

# Natural Ohio

Division of Natural Areas and Preserves

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## Ohio's Natural Heritage Team

THE OHIO NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM HAS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE DIVISION OF NATURAL AREAS AND PRESERVES FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS. AFTER ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN THE EARLY 1980S, IT WAS MOVED TO THE DIVISION. STAFF COMPRISED OF FIELD BOTANISTS, ECOLOGISTS AND DATA ANALYSTS HAVE MANAGED THE OHIO NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM, WHICH INCLUDES THE NATURAL HERITAGE DATABASE, SINCE ITS INCEPTION.

Ohio's Natural Heritage database was the third of its kind nationally when it was established in 1976. Originally funded by The Nature Conservancy and the George Gund Foundation, the database has grown to nearly 18,000 records of state-listed plants and animals, as well as unique geologic features and significant examples of Ohio's natural plant communities.

The collected data is a critical tool for conservation in Ohio. Data is supplied to developers and their consultants, government agencies, conservation groups, researchers and individuals.

Data may be used to assist in avoiding or minimizing damage to rare species and sensitive habitats. As a whole, the database remains a valuable tool in planning and implementing land management activities.

Today, Ohio's program is associated with a hemisphere-wide network of more than 75 heritage programs in all 50 U.S. states, most Canadian provinces and many Latin American countries. This network is coordinated by the international non-profit conservation organization NatureServe.

Greg Schneider is the Heritage Program manager. He is the division's NatureServe liaison and works to ensure that the massive database is operating smoothly. Originally hired as a botanist in 1992, Schneider specialized in tracking down rare wetland plants.

After obtaining a computer programming degree, Schneider traded his field days for office life in 2002. He was instrumental in converting the database to a geographic information system (GIS) based application which allows data to be mapped digitally and viewed interactively.

*(continued on page 2)*

## NatureCache— perfect combination of technology and nature

NatureCache is a new public program series which combines naturalist-led interpretive hikes with global positioning system (GPS) technology. The idea grew from a partnership between the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and Gander Mountain, which is the nation's largest network of stores for hunting, fishing, camping, boating and outdoor products.

“NatureCache is a great chance for the whole family to enjoy the beauty of Ohio's special places using today's popular technology—GPS units,” said Chief

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## FROM THE CHIEF



The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves is a prism through which we better appreciate and engage the vast and subtle, past and constant change to our environment.

In this issue of *Natural Ohio*, we share how we take stock of your natural inventory through the heritage database. The articles on Stage's Pond and Osman Prairie show the benefits of preservation for future generations. Our partnership with Gander Mountain seeks to meld an appreciation of technology and nature.

Change is also inherent to society and the division is always in search of ways

to enhance our mission. To do so, we have proposed and the Assembly is considering the transfer of the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program to the Division of Watercraft. The transfer will free the program from the uncertainty of the state's General Revenue Fund and give the rest of the division some budgetary relief. The program's mission and the legal obligation to fulfill it transfer with the program. That mission, to provide enhanced protection for Ohio's best streams benefits those who use the waters of this state, can only be enhanced by the program's transfer.

This will be my last contribution to *Natural Ohio*. I will be leaving to

become state director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency. It has been a remarkable two years. I have learned much. I still have much to learn. I thank Governor Strickland and Director Logan for their trust and the opportunity. I thank the remarkable, knowledgeable and always professional division staff for guiding and educating this novice naturalist and I commend to you, the people, the good and necessary work of heralding and supporting their work for our natural Ohio. 

*Steve Maurer*

**Steve Maurer**, Chief  
Division of Natural Areas and Preserves

*(Heritage Team, continued from page 1)*

Together, Debbie Woischke and Butch Grieszmer have more than 30 years of combined experience working with the Natural Heritage database. These busy environmental analysts handle more than 2,000 requests for data and reviews annually. Of all the Heritage staff, Woischke has been with the division the longest, since 1988.

