



# Nature Notes



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF DARKE COUNTY PARKS

December 2016 – February 2017

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~9TH ANNUAL~

## WALKIN' IN A WINTER WONDERLAND

Saturday, December 3: 6:00pm - 9:00pm  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

This holiday season join Darke County Parks for an evening stroll through our winter wonderland! There will be over 350 luminaries lighting your way along the wooded trails, allowing for a peaceful winter's night in nature. As you hike along the illuminated trail toward the log house and blacksmith shop, you can enjoy the crisp air, the bright stars, and perhaps the light crunch of snow on this early December evening.

In the log house the fire will be warm with holiday snacks and drinks to sample. Enjoy pioneer music of Christmas past as you relax in the comforts of the 18th century. Holiday crafts for all ages will be available upstairs in the log house and in the Nature Center to fuel the memories of this staff-favorite event. The Nature Center and gift shop will be open throughout the event offering a chance to discover a selection of unique gifts, or that perfect holiday stocking stuffer! Don't forget to bring a votive candle (or two) as a donation for next year's path!

*Walkin' in a Winter Wonderland* is the perfect event for the whole family to celebrate the winter season. Start a family tradition this year!

## OUR MISSION

The Mission of Darke County Park District is to acquire and preserve land areas possessing special natural and historical features and to manage and maintain these resources for the benefit of its residents through appropriate educational and passive recreational programs and activities.

## HAND-FEED A CHICKADEE

Saturday, January 28

Registration for desired time slot required / Dress for the weather



**Back by popular demand** is our hand feeding winter bird event!

This was absolutely wonderful last year and we can't wait to give you the chance to join us again. With a little patience and time, you'll have our feathered friends taking seeds right out of your hands. Register by choosing a time slot at 1pm, 1:30pm, 2pm, 2:30pm, 3pm, or 3:30pm. Please be prompt to allow as much time for your session.



## WINTER ENCAMPMENT

Saturday, January 7: 9-11am and 1-3pm

Shawnee Prairie Preserve Log House

*The Wilcox family has graciously extended* their hospitality and the use of their opulent log home to a group of long hunters traveling through the Ohio territory during these bitter months. They will have a roof over their heads and a warm fire to rest by here at Shawnee Prairie. Come visit with the Greenville Muzzleloaders and friends to learn about the long hunter and frontier way of life of 200 years ago.



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK...

The Mission of the Darke County Park District is to acquire and preserve land areas possessing special natural and historical features and to manage and maintain these resources for the benefit of its residents through appropriate educational and passive recreational programs and activities. Our mission statement was adopted by the board during Art Burke's tenure as park director. It has been revisited by the board on a regular basis to affirm its importance to the guidance of the district. It continues to be a guiding force behind the decisions the park board has made over the years.

Our Darke County Park District has seen change as it has grown. Most noticeable is its presence in Darke County. The parks have grown in number to a point that we have to really hustle to keep all in a condition that will allow for passive recreation activities by the public and attempt to keep the land in its "natural state". Our park land has been acquired through private donation or through some kind of application of a grant we have successfully attained.

As the park district grew over the years, so did our offerings to the public. Our staff provides traditional outdoor activities with groups, travelling to schools for curriculum enrichment opportunities in the classroom, as well as educating those children on site at Shawnee Prairie Preserve. Summer camps for kids of all ages are attractive to many families for their learning experience as well as summer fun!

Our seasonal public events have gained regional notoriety. First, Maple Sugaring in late winter is followed by Earth Day activities in the spring. In the summer, there has been entertainment at the outdoor stage of Shawnee Prairie. Of course Prairie Days, at the end of September, has grown to be a favorite for young and old. The activities are endless. Our sugar shack, log house, and blacksmith shop with all their volunteers are showcased that weekend. To wrap up the year, the Walkin' in the Winter Wonderland event, with luminaries aglow, wind around to the log house the first weekend of December. All of these events are free of charge to the public. It's so nice to see events held locally like these, allowing families to do something together without having to travel long distance or have to pay for admission!

Our park district has been fortunate to have such a wonderful group of supporters and volunteers through the years. Our Friends of the Parks have been there for the park district since the first levy approval. We are fortunate for their steadfast loyalty to the district. Without them we would not be where we are today. The recently formed Phoenix Committee has played an integral part in the advancement of the multi-use trail that now runs from eastern Darke County to the edge of Greenville. We also have a large group of Darke Countians who want to help but just volunteer when they can and do what they feel most comfortable doing. Truly, a deep felt sense of gratitude goes out to those who have taken an active role in helping the Darke County Park District.

As I wind up my 24th year and last term as a park commissioner, please accept my thank you to all of you for your support of Darke County Parks. It has been a pleasure to have served along past Commissioners Susan Gray and Dan Schipfer and with our current Board members John Cook and Roger Brocius. We have a great staff driven by a personable, creative Director, Roger VanFrank. Thank you for my opportunity to promote good stewardship of the Earth, here in Darke County.

