



Natural Ohio

Bob Taft, Governor • Sam Speck, Director
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Our Prairie Past Remnants of a by-gone era in Ohio

The French explorers called our country's open grasslands, "prairies," from the French word for meadow.

In the 1930s, Ohio State University Professor Edgar Nelson Transeau studied Ohio's prairies. He called the extension of the western prairie into Ohio the "prairie peninsula." The advance of western prairies occurred about 4,000-8,000 years ago during a dry period after the last glacial advance, called the xerothermic period.

Historically, forests covered more than 90 percent of Ohio's landscape. Today, forests remain the state's dominant plant community. Within forests, other vegetation types occur, including open wetlands and grasslands. Ohio grasslands comprised a small percentage of Ohio's original vegetation.

Today, several different types of prairies are found in Ohio including: tallgrass, wet sand, mesic sand, xeric limestone and slump prairies. In addition, there are savannas, which are prairie openings with scattered trees. In Ohio they include oak sand barren, oak

barren, post oak opening and bur oak savanna. These categories can be divided into even smaller types.

Different types of prairies depend on certain factors, such as soils, soil moisture and sometimes slope and aspect.

Ohio's list of prairie plants is rather lengthy but a few of the most common species include big bluestem grass (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*), whorled rosinweed (*Silphium trifoliatum*), tall coreopsis (*Coreopsis tripteris*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and blazing-stars (*Liatris* spp.).

Prior to conversion to agriculture and other human development, the tallgrass prairie was the most common type found in the state. These are classic prairies—deep, black soils, dominated

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Woodpeckers wonders of nature

As one of Ohio's most intriguing group of birds, woodpeckers both fascinate and frustrate with their compulsive pecking. They peck, drum, drill and chisel for four reasons: to establish territory and attract mates, extract insects and create nesting cavities.

Close to 20 species of woodpeckers live in North America. Recent news reports of the discovery of an ivory-billed woodpecker has reawakened interest in these large, colorful and yes, often noisy, birds.

Ohio may not offer a home to the ivory-billed, but seven kinds of woodpeckers can be seen in the wooded habitats of many state nature preserves. How many have you seen—red-headed, red-bellied, downy, hairy, pileated, yellow-bellied sapsucker and northern flicker?

The most common and often seen here is the small, black and white downy woodpecker. Males and females look alike except the males have a spot of red on the back of their heads. The hairy woodpecker is very similar to the

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From the Chief

Summer has arrived and after six months on the job, I've met many of our public and private partners who are committed to protecting Ohio's natural heritage.

I had not considered the nontraditional partnerships which have been forged by staff with local government agencies, such as the village of Marblehead; non-profit environmental organizations like Earth Force; and corporate partners like General Motors.

I attended Lakeside Daisy Day in Marblehead on May 14; all of the local events were impressive. Mayor Jacqueline Bird and the Marblehead Council were excellent hosts. Tours of Lakeside Daisy State Nature Preserve and Standard LaFarge's quarry operations ran all day. I spent several enjoyable, albeit slightly damp, hours at the preserve where more than 200 visitors stopped by to see the spectacular display of Lakeside daisies. It was an outstanding day and the partnership demonstrated how important working with local governments can be to our program.

Later in May, the division participated in a stream monitoring event with General Motors, Earth Force and Hedges Elementary School in Mansfield. This was a partnership of a different kind. Frank DiMarco, Central Ohio assistant scenic rivers manager and Alyssa Hawkins of Earth Force, provided a hands-on demonstration of how stream ecology is affected by water quality and how macroinvertebrates can be used to track water quality changes. The students demonstrated their ecological knowledge while learning more about the role of macroinvertebrates in the aquatic food chain. This continuing partnership is another way to encourage stream stewardship.

These are just two examples of the type of partnerships the division values, partnerships which make the task of educating citizens about our mission easier. Without our partners, fewer endangered species, unique natural areas and high quality scenic rivers would have the protection they need and deserve.