"Mapping all of the rare species used to be done by hand. We had to figure out the coordinates by using a grid sheet and some math," recalled Woischke. "We shared one computer and took turns entering data."

In addition to his database duties, Grieszmer has donated his artwork to the division for its publications and website. His most recent work graced the cover of the Ohio Botanical Symposium registration materials.

Field botanists Rick Gardner and Tom Arbour are charged with collecting and updating database records. Gardner is the division's senior Natural Heritage botanist. He spends a great deal of his week traveling around the state to

record new locations for rare plants, revisiting previously reported finds and meeting with landowners. Gardner regularly scouts high quality lands for biologically significant species and habitats.

"One of my most memorable moments as a botanist occurred when I was at Crystal Lake in Portage County. I found this spike-rush emerging from the water and wasn't sure I had collected it. It later became my first new species for the state," said Gardner when asked for a favorite field experience.

Arbour, who began with the division in 1999 as a seasonal in the Northeast Preserve District, specializes in plant communities and Lake Erie coastal region rarities. Additionally, Arbour is an expert GIS practitioner and produces highly specialized maps for the division as well as other agencies.

Ecologist Melissa Moser has become the division's invasive plant species expert. She coordinates the division's efforts to educate the public and public land managers about the threat of invasive plant species like garlic mustard and bush honeysuckle. She works with preserve managers to develop effective

ecological management strategies to combat the spread of invasives on the division's lands. Moser also works closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to track the location and health of Ohio's federally listed plant species.

The Natural Heritage program's newest addition is Erin Hazelton who was hired to assist in entering records into the database. The division soon discovered her expert knowledge in studying caves and she quickly became the Ohio Cave Survey project manager. She and her caving colleagues have recorded 230 caves as well as several rare cave dwelling species.

"My favorite Ohio cave critter is definitely the Buckskin Cave pseudoscorpion. It's blind, about the size of my pinky nail and looks like a tiny scorpion, but without the stinging tail. So far it has only been found in one cave in the world—right here in Ohio," said Hazelton.

In addition to permanent staff, many seasonal employees and volunteer botanists have contributed their talents to improving the Ohio Natural Heritage Program. To learn more, visit [www.ohiodnr.com/dnap](http://www.ohiodnr.com/dnap). 

(NatureCache, continued from page 1)

Steve Maurer, ODNr Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

The first NatureCache event was held in April at Tinker's Creek State Nature Preserve in Portage County. Armed with demonstration GPS units, participants learned to find the best wetland views at this 486-acre site. They also navigated themselves to the site's new eagle nest observation deck.

A representative from the North Canton Gander Mountain store was on-hand to share his knowledge about using GPS units outdoors as well as answer questions regarding the variety of models available.

"We hope to raise awareness of the excellent opportunities to enjoy the outdoors right here in Ohio," said Joe Hardin, district manager of Gander Mountain's Ohio stores. "Recreational GPS use is fun, great exercise and something that can be done inexpensively and close to home."

All of the NatureCache hikes are slow paced and suitable for the entire family. They are a perfect complement for Earthcaching, a virtual geocaching activity encouraged at a number of Ohio state nature preserves.

Upcoming NatureCache events include:

- Clifton Gorge in Greene County on **June 6**
- Conkle's Hollow in Hocking County on **July 18**
- Sheldon Marsh in Erie County on **September 26**
- Lawrence Woods in Hardin County on **October 3**

Pre-registration for all hikes is strongly encouraged. All pre-registered participants over 18 will be entered into a prize drawing for two Garmin GPS units, compliments of Gander Mountain. For more information, visit [www.ohiodnr.com/dnap](http://www.ohiodnr.com/dnap) and click on Discovery Series or call your local Gander Mountain store. 