Please visit your parks as often as you can. Stay involved with the park district if you already are and if you're not, what's holding you back? Get off the couch, and go walk a trail at one of your parks. Your body and mind will thank you. Call a friend, and take them with you, too!  
See you on the trails,

~Steve Shaltry~

Board of Park Commissioners (1992-2016)

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS...

### Memorials / Honorariums

#### "In Memory" of Floyd Whistler

- Roger Brocius, Jim & Kay Poeppelman, Richard & Glenna Kerns, Harvey & Phyllis Crick, Gary & Judy Ebinger, Janey & Leo Rindue, Marlene Blair, Tyler & Dana Gray

#### "In Memory" of Mary Jean Martin for Educational Children's Programming

- Mike & Torri Brown, Dick Martin

### Monetary Donations

Crowing Coops 4-H  
Darke County 4-H Committee  
Declores Montessori School  
Ansonia Early Childhood Education  
Mercer Savings Bank  
Darke County Civic Theater  
Ned Unger  
Darke County Birders  
Friends of the Darke County Parks

### Grants Awarded

- Harry D. Stephens Memorial, Inc.    □ Darke County Foundation/Ami  
*Toward cost of civil war programming*    McClurkin Fund  
*Toward cost of civil war programming*

### Programming & Event Materials

Linebaugh family / Karen Jo Maule / Canteen Shop / Sherry Marten / Eikenberry's IGA / Cavalier Clothing / Montage / Greenville Door Sales / Bob Hofacker / Countryside Gardens, Inc. / Steve Kolb / Pam Pohlman / Ansonia Lumber / Pitman Family / Dana Williams / Aultman Produce / Cornerstone Construction / Mark Wion / Fred Shaw (SUMAC Enterprises) / Gordon Patty / Anna Wetzel / Deb Shiverdecker

### Candlelight Dinner Donations

Margaret Hensel / Torri Brown / Roger Van Frank / Eileen Litchfield / Karen Hoschouer / Carolyn Hollinger / Sandy Hoying / Anna Wetzel / Darlene Dillon / Chuck & Vickie Snyder / Deb Shiverdecker / Barbie & Dudley Hansbarger  
Kim Droesch / Hugh & Malinda Linebaugh

# YOUR GUIDE TO GROUP PROGRAMS



## NATURE'S CLASSROOM FIELDTRIPS

Our school field trip programs are designed to enhance and supplement Ohio's science curriculum. Each program topic addresses current ODOE science grade level indicators and the science benchmarks by academic content standards. There is a fee of \$3 per student for out-of-county schools and groups. For more details, please call 937.548.0165, and ask to speak with Robb.

K	<u>Making Sense of Nature</u> Exploring the natural world using the senses	3	<u>Our Active Earth</u> Investigating the processes that shape the Earth
K	<u>What's Wild</u> Understanding <i>living</i> things and their basic needs	4	<u>Positively Plants</u> Plant structure, function, and life cycles
1	<u>Resources: Naturally</u> Defining natural resources and conservation	4	<u>Pioneer Living</u> Experiencing local frontier life in the late 18th century
1-2	<u>A Look at Habitats</u> Ohio's animals and their basic needs	5	<u>It's All Connected</u> Tracing the flow of energy through natural systems
2	<u>Through the Seasons</u> Seasonal changes and weather influences	4-6	<u>Wading Into Wetlands</u> The function, value, and biotic diversity of wetlands
3	<u>Life Cycles</u> Understanding plant and animal birth, life, growth, and survival		

## Maple Sugarin' School Days

Join us for our favorite seasonal school program: *Nature's Sweet Treat!* This program allows students to observe the process of turning sap into the sweetest of nature's treats, maple syrup! Topics will cover the science behind maple syrup as well as the rich cultural history of maple sugaring. Students will have the option of trying some maple sugar and fresh maple syrup at the end of the program as well.



*February 21 - 28*

The program lasts for one hour, and classes are welcome to eat their packed lunch before or after the program. Registration is required; please call the Nature Center at 937-548-0165

*(ask to speak with Robb)*



# YOUR GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

## PARENT & PRESCHOOLER ADVENTURES

Parent and Preschooler Adventures is a series of monthly, hour-long programs designed to give parents and their preschoolers an opportunity to investigate nature through hands-on activities, hikes, stories, songs and take-home projects. The "Little Explorers" Wednesday classes are for 2-3 year olds, and the "Seedlings" Thursday classes are for 4-5 year olds. **Registration is required**, and each class has a fee of \$2.00.

### DECEMBER - THE DEEP AND SNOWY WOOD

Wed., December 14 (2-3 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Thurs., December 15 (4-5 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

A deer, a squirrel, and a mole know a secret. They know that once a year a very special person pays a brief visit to the Deep and Snowy Wood. Who could this special person be? Join us to find out the answer at the end of the heartwarming Christmas tale.