I'll be looking for you in a preserve or on a scenic river. ✓

Tom Linkous
Chief, Division of Natural Areas & Preserves

Our Prairie Past

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by tall grasses with scattered forbs and occasional trees and shrubs. The largest of these prairie areas include the Darby Plains, Sandusky Plains and Castalia Prairie.

Plant communities associated with tallgrass prairies were bur oak savannas, which have scattered oaks, mostly bur oak. You may still see examples of these prairies at Smith and Bigelow Cemetery state nature preserves and Resthaven Wildlife Area. West of Columbus, Franklin County Metroparks is restoring areas of the Darby Plains at Battelle-Darby Metro Park.

One of the most interesting ecosystems in Ohio, the Oak Openings of northwest Ohio, features both mesic and wet sand prairies as well as oak sand barrens. These prairies differ from tallgrass prairies because the soils consist of nearly pure sand, yet share a number of the same plant species, as well as many different species more adapted to the sandy substrate. These prairies occur on old beach ridges and lake beds.

Oak sand barrens are the most common of the three occurring in other parts of the Lake Plain in north central and northeast Ohio. Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve, Toledo Metropark's Oak Openings Preserve and The Nature Conservancy's Kitty Todd Nature Preserve in Lucas County have great examples of these prairies. Erie Sand Barrens State Nature Preserve and Cleveland Museum of Natural History's North Kingsville Sand Barrens have examples of oak sand barrens in north central and northeastern Ohio.

Oak barren is the least known of the prairies in Ohio. It is highly fire dependent and has virtually disappeared in Ohio. Also called "oak openings," oak savannas feature scattered trees with an understory dominated by grasses with scattered forbs. The soils are sandy as the underlying bedrock is sandstone and typically sandstone is at or near the surface. They occur in the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau of southeastern Ohio on moderately to very steep south- and west-facing slopes. There are very few examples remaining

in Ohio—one of the best examples is Killbuck Watershed Land Trust's Brinkhaven Oak Barrens Preserve in Holmes County.

Slump or bluff prairies occur on steep, slumping hillsides along rivers and creeks. They typically occur on clay soils and persist by slumping action of the unstable slope. These prairies occur in glaciated Ohio on steep south- and west-facing bluffs. Goode Prairie State Nature Preserve, owned by the division and leased to the Miami County Park District, is an example of this type of prairie.

The last two types of prairie found in the state are post oak opening and xeric limestone prairies, which occur in the Interior Low Plateau physiographic region of Ohio, mostly in Adams County and adjacent Highland and Pike counties.

The post oak opening is the rarer of the two; it occurs over specific bedrock, Estill shale. It is also rare outside of Ohio, only occurring in adjacent counties of Kentucky.

Xeric limestone prairie is a dry prairie occurring over limestone or dolomite. The bedrock is at or very near the surface; most are on very steep south- and west-facing slopes, making it difficult for trees and shrubs to colonize the openings. Chaparral Prairie and Adams Lake Prairie state nature preserves, both in Adams County, are wonderful examples of post oak openings. The Nature Conservancy's Edge of Appalachia Preserve and Highlands Nature Sanctuary's Ka-ma-ma Prairie in Adams County are also great examples of xeric limestone prairie.

Today, you can still see examples of all the different kinds of prairies because most are under some type of protection.

In the next issue of *Natural Ohio*, we'll be taking an in-depth look at xeric limestone prairies. To learn more about Ohio's prairie past, visit our website at ohiodnr.com/dnap or the Ohio Prairie Association's website at www.ohioprairie.org. ✓

Rick Gardner
Heritage Botanist
Ohio Natural Heritage Program

Ohio's Woodpeckers

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downy, but at 9 inches, it's about 2-½ inches longer.

Woodpeckers do not sing like songbirds. But, just as each songbird's song is unique, every woodpecker's peck is too. Rhythm, duration and even the pattern of holes distinguish one woodpecker species from another.

For instance, trees with several rows of holes drilled straight in a line often indicate the work of a yellow-bellied sapsucker. True to its name, this colorful bird with a red cap and yellow belly is after tree sap. It actually laps the sap and consumes insects entrapped in the sweet, sticky liquid.