**Heidi Hetzel-Evans**  
Public Information

## Ohio botanists continue finding botanical goodies



**EVERY YEAR, OHIO BOTANISTS MAKE A NUMBER OF NOTEWORTHY PLANT DISCOVERIES. IN 2008, THEIR MANY RARE PLANT FINDS INCLUDED A FEW SPECIES THAT HAD NOT BEEN SEEN IN OHIO FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS OR WERE NEW TO OHIO.**

Ohio's newest find is sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*). This tree has somehow escaped the notice of Ohio's botanists in the past until Brian Riley, a forester with ODNr's Division of Forestry discovered a group of trees in the Ohio River valley near Chilo. Riley found a tree he suspected was sugarberry in 2007 but, due to a late frost, the tree did not produce fruit, an important characteristic needed to distinguish it from the common hackberry. He returned last year and discovered more than enough fruit to verify its identification. This species is common in the southeastern United States, but reaches as far north as northern Kentucky, central Illinois and Indiana.

A few years ago, an obscure bulrush, Rocky Mountain bulrush (*Schoenoplectus saximontanus*), was added to Ohio's rare plant list as extirpated or presumed no longer present in the state. Last seen in 1979, this plant was collected several times from a shallow pond in an active agricultural field near Circleville in Pickaway County. This site is the only occurrence east of the Mississippi

River. Heavy rains in 2008 kept this pond wet late into July which saved the field from being plowed. A "seed banker," this plant species produces hundreds to thousands of seeds that stay viable for many years, waiting for just the right conditions to germinate. Dan Boone, a well-known botanist from southwestern Ohio, rediscovered this plant in July, but the story didn't end there.

While at this Pickaway County pond, Boone, along with Jim McCormac from ODNr's Division of Wildlife, Riley, Jim Decker and Rick Gardner cooperated to identify a strange spike-rush as Engelmann's spike-rush (*Eleocharis engelmannii*), a state endangered species. McCormac, just the day before, discovered this spike-rush there. The group moved to another shallow pond nearby and found both Englemann's spike-rush and Rocky Mountain bulrush there as well.

Rocky Mountain bulrush wasn't the only presumed extirpated species to be rediscovered in 2008. Gardner, along with co-worker Tom Arbour, Pat Deering from the Licking Land Trust, retired Biologist Denis Case and his wife, Rita Apanius, found a population of the black-seeded needle grass (*Piptochaetium avenaceum*) which was last found in 1953 near Lake Vesuvius in Lawrence County. The newly discovered population was

(continued on page 5)

# Stage's Pond State Nature Preserve



**IF YOU'VE EVER HEARD THAT A SMALL GROUP OF CONCERNED CITIZENS CAN'T STOP PROGRESS, THEN YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THE STORY BEHIND STAGE'S POND STATE NATURE PRESERVE.**

Imagine if you will, bulldozers scraping off the top layer of soil, backhoes digging basements and construction crews building homes on postage stamp-sized lots. Not what most people would call an ecological triumph; even worse when you understand that all of this was happening on high-quality wetland habitat. This is what happened 35 years ago in Pickaway County.

What made this wetland different from countless others lost to development was that it had become the favorite haunt of many local birders. They didn't want to see yet another great birding site lost to development. What began as a grassroots effort turned into a statewide appeal to save a beloved local landmark.

Through the efforts of the Pickaway Garden Club, the local movement eventually included the Garden Clubs of Ohio, The Nature Conservancy and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Their concerted efforts led to the permanent protection of this wetland mecca. The 178-acre site became a state nature preserve in 1974.

Much of the preserve had been farmed and many of the now wet locations had been tiled and drained. Over the years, the tiles were broken and the water returned.

Two distinct features are present at the preserve. The larger area has for years been termed a kettle pond, a relict of Ohio's glacial past. New evidence has created some doubt as to the pond's formation; however, that doesn't matter to the wildlife using the site. The smaller area—once drained and covered with crop rows—is now a shallow depression that forms up to three distinct ponds depending on water depth.

Both wetland areas support a myriad of bird species, especially during spring and fall migrations. In the summer, it's not uncommon to see osprey circling above the ponds waiting to dive upon unsuspecting fish below. Bald eagles have been seen periodically as well. And on any day, visitors can easily spot the Canada geese and mallards who reside year-round.

