



# ONAPA NEWS

Dedicated to promoting, protecting, and improving Ohio natural areas and preserves.

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## Wild hyacinths: a beauty with history

Story and photos by David Weisenberg

In late September 1805, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and their Corps of Discovery were starving. To me, two of the outstanding features of the Lewis & Clark expedition are their mindset of curiosity and engagement. If humans of any culture could survive in the landscape, then so too could the members of the Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery.

Then on September 20, the Corps were introduced to a plant, somewhat confusingly called "camas," specifically *Camassia scilloides*, which is commonly referred to here in Ohio as wild hyacinth (also confusingly not a hyacinth). The Nez Perces people, who Clark referred to as Chopunnish in his journal, but who called themselves Nimiipuu, had immense quantities of camas bulbs in their storehouse and provided the explorers with sweet bread and soup made from these roots which "were enjoyed heartily." Clark even recounts a recipe for the preservation of the camas bulbs which the Nez Perces called *pas-she-co*.

Calling them by their east-coast name, wild hyacinths are a beautiful, native wildflower comprising six tepals that are the same ethereal lavender-blue color. I suspect that three of the tepals are petals and three are sepals. This speculation comes from viewing the flower buds before their opening as the plant's panicle of flowers blooms from the bottom up as you can see in the photos. The stamens are tipped with bright yellow anthers.

The bulbs self divide and so one of the many striking features of this plant is that they can grow in abundance, with their leafless stems rising above adjacent grasses and other vegetation, displaying their flower clusters. These floral racemes can have up to fifty flowers per stalk. In Ohio, they bloom in May.

I've been observing this uncommon plant for several years and am always delighted to find it in publicly accessible places. For the most part, my form of identification is that once I saw the flowers for the very first time, the unique light-blue color stayed in my mind's eye—and being tuned in to that color is how I have found the plant in various parks throughout the state. It also helps that wild hyacinths are a couple of



Wild hyacinths

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## Beautiful spring wildflower hard to miss in early-to-mid-May

feet tall and grow in colonies!

Here are just a few locations and the bloom dates in which I have observed them:

- Killbuck Marsh State Wildlife Area, on the west side of Valley Road just south of Messner Road and visible from the road (if you are travelling westbound on Messner, Valley is a left turn directly before the bridge that crosses the Killbuck Creek), 40.733224 - 81.972683, May 1
- Killbuck Marsh State Wildlife Area, on the west side of Valley Road just south of Clark Road and visible from the road (if you are travelling westbound on Clark, it will seem like you are going straight as the slight curve to the left puts you on Valley), 40.697345 - 81.977754, May 4
- Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve along the dirt trail that spurs off of the westmost paved trail, May 8
- Couplings Metropark in Erie County (the Virginia bluebells *Mertensia virginica* are also stunning in this park), Sycamore trail, May 15
- Shelby Black Fork Wetlands Park, Richland County, Nature Loop trail, May 18

The genus name, *Camassia*, is alleged to be derived from the Native American, and possibly another Nez Perce word, for the plant: quamash. The specific epithet, *scilloides*, means that the plant's appearance resembles similar appearing plants in the scilla or squill subfamily, native to Europe. Both genera are in the asparagus family and therefore wild hyacinths are monocots.

My Peterson's *Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants* suggests the bulbs can be boiled for twenty-to-thirty minutes or baked in aluminum foil for forty-five minutes at 350 degrees. I have not tried either of these and I strongly discourage anyone from doing so. I believe there are also recipes to make a kind of bread, called bannock, a frybread, from the bulbs. My well-worn (and autographed) copy of Euell Gibbons', *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, remarkably does not even mention wild hyacinths.

In June 1806, the Lewis & Clark expedition was once again provided with provisions made from camas roots by Native people. On June 29, Lewis described an expansive field of blooming blue wild hyacinth flowers covering around fifty acres and which inspired him to observe that the plants resembled a lake of fine clear water. In fact, in his journal entry, Lewis at first sight thought the flowering plants *were* water.

As a final historical note, wild hyacinths were alleged to have been one of the causes that started the



**Blooming wild hyacinths at Sheldon Marsh**

Nez Perce War (Chief Joseph's War) which took place in the summer and fall of 1877. Chief Joseph, who called himself Hiymatoowyahtqit ("Thunder Rolling Down the Mountain"), having resisted the unfavorable treaty imposed on his nation, went outside of the boundaries of the restricted reservation in which he was being held, to search for quamash, likely to recall the beauty and bounty they provided to his people.

(ONAPA member David Wisenberg is the retired co-founder and owner of the Wooster Book Company.)

## 2025 ONAPA field trips scheduled to start May 10

ONAPA's 2025 schedule of field trips includes fan favorites and some new sites and hike leaders. Most of the field trips require pre-registration — please check the listings carefully to register as needed.