Can you imagine pounding your head against the wall 8,000 to 10,000 times? That's the amazing number of times some researchers believe woodpeckers peck each day! Fortunately, a spongy tissue filled with air protects its brain.

To carry out their work, these birds are equipped with highly specialized accessories: sturdy beaks, strong neck muscles, long elastic tongues, stiff tails and powerful toes. Acting as a brace, the tail supports the woodpecker while

it chisels away. Unlike other birds, woodpeckers have two toes forward and two toes back, helping them grip the sides of trees.

Here's a fun fact about woodpeckers—they store their long tongues inside their noses, some of which are 4 inches long. Sticky saliva and barbs on the end of their tongues help woodpeckers glean insects deep inside trees. As an example of this dexterity, consider that a single northern flicker can eat thousands of carpenter ants in one day.

When visiting a heavily-wooded preserve, such as Fowler Woods, Conkle's Hollow, Hueston Woods or Tinker's Creek, woodpeckers are more often heard than seen. Such is the case with the pileated, one of the state's most distinctive and largest woodpeckers, at 16-19 inches tall. Most notably recognized as the model for the cartoon character Woody Woodpecker, it is the only woodpecker with a bright red crest on its head. These shy birds prefer living within large tracts of forested land.

According to DNAP Northwest Ohio preserve manager, Steve Harvey, all seven of Ohio's nesting woodpeckers can be seen at Goll Woods State Nature Preserve in Fulton County.



pileated woodpecker

"We have a nesting pair of pileated woodpeckers at Goll Woods. They are regularly seen and heard from the preserve's Cottonwood Trail," observed Harvey.

Other sites to test your woodpecker identification skills include: Johnson Woods, Augusta-Anne Olsen, Sheepskin Hollow, Hach-Otis, Davey Woods, Gross Woods and Lawrence Woods. ✓

Editor's Note – Thanks to ODNR columnist, Laura Jones, whose article this was based on.



Ohio's First Water Trail on Kokosing State Scenic River

Twenty-eight miles of the Kokosing State Scenic River in Knox County has been designated as Ohio's first water trail. The Kokosing River Water Trail is part of a new Ohio Water trails initiative to promote and provide access to streams and rivers that offer excellent opportunities for boating and fishing.

"Our goal is to provide paddlers and anglers with safe and convenient access points to enjoy the state's thousands of miles of rivers and streams," said ODNR Director Sam Speck. "The Kokosing River Water Trail and similar trails that we hope to designate through future partnerships will improve public access to some of Ohio's finest outdoor recreation opportunities."

A water trail is similar to a hiking or biking trail with one critical difference—the trail already exists and access just needs to be provided.

The Kokosing Water Trail features nine public access points, many of which are maintained by the Knox County Park District. Several access improvements have been made in recent years with the support of

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A gift of nature in the scenic Hocking Hills

Kessler Swamp State Nature Preserve

The afternoon's long shadows give way to twilight as the summer sun settles behind the nearby hillside.

A stillness falls over the water. The breeze has stopped and the bustle of birds has been replaced by the erratic flight of bats overhead as they seek their evening meal. A loud slap breaks the silence as a beaver snaps out an alarm with a single whack of a tail, then slips below the water surface. Such is the scene along a picturesque section of roadway in northern Hocking County, also known as Kessler Swamp State Nature Preserve.

This small and wonderful site's existence is due in large part to the industrious beaver. Kessler Swamp is actually the flooded valley of Durbin Run, a small tributary to Rush Creek. Years ago, as beaver returned to the area, their dams began to impound the waters of Durbin Run as it descended from the hillsides, now covered by the Hide-Away-Hills resort community, on its way to the larger Rush Creek valley. Then, because of flooding problems, even the course of Rush Creek was altered by straightening it and moving it a short distance east. Now these impoundments include not only Durbin Run, but also the old Rush Creek valley.

Kessler Swamp's 20 acres was a generous gift from Dr. Francis and Mrs. Joyce Kessler to the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves in 2003. Long dedicated to protecting the resources of Ohio and specifically the Hocking County area, the Kesslers wanted to guarantee that the unique habitat would be forever protected from development.