### JANUARY - Give a Hoot

Wed., January 11 (2-3 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Thurs., January 12 (4-5 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Whoohoo is it that calls in the night? Explore the owls of Ohio through song, story, games, and crafts. The secretive, silent hunters will delight the senses of your preschooler.

### FEBRUARY - TRICKY TRACKS AND MAMMAL FACTS

Wed., February 8 (2-3 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Thurs., February 9 (4-5 yr. olds); 10-11am  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Coyotes, beavers, and bears, oh my! An exploration of everything mammals will lead us into the woods in search of signs. We'll take a closer look at furs, skulls, and tracks of our most common mammals found at Shawnee Prairie.



## PARK P.A.L.S.

Park P.A.L.S. is a series of monthly programs designed for children in grades K-2nd who are interested in nature. P.A.L.S. stands for Practicing And Learning Stewardship. The program's mission is to develop future earth stewards through meaningful educational opportunities and hands-on experiences in the natural world. Programs are held on a Saturday of every month and are supervised by staff & adult volunteers. A materials fee of \$3.00 is charged for each program, and registration is required.

### DECEMBER - COYOTE HOWL

Saturday, December 10, 10am - 12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Explore the world of Ohio's largest wild canine! Bring your sense of adventure as we learn how these predators fit in to the ecosystem and how they are adapting to urban living. Study tracks, fur, and scat as we do fun activities to discover more about the cunning coyote.



### JANUARY - BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Saturday, January 14, 10am - 12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Who is gathered at our warm and cozy bird window this winter? Are they here year round, or do they migrate? Learn the answers to this and more as we play games and do a craft while watching our feathered friends feast from the feeders.



### FEBRUARY - LOVE TO RECYCLE

Saturday, February 11, 10am - 12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Fall head over heels with saving the environment! Explore how recycling works and ways you can reduce the amount you throw away. We will also learn how to reuse discarded items to make a cool craft.



## JUNIOR NATURALISTS

Jr. Naturalists is a series of monthly programs designed to give 3rd-6th grade students a hands-on interaction with the natural world and a look at our current and historical place within it. Hikes, games, and service projects are all part of this exciting integrated study group. Programs are held on a Saturday of every month and are supervised by staff & adult volunteers. A materials fee of \$3.00 is charged for each program, and registration is required.

### DECEMBER - AN EVERGREEN CHRISTMAS

Saturday, December 17, 9:30am-12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

From the sweeping white pine needles to the prickly blue spruce, Christmas conifers come in many different forms. We'll discover why these plants are such a Yuletide tradition, how they stay green throughout the year, and the many types right here in Darke County.



### JANUARY - SEED SWAP DAY

Saturday, January 28, 9:30am-12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Seeds were one of the first commodities valued and traded. For millennia gardeners traded their saved seeds to try new varieties, save money, and improve their gardens' biodiversity. We'll look at the difference between heirloom and hybrid seeds, learn how to properly collect and store seeds, and do some trading of our own.



### FEBRUARY - IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS...

Saturday, February 25, 9:30am-12pm; Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Animal tracking is as old as the human race. We'll follow our ancestors' footsteps by following the animals' footsteps. We'll learn to identify basic tracks and signs, then head outside to check out the snow (or mud) and see where the footsteps lead us.



# YOUR GUIDE TO CITIZEN SCIENCE

## Nest Box Building & Monitoring

Thursday, January 26: 6:30pm

Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required / Fee: \$10

*Bluebirds, chickadees, and titmice*, all of these birds commonly use man-made nestboxes each spring, and with our desire for removing dead-standing trees, boxes are vitally important for survival. Come learn how to safely monitor and see the miracle of life from egg to fledgling! We'll focus on the do's and don't's, how you can help out at Shawnee Prairie, and at your own home. Finally, we'll wrap up the morning by building a nestbox for your own backyard! Please bring a hammer.



## Pollinator Clinic

Saturday, February 4: 1pm

Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required

*If you have visited the nature center last summer or fall*, you surely noticed the beautiful flowers lining the park entrance and adjacent field. Contrary to popular belief, the installment of blooms was not placed there for human enjoyment, although that was a wonderful side effect; the flowers were planted for the pollinators. You may have heard of Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative, a partnership with ODOT and many other agencies to create and improve pollinator habitat in Ohio. What can you do in your backyard to join the movement and mow less? We will welcome John Kaiser with the Ohio Division of Wildlife for this informative program.

# YOUR GUIDE TO OUTDOOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

## WINTER SURVIVAL SHELTERS

Saturday, January 7: 12pm / Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Registration Required / FREE

*Give me shelter.* Many of us spend a fair amount of time outdoors, and while many do not choose to camp during the cold winter months, it's nice to know how to set up a shelter in the event of an emergency while on the trails. Join us as we welcome Rob Simpson from the Canteen Shop back for a winter shelter building course. Dress for the weather as we will be outside for the duration of this survival course.