For the trips requiring pre-registration, email [guy.denny7@gmail.com](mailto:guy.denny7@gmail.com); details where to meet and items you may need on the hike (as well as notification if the trip is cancelled for any reason) will be provided when you register. We recommend you dress for the weather, bring water and a bag lunch or snack on all field trips.

### Lakeside Daisy State Nature Preserve

**Saturday, May 10, 11:00 a.m.** — Leader Lakeside Daisy Expert, naturalist and ONAPA Vice President Jennifer L. Windus. Jennifer will bring us up-to-date on the Lakeside Daisy Federal Recovery Plan, explore the associated alvar ecosystem and unusual rare plants and visit the interesting glacial geology of the Marblehead Peninsula. **Registration Required --- participation is limited to 20.**

### The Fascinating World of Mosses and Lichens of Caesar Creek Gorge

**Thursday, June 12, 10:30 a.m.** — Leader Robert Klips, Associate Professor Emeritus at The Ohio State University and author of *Common Mosses, Liverworts, and Lichens of Ohio*. We will meet at the Caesar Creek Lake Visitor Center parking lot. This is the Corps of Engineers facility located off of North Clarksville Road, Waynesville, Ohio. If you have a copy of Dr. Klips' book, he will be glad to autograph it. **Registration Required --- but participation is not limited.**

### Boardwalk Tours of Triangle Lake and Kent Bog State Nature Preserves

**Tuesday, July 8, 10:30 a.m.** — Leader ONAPA President Guy L. Denny

and author of *Peatlands of Ohio and the Southern Great Lakes Region* will be exploring kettle lake sphagnum peatlands of Portage County. If you have a copy of Denny's peatland book he will be glad to autograph it. **Registration Required --- participation limited to 15.**

### A Walk with Some Good Fronds

**Thursday, July 10, 10:00 a.m.** — Leader Steve McKee, naturalist and retired Director of the Richland County Park District and Gorman Nature Center. Ferns and other flora will be the focus of this walk through the woods at Malabar Farm State Park (Richland County). Meet in the parking lot next to the Pugh Cabin and sugar shack. **Registration Required --- participation limited to 20.**

### Tour of Denny's Tallgrass Prairie

**Saturday, July 26, 10:00 a.m.** — Several prairie experts will be on hand to guide small groups through the native flora of the prairie situated in Knox County. Location is 6021 Mt. Gilead Road, Fredericktown. **No registration required.**



Photo by Ian Adams

Lakeside Daisy State Nature Preserve

### Tour of the Resthaven Wildlife Area's Prairie Fen

**Saturday, September 13, 10:30 a.m.** — Tour leader will be ONAPA President Guy L. Denny. Resthaven Wildlife Area is located in Castalia, Ohio, Erie County. Meet at the Resthaven Wildlife Office parking lot at the end of Cement Street. **Registration Required --- participation limited to 30.**

### Annual Prairie Seed Collecting Event

**Saturday, October 4, 10:00 a.m.** — Once again we will open Denny's Tallgrass Prairie for anyone to collect prairie seeds for planting their own prairie gardens. Meet in Knox County at 6021 Mt. Gilead Road, Fredericktown. **No registration required.**

*Hope to see you on the trail!*

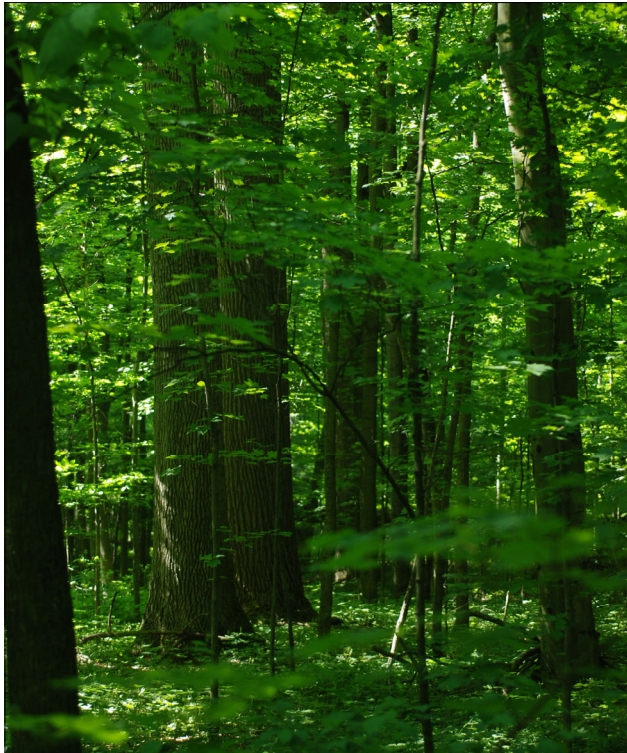
## A tale of two woods

By **Tim Snyder**

In 1970, Richard H. Durrell (Professor of Geology, University of Cincinnati, and original Ohio Natural Areas Council member) completed a report for the U. S. Engineers Corps that listed the results of his inventory of the natural features of southwest Ohio. His work covered nineteen counties and attempted to describe every notable natural area or feature that might be of interest.