Before transferring ownership, the Kesslers realized the allure of the water and had a small overlook deck built so visitors could view the southern section of the swamp. This deck has been enlarged to handle more visitors, as well as increase accessibility. The division also erected an entrance sign to make the access point more recognizable.

Wetlands have a special appeal and represent a habitat type that has seen tremendous decline in Ohio. This often translates into an area brimming with rare species of plants. However, Kessler Swamp is not special because of a list of endangered species. Rather, this area is special based solely on the fact that

it exists. In a region of Ohio known for its forests and magnificent geologic formations, any swamp area of this size is remarkable.

A variety of wetland-dwelling plants thrive at Kessler Swamp. It supports perhaps the best buttonbush community in the county. The water level of the swamp has varied widely in recent years due to a combination of the natural fluctuations in rainfall and the breaching of the dam at the outflow of the swamp.

During drier periods, the exposed mudflats become veritable fields of lush vegetation with an incredible growth of bur-marigolds, also known as beggar's ticks because of the pitchfork-shaped seeds that in autumn seem to grab any material that comes near. The bur-marigolds create a sea of yellow blooms in the summer, adding beautiful color.

Perhaps the biggest attraction at Kessler Swamp is the birds. Because of the size of the open water, it is one of the better wooded waterways in the region. It attracts numerous spring and fall migrants in addition to those that take up residence all summer long. Green-backed and great blue herons are nearly always present, stalking the shallower sections of the swamp.

For several years now, it has also served as a host for large numbers of great egrets that stop for several days as they travel north in the spring. Wood ducks, mallards, Canada geese and other waterfowl are frequently seen foraging the waters as well. The waters being well stocked with fish has also allowed for a couple of larger avian members. In recent years, both bald eagles and ospreys have been seen soaring overhead and perching in the dead snags located throughout the open water.



Even though they have not nested in the area, it is always a thrill to see them surveying their environment.

For those who wish to visit Kessler Swamp State Nature Preserve in Hocking County, the parking area is located in Marion Township on Hide-Away-Hills Road about 5 miles east of US Rte. 33. Facilities include a small parking area and observation deck. The preserve is open daily year round. For more information, contact (740) 420-3445 or visit www.ohiodnr.com/dnap.

Jeff Johnson
South-central District Preserve Manager

A lifetime devoted to Ohio's flora

From his childhood on a family farm in Licking County to his distinguished career as professor of botany at Kent State University, Dr. Tom S. Cooperrider has remained passionate about one thing—the flora of Ohio.

During his career, which dates back to the late '50s, Cooperrider and his students have contributed a massive amount of field work to the study of botany in Ohio. He first came to Kent State to work on the *Flora of Ohio*.



Cooperrider needed access to Ohio specimens when he began his work, so aided by his botanist wife, Miwako (Mix), they worked together to establish a research herbarium at Kent State.

"My debt to my wife is great. She built the KSU herbarium and that enabled me to do my work and take on grad students," he said. "Working with students has given me great satisfaction."

And he's proud of his students—many of them went on to their own distinguished environmental careers, including former DNAP botanists Barbara Andreas, James Burns, Allison Cusick and David Emmitt.

During his long career, Cooperrider has worked with many renowned scientists, including Ohio's own legendary botanist, E. Lucy Braun.

His own work in northeastern Ohio was instrumental in laying a foundation for Ohio's rare plant legislation. In the mid 1970s a group of botanists, many volunteers, worked to create Ohio's rare plant list, which hadn't been updated since the '40s.

"There was no voice mail, no answering machines, we had to make a lot of phone calls and visit many Ohio herbariums," he recalled. "The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves was beginning from scratch but by 1980 we finished the first list."

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Water Trail

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state funding, including the Ohio Scenic Rivers License Plate.

Beginning in Mt. Vernon, the trail features long deep pools, riffles and short rapids as it passes scenic sandstone cliffs and tree-lined riverbanks. The river maintains its natural quality as it winds eastward through mostly wooded and rural portions of Knox County.