If you can name a species that migrates through the state, chances are it has been seen at Stage's Pond. Divers and dabblers call the pond home for several months each year. Cormorants, mergansers, buffleheads, pintails and canvasbacks have all been reported in the past year by regular visitors. And although it has been awhile, I have

seen rails in the grasses along the edge of the small pond.

But don't just come to Stage's Pond to see its wetland habitat and occupants; there's much more to see. The old farm fields are recovering. Much of the upland ecology is early successional and numerous birds are found in these areas as well. Deeper in the preserve, a fairly mature woodlot brings in another cadre of bird species.

If you love birding and haven't yet been to Stage's Pond State Nature Preserve, you're missing a great site. To learn more, visit [www.ohiodnr.com/dnap](http://www.ohiodnr.com/dnap).

**Jeff Johnson**  
South Central District  
Preserve Manager



**cormorant**

(bird photo by M. Mainhart)

## A farewell from the field

Dear Readers,

As you read this, I will have said my goodbyes, turned over my uniform and keys and begun a new chapter in my life. Thirty years and six job titles later, I ended my career less than a mile from where it began, as I left Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve as district manager for the last time.

I have met with and spoken to many folks over the years who understood that working at ODNR was more than a job; it was a passion fueled by interacting with visitors and protecting and promoting the special places under our care. Work continues daily to find undiscovered species, protect more landscape and maintain the thousands of acres already acquired for Ohio's citizens.

I have shared a large part of my life with ODNR. I met the love of my life, Michele, when she was a naturalist at John Bryan. We raised two children, both of whom spent many hours volunteering at Ohio's state nature preserves. I will miss many things about my time with ODNR, but mostly I will miss the people—those who have already retired and those who continue to work so diligently to protect the best of Ohio.

After nearly 12 years with State Parks and more than 18 with Natural Areas and Preserves, I appreciate saying goodbye one last time to the fine people of this state who understand and cherish our natural history and the natural resources of Ohio.

Respectfully submitted,

**Ron Demmy**  
retired District Preserve Manager

(Botanical goodies, continued from page 3)

found in Wayne National Forest. This beautiful grass is a southern species that reaches its northern limit in extreme southern Ohio.

It is always exciting to find new populations of native orchids and several were found this year. Eric Durbin, an orchid enthusiast with an expertise in north-west Ohio orchids, found one of the state's rarest orchids, long-bracted orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*) in Maumee State Forest. Durbin's find is only the third find for this orchid in the last 30 years.

Other great orchid finds include a new population of the endangered, small white lady-slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*) in Adams County, which was discovered by The Nature Conservancy's Rich McCarty. Don Beam of Holmes County found a large population of small purple fringed orchid (*Platanthera psycodes*) in Wayne County. This endangered orchid was last reported from Wayne County in 1907.

Riley found another population of the endangered Canada plum (*Prunus nigra*) in Wood County. Just a few years ago, he found the first population of this northern shrub not seen since the 1970s.

Lichenologist and fern enthusiast, Ray Showman, and Ohio EPA Biologist Brian Gara rediscovered the tiny, triangle grape fern (*Botrychium lanceolatum*) at Conkle's Hollow State Nature Preserve in Hocking County. This endangered miniature fern was last seen there in 1971.

As in past years, there are too many "best finds" to report here, but the complete list may be found on the division's website at [www.ohiodnr.com/dnap](http://www.ohiodnr.com/dnap) and click on Natural Heritage Database. The division appreciates all of its volunteer botanists who continue to share their fascinating finds with us each year. 🌸

**Rick Gardner**  
Heritage Botanist



triangle grape fern



small purple fringed orchid



Rocky Mountain bulrush



# Ohio's Birds of Prey

**SPRING IS A TIME OF CHANGE AND REBIRTH. THE FOREST BEGINS TO GROW ITS GREEN CANOPY AND COLORFUL BLOOMS WHILE THE AIR BECOMES FILLED WITH THE CALLS OF FROGS, TOADS AND SONGBIRDS LOOKING FOR MATES AND BUILDING NESTS. OHIO'S BIRDS OF PREY, LIKE THEIR SONGBIRD COUSINS ARE ALSO RETURNING TO MATE, NEST AND FLEDGE THEIR YOUNG.**