One of the places he found was Millertown Woods. This was actually two woodlots on opposite bluffs of Nettle Creek Valley. The western tract of 61 acres was smaller, but he rated it the “best” of the two because it had examples of sugar maple, white ash and Tuliptree as much as two feet in diameter, and a few oaks that were even larger. The eastern tract also had good-sized trees and covered an area over twice as large. Over the past forty-five years, these two examples of mature forest have experienced vastly different histories.

At some point, the west woods was leased by its owner to an archery club which put up a small building, installed a parking lot and cut trails, mostly in the scrub woods growing on former pastureland bordering the older forest. The east woods slumbered unmolested until the owner sold it to a party who promised to keep the trees. Once the deal was concluded, the new owner began cutting the trees — carving the woods into house lots.



Example of mature forest floor



Photos by Guy Denny

### Welcome to Davey Woods

Dismayed by this betrayal, the former owner was ready to listen when The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a private, non-profit organization that raises funds to purchase environmentally-important tracts of land, contacted him about his remaining woodlot. When he expressed an interest in having it protected, TNC notified the Davey Tree Expert Company which was looking for just such a project. Between them, they raised the finances, completed the purchase and then turned the area over to the Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves for management as Davey Woods State Nature Preserve.

At 103 acres, the preserve contains both the original west woods and much of the reverting pasture, most of which has since grown up into a respectable second-growth forest of its own. The old archery club “improvements” were removed and the trail system consolidated. Visitors can view some impressive trees, enjoy the spring wildflower show and follow the course of a small stream that winds its way down to Nettle Creek.

This is surprisingly hilly ground for western Ohio, a result of the glacial history of the area. The oversized valley in which Nettle Creek flows is actually older than the stream, for it was cut by a now-vanished meltwater river coming off the last continental glacier as it retreated. The force of its flow enabled it to cut a trench 100 feet deep into the glacial till left behind by the ice sheet. Davey Woods occupies the steep side of this trench, providing some interesting topography in an otherwise gently-rolling landscape.

Davey Woods State Nature Preserve in Champaign County can be reached from Urbana by traveling 7 miles west on US36, 1 mile north on Neal Road, ½ mile west on Smith Road, and then northwest on Lonesome Road to the gated parking area. The other half of the old Millertown Woods — what is left of it — can be seen across the valley.

## Winter does not stop stewardship in preserves

*Story and photos by Jennifer Windus*

The ONAPA stewardship crew stayed busy in the fall and winter with 14 projects (see box at right). We took a break in December and only had two projects, then one project per week in January and February. Our dedicated volunteers worked with 10 different partners to accomplish important habitat management in bogs, fens, savannas, sedge meadows, barrens, and alvars. All of these projects involved woody species removal and treatment of the cut stems with herbicide. During these four months, we worked twice at Travertine Fen, Cedar Bog, and Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area, all natural areas with a significant amount of stewardship to do in cooperation with our partners: Greene Co. Parks & Trails, Cedar Bog Association, and the Division of Wildlife, respectively. The weather cooperated for the most part and we only had to cancel one project, despite cold and snowy weather on several days.

We are already recruiting for two new Stewardship Assistants for the upcoming season. At the time of printing, we may have finished the interviews and are ready for new contracts. We look forward to the upcoming seasons!

### Projects and Partners

Brown's Lake Bog (TNC) – November 7  
 Travertine Fen (Greene Co. Parks & Trails) – November 12 & February 11  
 Cedar Bog (Cedar Bog Association) – November 19 & February 25  
 Daughmer Savanna (Crawford Co. Park District) – November 21  
 Medway PFO Site (City of Dayton) – November 26  
 Zimmerman Prairie (Beaver Creek Wetlands) – December 5  
 Killbuck Marsh PFO Sites (Division of Wildlife) – December 10 & February 13  
 Lakeside Daisy Preserve (DNAP) – January 14  
 Brinkhaven Oak Barrens (KWLTL) – January 23  
 Bonnett Pond Bog (DNAP) – January 28  
 Singer Lake (CMNH) – February 6

**Both Cedar Bog (right) and Travertine Fen (below) stewardship projects enjoyed a large turnout of volunteers to clear woody species from sensitive fen habitats.**



## Vultures in flight are beauty on the wing

By Guy Denny

Traditionally, every weekend following March 15<sup>th</sup> the citizens of Hinckley, Ohio turnout to welcome turkey vultures returning back to their traditional roosting grounds within the Cleveland Metropolitan Park District's Hinckley Reservation, an event heralding the coming of spring. Buzzard Day is celebrated with the Buzzard Festival including a pancake and sausage breakfast prepared by the Hinckley Chamber of Commerce. Although those who celebrate Buzzard Day are enamored with vultures, not everyone elsewhere are necessarily so inclined.