Paddlers and other users are encouraged to follow the newly published Kokosing River Water Trail Guide, which features a narrative listing of river access points and fishing opportunities, as well as boating safety tips. To learn more, visit www.dnr.state.oh.us/watercraft/watertrails. ✓

Blanding's turtles released at Sheldon Marsh

Looking larger than the pet store variety, a half-dozen Blanding's turtles spent their last hours in captivity sunning themselves in an open plastic container.

The adults and children who gathered to watch as the turtles were released into their new home were equally charmed by the turtles—taking turns holding them and checking out their bright yellow necks and patterned shells, complete with radio transmitters.

In early June, staff from Cleveland Metroparks began a new phase of a four-year research project—releasing nearly 40 Blanding's turtles at a few sites scattered across the Lake Erie region, including a dozen at Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve.

Home to a small population of Blanding's turtles, Sheldon Marsh provides perfect habitat for these turtles. The newly-released turtles were raised from eggs harvested from female turtles at Sheldon Marsh more than 2-1/2 years ago.

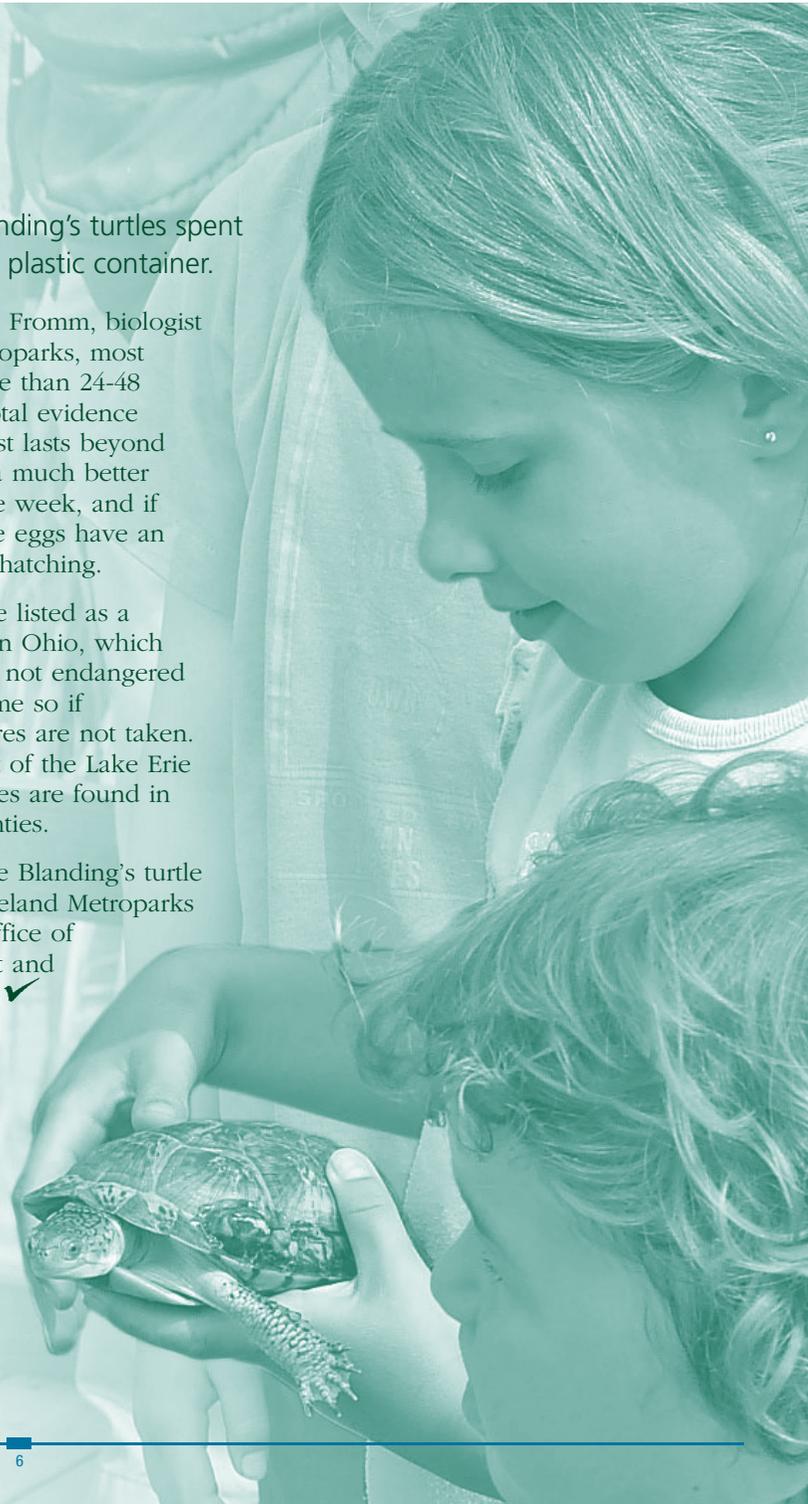
The turtles are fitted with radio transmitters which will track their progress as well as their locations within the preserve. Researchers from Cleveland Metroparks will compare survival rates and examine their environment and predators. Besides habitat loss, predation of the nests is a major challenge for the turtles.