## Backyard Sugaring

Saturday, February 18: 10am

Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required

Just in time for the upcoming maple sugaring season, join us to master a new woodland skill! You will learn how to tap your own maples, how and when to collect the sap and finally, how to go about turning that sap into maple goodness! Demonstrations and hands-on experience will ensure that by the end of the program, you'll have the skills needed to produce your very own maple syrup!

## EARLY MORNING DISCOVERY HIKES

Note:  
Winter Dates

First & Third Tuesdays - 8am  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

There is something invigorating about winter's crisp morning air! We will focus on birds, tree ID, winter animal tracks, and anything else that catches our eyes! Meet in the Nature Center parking lot dressed for the weather. Please note, this winter we are only meeting on the first and the third Tuesday of each month.



## PROJECT FEEDERWATCH

Tuesdays & Wednesdays - 9:30-11:30am  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve

Calling all birders! Project FeederWatch is an annual citizen science program organized by Cornell University which studies winter bird populations. No matter your birding level, beginner or expert, we need your help! We'll gather inside the Nature Center and count the birds that visit our bird-feeding station, and did we mention we'll have warm drinks?

## DOWN TO EARTH BOOK CLUB

*Do you like reading books by nature writers, books about the outdoors, or maybe even books about pioneers settling Ohio? "Down to Earth" will feature a different book every quarter. Everyone is welcome to come discuss the work, enjoy some yummy treats, and suggest future books.*

### 1491: NEW REVELATIONS OF THE AMERICAS BEFORE COLUMBUS

Monday, February 6: 6:30pm  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve



In our fifth season, we invite you to read *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* by Charles C. Mann. This work of science, history, and archaeology radically alters our understanding of the Americas before Columbus' arrival in 1492. Contrary to what so many learn in school, the pre-Columbian Indians were not sparsely settled in a pristine wilderness; rather, there were huge numbers who actively molded and influenced the land. Please give us a call to let us know you plan on participating.

# 3 Months At A Glance

## YOUR GUIDE TO WHAT'S HAPPENING IN DARKE COUNTY PARKS

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>December</b>						
4 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	5	6 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am Project FeederWatch Friends Christmas Carry-in 6pm*	7	8 DCP Board Meeting 4pm	9	10 Park PALS 10am*
11 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	12 Volunteer Gathering: Raptors 10am*	13 Olde Thyme Gardeners - 12pm Project FeederWatch Full Cold Moon Hike 5:30pm @ Turkeyfoot Preserve	14 Little Explorers Preschool 10am*	15 Seedlings Preschool 10am*	16	17 Jr. Naturalists 9:30am*
18 Nature Center -Closed - Darke County Birders Christmas Bird Count	19 Naturally Fit 4pm @ Alice Bish Park	20 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am Project FeederWatch	21 ~Winter Solstice~	22	23	24 NATURE CENTER CLOSED
25 -CHRISTMAS DAY- NATURE CENTER CLOSED	26 NATURE CENTER CLOSED	27 Christmas Tree Drop-off Begins Project FeederWatch Birders Meeting 6pm	28	29	30	31 Birds of Winter 9am
Unless indicated, all programs begin at Shawnee Prairie Preserve.	Programs marked with an (*) require registration.	 <p>Not sure what to do with your dried-out cut Christmas tree? Why not bring it to Shawnee Prairie Preserve to recycle it back to nature! All shredded trees will be used on the trails. Please remove all ornaments, lights, wire, tinsel, and nails prior to arrival. We regret we can not accept trees with fake snow. Drop off dates run from Dec 27-Jan 13.</p>				

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>January</h1>						
1 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	2 <b>HAPPY NEW YEAR!</b> NATURE CENTER & OFFICE - CLOSED -	3 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Friends Meeting 6:30pm	4	5 New Year; New Hike 10am @ Alice Bish Park	6	7 Winter Shelter Building 12pm* Winter Longhunter Encampment 9-11am & 1-3pm
8 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	9 <b>Volunteer Gathering: Rocks 10am* -or- 6pm*</b>	10 <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Olde Thyme Gardeners Meeting 12pm	11 Little Explorers Preschool 10am*	12 Seedlings Preschool 10am* DCP Board Meeting 4pm Full Wolf Moon Hike 6pm	13 Christmas Tree Drop-off Ends	14 Park PALS 10am* Volunteer Open House 2pm
15 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	16 Naturally Fit 4pm @ Tecumseh Point	17 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am <b>Project FeederWatch</b>	18	19 Nature Did It First 6:30pm*	20 Broom Making 6pm*	21 Broom Making 9am*, 12pm* and 3pm*
22 Nature Center -Closed -	23	24 <b>FeederWatch</b> Birders Meeting 7pm <b>FeederWatch</b>	25 <b>Project FeederWatch</b>	26 Nest box Monitoring 6:30pm*	27	28 Jr. Naturalists 9:30am* Handfeed a Chickadee 1pm*, 1:30pm*, 2pm*, 2:30pm* 3pm*, 3:30pm*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February</h1>						
			1 <b>Project FeederWatch</b>	2	3	4 Pollinator Clinic 1pm*
5	6 Down to Earth Book Club 6:30pm*	7 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Friends of DCP 6:30pm	8 Little Explorers Preschool 10am*	9 Seedlings Preschool 10am* Moon Hike 6:30pm @ Eidson Woods Preserve DCP Board Mtg 4pm	10	11 Park PALS 10am* Meet the Animals 2pm*
12 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	13 <b>Volunteer Gathering: Herbal Tea 10am* -or- 6pm*</b>	14 <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Olde Thyme Gardeners Meeting - 12pm	15	16	17	18 Backyard Sugaring 10am*
19 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	20 Naturally Fit 4pm @ Donna May Campbell Preserve	21 Early Morning Discovery Hike 8am <b>Project FeederWatch</b>	22	23 Maple Sugarin' School Days <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Worm Composting 6pm*	24	25 Jr. Naturalists 10am* Antler Amble 2pm @ Worth Preserve
26 Nature Center & Park Office -Closed -	27 <b>Maple Sugarin' School Days</b> Here Comes Spring 9am @ Eidson Woods Preserve	28 <b>Project FeederWatch</b> Cast Iron 5:30pm* Birders Meeting 7pm			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> - First Quarter</li> <li> - Full Moon</li> <li> - Last Quarter</li> <li> - New Moon</li> </ul>	
					Be sure to join us for our annual maple syrup tours through our sugar shack on March 4th!	



