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers, and spiders. In fall and winter they eat wild fruits including sumac berries, poison ivy berries, blueberries, wild grapes, currants, hackberries, juniper berries, and others. Bluebirds have been seen eating worms, salamanders, lizards, and tree frogs.

Bluebirds like to put their nests in natural cavities or in nest boxes. They like old woodpecker holes in oak trees which can be many feet above the ground, but they like to also use bird houses put up about four feet or so off the ground. I have put up three bluebird houses. The Kirby Preserve has bluebird houses on a trail around the prairie. Bluebird trails with nesting boxes have helped keep the Bluebird population constant; but there is a risk that other birds will

take over the bluebird houses. House sparrows, wrens, and starlings will all do that.

After a male has attracted a female to his nest site, the female does the nest building. She makes the nest by loosely weaving together grasses and twigs, and then she lines it with fine grass, and sometimes hair or feathers. Nest may contain two to seven eggs. The birds can have two broods per season and sometimes more. Both parents feed the young. When there are nestlings to be fed, the birds forage for insects, which provide protein for the growing young birds. Bluebirds forage by watching on perches for insects and fly down to pick them up or catch them in the air.



Eastern Bluebird populations increased between 1966 and 2019 according to the North American Bird Survey. Bluebird populations fell in the early twentieth century as the introduced species of starlings,

and house sparrows made nest in occupied holes difficult to find for the Bluebirds. In the 1960s and the 2000s the establishment of bluebird trails and other nest-box campaigns alleviated this problem somewhat. It would be helpful to put up a Bluebird house on your property. You can get Bluebird houses with the right size holes or slits now that will keep out the starlings and most sparrows.

Board member John Klein contracts and installs Bluebird boxes for a nominal fee. If interested, you can contact John at [john.kleinp2@yahoo.com](mailto:john.kleinp2@yahoo.com)

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**It would be helpful to put up a bluebird house on your property.**

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Tim Sisson

Winter Scene — Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

# Membership Gifts — Thank You!

## Black Walnut Tree of Honor

\$1,000 or more:

- Anonymous
- Jim & Kaye Bono
- Mike Flanders
- Ed Gemperle
- Pamlaia Grafe
- Kraft Electrical Contracting, Inc.
- Walt & Susan McBeath
- Midwest Native Plant Society
- Mark Streicher
- Beth Warmuth

## Red Oak Tree of Honor

\$500 to \$999:

- Paul Brinker
- Jaqui Brumm
- Bill & Beth Burwinkel
- Tom & Mary Croft
- Connie & Bob Heintz
- Don Horak
- Mary Elizabeth Huey & Dan Hadley
- Liz Maxwell
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- Jim Scott & Donna Hartman
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- John Trokan

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\$200 to \$499:

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- Frank Davis
- Chuck Geraci
- Sherry & Brett Goodson
- Linda Graviss
- Molly Hunter
- Steve Johns
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## Paw Paw Steward Recognition

\$100 to \$199:

- |                          |                           |                      |
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### Gift in Memoriam

We would like to give special thanks to Jack Berninger in honor of Elaine Berninger.



## Western Wildlife Corridor Membership

All donations \$100 or more will receive a special recognition in *The Steward* newsletter. \$500 or more will be prominently displayed on the Tree of Honor located in the Kirby House Great Room — A Lasting Memorial!

### SUPPORTING DONATION

- \$25 Individual Hiker
- \$35 Family Pathfinders
- \$55 Organization Trailblazer
- \$75 Mountain Climber

### STEWARD RECOGNITION

- \$100—\$199 Paw Paw
- \$200—\$499 Beech

### TREE OF HONOR

- \$500—\$999 Red Oak
- \$1,000 and up Black Walnut

Enclosed is my tax deductible donation:  New Member  Renewal

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

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Mail to Western Wildlife Corridor, P.O. Box 389077, Cincinnati, OH 45238-9077 or Donate online



*Thank you for supporting us and our mission to preserve the scenic beauty and natural resources of the Ohio River Valley!*

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