According to Jeanne Fromm, biologist with Cleveland Metroparks, most nests rarely last more than 24-48 hours. Some anecdotal evidence shows that if the nest lasts beyond the first day, it has a much better chance of lasting the week, and if it lasts the week, the eggs have an excellent chance of hatching.

Blanding's turtles are listed as a species of concern in Ohio, which means the animal is not endangered but may soon become so if conservation measures are not taken. Once native to most of the Lake Erie coastline, these turtles are found in only four Ohio counties.

Other partners in the Blanding's turtle project include Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and ODNR's Office of Coastal Management and Division of Wildlife. ✓

Heidi Hetzel-Evans
Public Information



Cooperrider Profile

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That first list became the foundation for the division's Natural Heritage database. Since then the Ohio's Rare Plants Committee, as Ohio's endangered plant law spelled out, has met every two years to update the list.

"Field work was my first love; pressing and making specimens my secondary love," says Cooperrider. "In the first few summers I hit the local areas heavily. Northeast Ohio was where I did most of my work. I discovered tamarack trees, which was a new species for me. I began looking for tamarack trees and every once in awhile I'd hit a gold mine. One of those places was Kent Bog."

Cooperrider's work at the bog, collecting specimens for the KSU herbarium, led to the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves eventually purchasing Kent Bog in 1985. Ten years later, the division honored him by changing the name of the site to the Tom S. Cooperrider-Kent Bog State Nature Preserve. Cooperrider may brush aside questions related to what it feels like to have a preserve named after him, but he's proud to tell you that Kent Bog was the first nature preserve purchased with state income tax checkoff funding.

Not resting on his laurels, Cooperrider remains active in the floristic work of Ohio. Currently he is serving as a pre-publication reviewer on the *Flora of North America*.

"It's one of the most interesting things I'm doing. I see the manuscripts before they're published," explained Cooperrider. "It keeps me up-to-date."



Kent Bog continues to remain a part of his daily routine. Cooperrider goes to the bog nearly everyday. For Cooperrider, some things will never change. ✓

*Heidi Hetzel-Evans
Public Information*

Thistle Tales

Never grab a thistle by the stem.

This is a lesson I have to learn every summer. Thistles have a pernicious determination to survive in my garden, and they have no respect for gloves.

If there is such a thing as a violent weed, thistles are it. Well armed with spikes on leaf, stalk and even flower, they repel all advances. In the Victorian language of flowers, they stand for surliness—not exactly the message you'd want to send to your sweetest. Cows wisely refuse to eat them and so they will be found standing alone like silent sentinels in otherwise low-shorn pastures, earning the common name—bull thistles.

And yet even thistles have their positive side. Anything that attracts flocks of darting goldfinches, those connoisseurs of thistle seed, cannot be all bad.