Mark Your Calendars!

## Maple Syrup Day!

### Annual Maple Syrup Festival

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Teachers: See page 3 for more info about our special school-age program!



Mark Your Calendars!

# YOUR GUIDE TO NATURAL HISTORY PROGRAMS

## WONDROUS WINTER HIKES

**Birds of Winter:** December 31: 9am @ Shawnee Prairie

**New Year, New Hike:** January 5: 10am @ Alice Bish Park

**Here Comes Spring:** February 27: 9am @ Eidson Woods

**Full Cold Moon:** December 13: 5:30pm @ Turkeyfoot Preserve

**Full Wolf Moon:** January 12: 6pm @ Shawnee Prairie Preserve

**Full Snow Moon:** February 9: 6:30pm @ Eidson Woods Preserve

Winter's brisk weather brings with it a unique beauty. Join us to seek out these seasonal sights and hiking opportunities. We'll travel to a variety of parks to check out what the winter landscapes have in store for us. "Birds of Winter" will start with a quick presentation on possible bird species, and then we will take a bird hike and enjoy the bird window in the nature center. Please meet at the designated park dressed for the weather.

*Please note: Full Moon hikes start at sunset, so flashlights may be useful.*

## NATURE DID IT FIRST!

Thursday, January 19: 6:30pm / Shawnee Prairie Preserve  
Registration Required / FREE

Flight. Nature did it first. Velcro. Nature did it first. Umbrella. Nature did it first. Biomimicry is when we look to nature for inspiration and innovation for our own tools, buildings, even art. The adaptations of plants and animals have long been the catalyst for a countless number of human inventions. Spend an evening discovering the items you use every day and how nature did it first and, most likely, better!



## MEET THE ANIMALS

Saturday, February 11: 2pm  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required / FREE

From the tiny brown snake to the Great Horned Owl, we have over 18 species waiting to meet you! Learn why these animals live at the Nature Center and what it takes to care for them on a daily basis. Find out why each is an important part of the ecosystem and how you can help keep them safe. Bring a friend and prepare to have an up-close encounter as you see (and possibly touch!) some of the most amazing native animals that call Darke County home.

## WORM COMPOSTING

Thursday, February 23: 6pm  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required / Fee: \$15

Learn how indoor vermicomposting helps you and the environment! Explore the truths and myths associated with compost while we lead you through all aspects of worm bin care. Discover how choosing the correct worms, maintaining good ratios, and monitoring moisture can give you what gardeners refer to as "black gold". Participants will receive small starter bins, worms, and materials to take home and get started. *Register before February 3rd.*

## ANTLER AMBLE

Saturday, February 25: 2pm  
Worth Family Nature Preserve / FREE

We'll meet at Worth Family Nature Preserve and leave the trails in search of shed white-tail antlers. During the late winter when the amount of daylight is at its lowest, the bucks' bodies will break down the connective tissue, and the antlers will fall off. Not all antlers fall off in pairs though. Matched sets have been found miles apart. We'll see if we can find any sheds or at least signs of these large mammals in the area. Dress for the weather and being off trail.





# Naturalist Corner



## POLLINATORS FOR THE PEOPLE

One out of every three bites of food you eat is a result of the symbiotic relationship between plants and pollinators. Pollinator is a very widely used word among the environmentally conscious crowds as of late. Perhaps you have heard of the Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative or seen one of their billboards? Pardon the pun, but pollinator is not just a temporary 'buzz' word. Therefore, the definition of the word begs our attention, so, what exactly is a pollinator? It is any animal that transfers pollen from plant to plant. Specifically, pollination is the act of transferring pollen grains from the male (anther) of a flower to the female (stigma). The intricately designed adaptations of both plant and pollinator complement each others' existence. The unintended consequence of an animal's activity on a flower is the creation of fruit and ultimately seeds.