More than 400 species of birds have been found in the state, but only 34 are species of owls, falcons, vultures, hawks and eagles. The diversity among these birds of prey is great. From the tiny Northern saw-whet owl weighing about the same as a candy bar to the majestic bald eagle which tips the scales at 15 pounds, each bird has its place in Ohio's forests and fields.

Slightly larger than the saw-whet owl, the Eastern screech owl makes its home in Ohio. Commonly found, it stands about 8 inches high and weighs about 6 ounces. On a quiet night in forested areas, the eerie call of this small predator is easily identified. A silent nighttime

hunter, this owl feeds on large moths and other insects.

A species starring on websites statewide is the peregrine falcon. Its striped body and black hooded tail and wings create a distinctive color pattern for the fastest bird on Earth. More and more cities throughout the falcon's



*red-tailed hawk*

range in Ohio are offering man-made nest boxes atop some of the highest buildings, recreating the falcon's original cliff top habitat. City workers in Akron, Cleveland and Columbus are regularly treated to the aerial acrobatics of this bird as it hunts pigeons and other birds at speeds of up to 200 miles per hour. Peregrine falcons are listed as a state-threatened species in Ohio but in recent years their population has been slowly increasing.

More often seen than the falcon, the red-tailed hawk is a species that is finding some benefit from human activity. Despite the rush of speeding cars, the grass-lined roads and high-



*bald eagle*



*osprey*

*(Osprey photo by J. Martin, all other photos by M. Mainhart)*

ways of the state provide these birds with great hunting grounds. It's not hard to spot a red-tail perched in a roadside tree scanning the ground for small animals such as chipmunks, rabbits and the occasional snake. They're a sight to see flying overhead; their reddish tail feathers make a grand show.

Known to occasionally feed on carrion, fish is this bird of prey's food of choice. With its stately white feathered head and neck, massive body and 7 foot wingspan, it's easy to see why the bald eagle is our national symbol. Images of bald eagles surround us in our daily lives, but it's only been in recent years that Ohioans have begun seeing these stately birds in their natural habitat.

In 1979, only four pairs of eagles could be found in the state. Today, due to the efforts of wildlife agencies, more than 100 active nests were recorded in 2004 and the number increases annually. An excellent place to view an active nest is at Tinker's Creek State Nature Preserve in Portage County. A new observation deck opened late last year enables all visitors to view the eagles from a safe distance.

A bird often mistaken for other species is the osprey. It feeds in similar habitats as the eagle but is much smaller at 4 pounds. Its body is white but the underside of its wings is mottled. It is also distinguished by the dark mask around its eyes. Another fish eater, it is the only raptor whose outer toe is reversible, allowing it to grab its prey with two toes in front and two toes in back. Adapting well to urban environments in Ohio, man-made nest platforms are attracting these birds.

Despite differences in diet, size, color patterns and nesting habits, these raptors may all be found in Ohio. Keep a look out and you'll soon notice these imposing birds among the others who call the Buckeye state home during spring. 🌸

**Andy Varsho**  
Northeast District Naturalist

## Adams County prairie becomes new state natural landmark

LUKE OSMAN PRAIRIE, LOCATED IN ADAMS COUNTY, IS A FANTASTIC EXAMPLE OF A POST OAK OPENING OR CEDAR BARREN COMMUNITY. THE SITE BOASTS A DOZEN STATE-LISTED PLANT SPECIES INCLUDING ROUGH RATTLESNAKE-ROOT, PRAIRIE FALSE INDIGO, AMERICAN ALOE AND TALL LARKSPUR.

The prairie is named for a former owner, by request of its current owners, the Cox family.