The Scots think highly of thistle, having made it their national flower, in part, perhaps, because of its rugged, independent character. Traditionally, the Scottish reverence for thistles goes back to the depths of the Middle Ages when a Danish raiding party, trying to creep into a sleeping village of Scots, took off their boots to silence their advance, only to encounter a phalanx of thistles. The resulting commotion roused the Scots to a successful defense.

Thistles belong to the composite family, as a close look at their flowers will show. What appears to be a single feathery bloom is actually a tightly clustered congregation of tiny flowers held together by a cup made of tiny, overlapping, leaf-like and spine-tipped phyllaries. Flower heads commonly range in color from pink through rose to purple, but white versions are occasionally found.

While we may consider them a nuisance, bees are quite enamored of thistles. Their flowers are sweet-scented and contain an abundance of both pollen and nectar.

The most common thistles encountered in Ohio are imports. Bull thistles can be 3-6 feet tall. Canada thistle, which is not actually from Canada but Eurasia, thrives in roadsides, abandoned fields and other disturbed ground. Its small



flower heads color whole swaths of ground a dull pink while the massed ranks of their spiny stems give full expression to the scientific names of one of its varieties—horridum.

Ohio's native varieties aren't much friendlier. There are at least five thistles considered to be original to the state, all of them share the prickly disposition of their imported cousins, along with the typical tufted purple to pink flower heads. The rarest of these are the Carolina thistle, a southern species that can be found in the southeast area of the state and Hill's thistle, which prefers sandy open fields in Ohio's east-central counties.

The most elegant of our native thistles (at least to my eye) is the swamp thistle. Found in calcareous wetlands, in Ohio it is limited almost entirely to fens—those spring-fed, cold-water refuges that hold so many of our interesting northern species. Their purple flowers have the richest color of any of our thistles. Not content with that show, the points of the phyllaries surrounding the base of the flower head, like the shingles of an upside-down roof, are also flushed with purple, as are segments of the relatively unarmed stem. Also of interest is the stickiness of the flower head base, which prompted its species name, muticum. It is an altogether strikingly handsome, friendly plant... for a thistle. ✓

*Tim Snyder
Retired DNAP preserve manager*

Division wraps up 2005 Natural Areas Discovery Series

There's still time to check out one of the last Natural Areas Discovery Series programs. The choices in September and October will please any nature lover.



Fen-tastic Journey

Jackson Bog State Nature Preserve
Saturday, Sept. 10, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
Step back in time and visit a small "throw-back" to the Ice Age. On this guided hike, visitors will follow a boardwalk trail through a dozen fen meadows to see an array of the beautiful and rare species.

For more information on this Stark County event, call (330) 527-5118.

Birding on Coastal Dunes

Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve
Saturday, Sept. 17, 7:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
As summer turns to autumn, experience one of Ohio's best coastal dunes communities. Whether your interest is botanical or avian, there is plenty to see. Begin your visit with a 7:30 a.m. bird hike or learn more about coastal plants by joining one of two hikes (9 or 11 a.m.) focusing on the unique vegetation of the dunes.

For more information on this Lake County event, call (440) 632-3010.

The Colors of Autumn

Fowler Woods State Nature Preserve
Saturday, Oct. 8, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
A vibrant spectrum of autumn colors awaits visitors at this Richland County wooded preserve. Guided, fall color

hikes along the accessible boardwalk trail will begin at 10 a.m. and noon.

For more information on this Richland County event, call (419) 981-6319.



Fall Foliage Festival

Conkle's Hollow State Nature Preserve
Oct. 15-16, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Brilliantly colored hills, winding trails and spectacular autumn views of the Hocking Hills. Choose the accessibility of the Lower Gorge trail or the more challenging Upper Rim trail with its breathtaking views.

For more information on this Hocking County event, call (740) 420-3445.

PRESERVING NATURE TODAY FOR THE NEEDS OF TOMORROW

The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves' Mission Statement
Administer a system of nature preserves and scenic rivers by identifying and protecting Ohio's significant natural features.

Vision Statement
Leading Ohio in the stewardship of its natural heritage.

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