Pollination seems like a simple concept; however, the impact the process has on our survival is substantial. Of the 1,400 crops grown globally, both for food and industrial products, almost 80% require pollination by animals. In the United States, pollination produces \$10 billion worth of products annually. Food and drinks produced with the help of pollinators include apples, peaches, lemons, chocolate, coffee, melons, potatoes, tomatoes, almonds, and tequila just to name a few. It is safe to say that without pollinators the human race will cease to exist. The Banana Slug String Band sings a song called, "Dirt Made My Lunch". Take a moment and think about what you ate today. How many different kinds of food you ate grew in the dirt? Dirt made your lunch, didn't it? As many people have paraphrased John Muir, "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." Everything is connected, and nothing proves this notion more than the role of pollinators within the earth's ecosystems.

There are approximately 200,000 different species of animals around the world that act as pollinators. Of these, about 1,000 are vertebrates, such as birds, bats, and small mammals, and the rest are invertebrates, including flies, beetles, butterflies, and bees. At this point you're probably wondering, "OK, I see the importance of pollinators, but why is this such

a hot button issue?" Unfortunately, human activities have destroyed and fragmented many native pollinator habitats. Many remaining habitat areas are isolated and degraded by invasive plant species, making them less suitable for native pollinators and other wildlife. These changes in habitat can lead to a reduction of native pollinator food sources and sites for mating, nesting, roosting, and migration. Excessive use and improper application of many pesticides impact pollinators and their habitats.

Some insecticides directly kill pollinators, particularly pollinating insects, and herbicides reduce forage plant diversity by killing wildflowers. Non-native pollinators, such as honeybees, can out-compete native pollinators for local nectar resources, placing them at greater risk of decline. The destruction and fragmentation of pollinator habitats have led to significant declines in many populations. At least 185 species of pollinators are considered threatened or extinct by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). There is hope though, and there are ways you can help. Simple things like a reduction in pesticide use, mowing less, planting more pollinator friendly plants, and providing a water source are easy ways to encourage population growth.

If you've visited Shawnee Prairie Preserve this past growing season, you witnessed a beautiful spectacle. The vibrant flowers greeting visitors as they drove the lane afforded Darke County Parks many compliments, however our purpose wasn't to please our patrons. The flowers were carefully seeded to attract and support pollinators, and wow, did it work. It was like driving through a Disney movie with birds and butterflies flying all around in waves of delight. In fact, on a warm September afternoon, Robb witnessed over 50 individual butterflies and at least 6 monarchs visiting the blooms in one small portion. The outcome of the meadow was magical, purposeful and beneficial for pollinators and people. I urge those of you who took pictures here, gazed at the colors, complimented the staff, and smiled when you drove by, to join us for our Pollinators Workshop. Leave a piece for pollinators in your backyard.

Mandy Martin - Naturalist



## YOUR GUIDE TO CULTURAL HISTORY PROGRAMS

### CAST IRON CUISINE 101

Tuesday, February 28: 5:30pm  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve Log House  
Registration Required / Fee: \$5

Does Grandma's cast iron skillet intimidate you? Do you want to use it, but you're afraid of ruining the seasoning? Do you just want to learn some simple and delicious dishes you can make in cast iron? Join us for an introduction to cast iron use, maintenance, and even restoration along with a few basic recipes your family will love. Dress for the weather because this program will take place in the log house. Look for Cast Iron Cuisine 102 in the spring.



### BROOM MAKING

Floor Broom: January 20, 6pm -OR- January 21, 12pm (Fee: \$15)  
Whisk Broom: January 21, 9am -OR- 3pm (Fee: \$12)  
Shawnee Prairie Preserve / Registration Required

We welcome back broom maker Frank Rouse in January. Frank has over 40 years of experience with brooms of all shapes and sizes and loves passing on this skill. Learn how to make a traditional turkey wing whisk that dates back to the late 1700s, a great project for first time broom makers. Consider signing up for the more advanced floor broom class if you've taken a class before. Space is limited; call today.



# FRIENDS OF THE DARKE COUNTY PARKS

Organized in 1995, the Friends of the Darke County Park District is a 501(c)3 corporation whose mission is to "Promote and support the mission of the Darke County Parks through volunteerism and fund-raising". The Friends strive to increase public awareness and appreciation of the beauty found within Darke County Parks. Their volunteerism shows throughout the county through Adopt-a-Waterway & Highway programs, helping staff run events such as Prairie Days, hosting the Waffle Breakfast, managing the endowment fund, and staffing the gift shop in the Nature Center. Business meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month beginning at 6:30pm, with a gathering or program being held at 7pm immediately following the business meeting. Please join us!