"Luke was an interesting guy... kind of a recluse. I tried several times to buy his property, but he never agreed to sell it to me," said Mr. Garland Cox.

Cox was later able to purchase this rare habitat by buying the property from another gentleman who had purchased it from Osman.

Prairie openings, such as Luke Osman Prairie, feature scattered post oaks and Eastern red cedars. Little bluestem is

the dominant grass with big bluestem and Indian grass also occurring there. Prairie dock, whorled rosinweed and many other prairie wildflowers may be found in these openings.

The underlying bedrock, Silurian-aged Estill shale (also called Crab Orchard shale), quickly disintegrates when at the surface. It forms a hard clay that is prone to erosion, often forming deep gullies. These soils make it very difficult for trees, or any vegetation for that matter to become established perpetuating the open, prairie habitat.

Similar examples of this rare habitat may be seen at Adams Lake and Chaparral Prairie state nature preserves.

Ohio's Natural Landmark designation is voluntary and in no way impacts landowner rights. If you're interested in more information, please call **(614) 265-6419**. 🌸

**Rick Gardner**  
Heritage Botanist

## Stream Volunteers Needed

Stream quality monitoring is a fun and easy way to volunteer for the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program. Workshops and equipment are free; all you need is to jump in and get wet! To view the full calendar and learn more, visit [www.ohiodnr.com/dnap](http://www.ohiodnr.com/dnap).



### Central Ohio –

Tiffany Taylor, (614) 265-6422

#### **Darby Creek** – August 15

10 am – Prairie Oaks Metropark, Franklin County

#### **Kokosing River** – August 5

6 pm – Riverside Park, Knox County

#### **Mohican River** – June 27

10 am – Mohican State Park, Ashland County

### Northwest Ohio –

Anne Coburn-Griffis, (419) 981-6319

#### **Maumee River** – June 13

10 am – Farnsworth Metropark, Lucas County

12:30 pm – Otsego Park, Wood County

#### **Sandusky River** – June 20

1 pm – Tindall Bridge, Sandusky County

### Southwest Ohio –

Bob Welch, (513) 934-0751

#### **Stillwater River** – June 20

9 am – DeWeese Park, Montgomery County

2 pm – Stillwater Prairie Access, Miami County



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# Summer 2009 Natural Areas Discovery Series

## **SE Ohio – Hocking County**

*Saturday, July 18*

### **NatureCache**

Conkle's Hollow – 10 am

We'll be using GPS coordinates to locate some of the best features of the preserve including the natural geologic wonders found throughout this site. Pre-registration encouraged. For more details, call **(740) 380-8919**.

## **SW Ohio – Adams County**

*Saturday, August 1*

### **Open House**

Chaparral Prairie – 10 am to 1 pm

Come along on a guided hike at one of the most diverse and easily accessible prairies in the Bluegrass Region of Ohio. Many colorful prairie flowers will be at their peak bloom. For more information, contact **(937) 544-9750**.

## **NW Ohio – Lucas County**

*Saturday, August 15*

### **Wetland Wonders**

Irwin Prairie – 1 pm

Join this guided walk of the 1.25 mile boardwalk trail that winds through the wetland wonders of Irwin Prairie. This preserve is Ohio's finest example of a twig rush wet prairie remaining in the Oak Openings region. You'll see many unusual prairie plants at their peak bloom. For more information, contact **(419) 445-1775**.

## **SW Ohio – Adams County**

*Saturday, September 12*

### **Monarch Butterfly Tagging**

Chaparral Prairie – 1 to 4 pm

The unbelievable life cycle and cross-continental migration of these beautiful insects will be the focus of this family-oriented program. Participants will assist naturalists in the capturing, tagging and release of migrating Monarch butterflies. For more details, contact **(937) 544-9750**.



## *Preserving Nature Today for the Needs of Tomorrow*

### **Mission Statement:**

*Administer a system of nature preserves and scenic rivers by identifying and protecting Ohio's significant natural features.*

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