## A Message from the Friends:

A big thank you goes out to all volunteers for a very successful 2016 Prairie Days. It's by far the best year we've had yet!

I would like to mention that the park is always in need of volunteers. There is a wide variety of jobs/duties that need filled each month. To me, personally, it is very rewarding to be a volunteer. To see the look of enjoyment on a child's face from learning about Darke County history, nature, wildlife, plants, and flowers is priceless, so please think about what you could do to help out Ohio's favorite park system. One such opportunity would be the Winter Wonderland walk on December 3. Please contact Kathi McQueen, our volunteer coordinator, to sign up. Also, the Friends of the Darke County Parks would always like to have new members.

Lastly, I hope to see all volunteers and Friends members at the December 6 Christmas carry-in dinner. Drinks and tableware will be provided, so just bring your favorite dish to share. We will eat at 6 p.m. We will play games and draw door prizes, so come and enjoy good company and good eats. No regular Friends meeting will be held.

*-Barbie Hansbarger, President*

## Meetings

December 6 @ 6pm

Christmas Carry-in

January 3 @ 6:30pm

February 7 @ 6:30pm

## The Olde Thyme Gardeners

The Olde Thyme Gardeners have a strong interest in heritage and pioneer gardening techniques used in the 19th century. They also maintain the heirloom garden adjacent to the log house at Shawnee Prairie Preserve. No special training is necessary to become a member; the only requirement is an interest in gardening practices of 1800-1820 and a love of growing things. Meetings are held each month at 12pm. Contact them at:

Blog- <http://oldethymegarden.blogspot.com/>

E-mail- [oldethymegardener@gmail.com](mailto:oldethymegardener@gmail.com)



### Meetings

December 13

January 10

February 14



### Spring Workshop:

Sunday March 19, 2pm

The Olde Thyme Gardeners are excited to announce their spring workshop. This year's speaker will be local historian and naturalists Susan Gray. Topic to be determined. Registration will be required and will be \$10. Details will be made available via their facebook or email at [oldethymegardener@gmail.com](mailto:oldethymegardener@gmail.com), or check out their blog at <http://oldethymegarden.blogspot.com>.

## DARKE COUNTY CANOE & KAYAK CLUB

The Darke County Canoe and Kayak Club was organized to promote canoeing and kayaking. In non-paddling months, we enjoy hiking. The club is open to all experienced paddlers. Beginning paddlers can learn through the parks' instructional programs. Our meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at 7pm in the Nature Center. For updates and to reserve space on a trip, call Carol Hathaway at 937-547-0220.

### Meetings



None during winter months.



### Field Trips

January 21 - Hike Charleston Falls

February 18 - Hike Erie Towpath Trail  
(near New Bremen)

## DARKE COUNTY PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

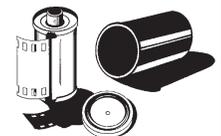
The Darke County Photography Club was formed in 1995 and promotes photography in & around Darke County. Presentations are also given by guest speakers on all subjects of photography. Whether you are a beginner or advanced photographer, all are invited to attend the monthly meetings held the third Tuesday of each month at 7pm and are held at the Shawnee Prairie Preserve Nature Center.



December 15

January 19

February 16



Meet Karen Jo Maule, this quarter's Volunteer in the Spotlight! A volunteer in the parks for more than 3 years, Karen Jo is an avid reader, loves music, spending time with friends and family, and traveling. She is a dedicated front desk volunteer but helps with big events as well. What she enjoys the most about volunteering is the time that staff takes to tell her thank you. When talking with friends or potential volunteers, Karen Jo lets them know how appreciative the park staff is and the flexibility in interests and scheduling. Looking into the future, Karen Jo would like to see the park grow with more parks, additional animal ambassadors, and additional space added to the Nature Center. Thank you for your dedication Karen Jo!

## VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT



"THOSE WHO CAN, DO.  
THOSE WHO CAN DO MORE, VOLUNTEER."

A big thank you goes out to everyone who helped at my very first Prairie Days! I feel we were a great success. We had over 160 individual volunteers who worked a whopping 1200+ hours just on Prairie Days weekend alone. I feel very fortunate to have such dedicated volunteers who clearly love sharing the park with visitors. Going into the New Year, I look forward to building our volunteer ranks, and our biggest advertisement is word of mouth from volunteers like you! Tell everyone around you about the park, our mission, and how they can help. Invite them to attend our Volunteer Open House in January or stop by to talk with me in person. See you soon in the parks!

-Kathi McQueen: *Volunteer Coordinator*



### VOLUNTEERS IN THE FIELD

Pam Siegel and Lorraine Gebhardt hiking at the Cincinnati Nature Center during our summer 2016 Volunteer Eco-tour.



## GATHERINGS & TRAININGS

Each month, we offer a different and exciting volunteer training or outing. These workshops will allow you to grow your skills, explore other nature centers and parks, help with group projects, and have fun! Even if you aren't sure about the topic, join us for an enjoyable, social gathering. Most trainings will last two hours. The occasional day-trip will have special times. We hope you will attend often and see this as a small reward for all that you give us. Thank you.

*Registration Required: Call Kathi today!*

- ❑ *December 12, 10am* - Raptors
- ❑ *January 9, 10am OR 6pm* - Rocks
- ❑ *February 13, 10am OR 6pm* - Teas, Trees and Evergreen Leaves
- ❑ *Volunteer Open House: January 14, 2pm* - Start your new year off right by signing up as a volunteer with Darke County Parks! Bring a friend, and learn what you can do to support programming, operations, and special events. Talk with our volunteer coordinator, and meet current volunteers as you find out all there is to know about being a part of the park district.



## DARKE COUNTY BIRDERS CLUB



The Darke County Birders Club is open to beginning and experienced birders alike. Monthly meetings include a short business session followed by a program on a variety of topics. The club meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at Shawnee Prairie Preserve Nature Center. Monthly field trips begin at the Nature Center where directions and carpooling opportunities are discussed. For more information, contact Steve Miller at 547-3340.

### PROGRAMS, MEETINGS, & TRIPS

#### Audubon Annual Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, December 18, 8am

Meet at McDonald's North for census assignments to this co-sponsored event with the Darke Countians for Wildlife Conservation. Count week is three days before and three days after.

#### Meeting

Tuesday, December 27, 6pm

**Annual Christmas Carry-In Dinner:** Find out what new birds have been reported in Darke County for 2016. Bring a covered dish to share. Beverages not provided. Autumn Young will join us to update us on Alaska Sealife Center and Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage.

#### New Year, New Start

Saturday, January 7, 12:30pm

Join us and start your 2017 bird list now!

#### Annual Mystery Trip

Sunday, January 22, 8am

Trip, weather and birds will dictate our destination.

#### Meeting

Tuesday, January 24, 7pm

Big South Fork: Regina will introduce us to the huge National Recreation Area that overlaps Kentucky & Tennessee.

#### Tour De Donut Birding Style

Saturday, February 11, 12:30pm

We will bird the bike trails around Arcanum for winter birds.

#### Carpooler's Choice

Sunday, February 19, 8am

Meet at the Nature Center's parking lot, and we will opt for either Dayton's Great Miami River or Indiana's Brookville Lake.

#### Meeting

Tuesday, February 28, 7pm

*Ohio's Breeding Bird Atlas:* Steve Miller will review this new edition of the atlas.

# Darke County Parks

P.O.Box 801  
4267 State Route 502  
Greenville, OH 45331  
Voice: 937.548.0165  
Fax: 937.548.2935  
www.darkecountyparks.org



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## Quarterly Question:

On what date this winter will the "sun stand still" and will also be the day "the sun turns around"?

Email your answer to [info@darkecountyparks.org](mailto:info@darkecountyparks.org)

*Last quarter's correct answer: Milkweed Tussock Moth. Congrats to Davis Maynard for submitting the correct answer!*

## WISH LIST

If you have any of the following items and would be willing to donate them to Darke County Parks, please contact the park office at 548-0165. Your donations are tax deductible.

- Birdseed for feeder station (sunflower; mix; suet cakes)
- New or used refrigerator
- Large plastic totes w/ lids
- Votive candles
- Mannequin
- Plastic fruit & vegetables
- Empty soup cans

### Darke County Parks Contacts

*Director/Secretary* - Roger Van Frank

*Chief Naturalist* - Robb Clifford

*Naturalist* - Mandy Martin

*Naturalist* - Hannah Wiest

*Volunteer Coordinator/Naturalist* - Kathi McQueen

*Administrative Assistant* - Deb Shiverdecker

*Parks Maintenance* - Wayne Nichols, Craig Kinnison, Ray Bradbury

### Board of Park Commissioners

Roger L. Brocius, President

L. Stephen Shaltry, Vice-President

John M. Cook, Commissioner-At-Large

Questions about the newsletter or operations of the park district may be directed to 937.548.0165

Monday through Friday, 9am-5pm, or send an email to [info@darkecountyparks.org](mailto:info@darkecountyparks.org).



# Sponsor a Bucket



Support Darke County Parks, and sponsor a bucket! Each sponsor will have his/her name placed on a sap bucket along the trail during the Maple Sugarin' Festival on March 4, 2017.

- ⇒ "Amber Grade" (\$25) sponsors will receive a 250 ml bottle of Darke County Parks maple syrup in a decorative maple leaf-shaped glass bottle.
- ⇒ "Fancy Grade" (\$40) sponsors will receive two complimentary tickets to the Waffle & Sausage Breakfast on March 4th from 8AM-noon in addition to a 250 ml bottle of Darke County Parks maple syrup in a decorative maple leaf-shaped glass bottle.

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

(Print as you would like it to appear on the sap bucket.)

**Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please return form & donation by February 15th.

Make checks payable to: Darke County Park District, c/o Naturalist Staff, P.O. Box 801, Greenville OH 45331