Vultures, or "buzzards" as some people call them, are among the most underappreciated and maligned of birds, while at the same time, they are incredibly fascinating. Many consider them repulsive and even sinister, feeders that prey on the dead, an impression promoted by Hollywood western motion pictures depicting vultures circling high overhead above the deceased. True, they are carrion eaters of decaying flesh, and are awkward and less than beautiful while feeding on the ground. Nevertheless, once airborne, these cumbersome creatures transform into winged beauties of exceptional aerial grace and splendor as they masterfully soar to great heights among the clouds in search of meals.

Two very different species of vultures are native to Ohio. The more common is the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). This is an impressively large, blackish-brown bird with a wingspan up to six feet. It has a distinctive, naked bright red head (immature birds have naked black heads until their second year). Turkey vultures are shy birds that tend to keep their distance from humans. They nest throughout most of Ohio in concealed places including dark recessed rock shelters and caves, protected rock ledges, and abandoned buildings. They also are known to nest on the ground within large isolated woodlots in hollow logs, stumps, boulder fields and brush piles. Usually two eggs are laid on a bare surface; no nesting materials are used.

The other species is the much more aggressive black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*). It is a somewhat smaller, stout bodied bird with a black body and featherless black head. This is a species of the southeastern states and Texas southward to southern South America. The northernmost part of its range extends just into southern Ohio, being more frequently encountered in Hocking, Licking and Adams counties. However, during the last few decades, black vultures appear to be expanding their range northward with nest sites now reported from Knox and Holmes counties. Although large numbers of vultures migrate across Ohio in both spring and fall, small numbers of



Photo by Tom Fishburn

### Black vulture in flight

warms up again with a minimal expenditure of energy by turning its back to the morning sun and spreading its huge wings out to soak up as much of the sun's warming rays as possible. During cold, wet weather, vultures may not even leave the roost, but rather stay put for days at a time rather than waste energy. Since a vulture's metabolism is lower than that of most other birds, they are able to withstand such forced fasting.

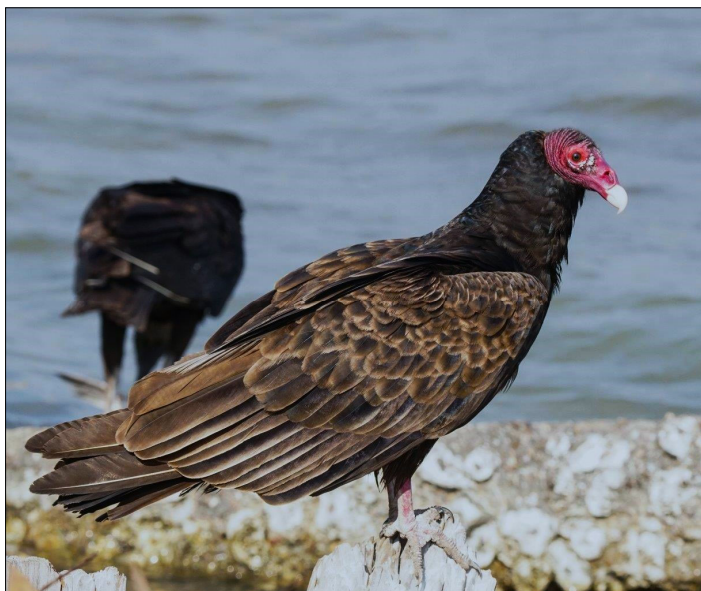
Considering how their food supply is so unpredictable, vultures must minimize the amount of energy they expend looking for their next meal. Consequently, these birds have large but light-weight bodies and long, broad wings which provide exceptional lift. Each morning they wait until the sun's rays have warmed the earth enough to create strong thermal updrafts upon which they can hitch a ride. Skillfully maneuvering in tight circles, vultures ride these huge pillars of rising warm air, seemingly without effort, to great heights. Vultures have been reported to soar as high as 15,000 feet. Gliding requires no propelling energy from the bird itself, so turkey vultures can cover dozens of square miles of countryside in search of food with only an occasional flap of the wings. The black vulture, on the other hand, is a smaller, heavier bird with a shorter wingspan and therefore does not soar as effortlessly as does the turkey vulture.

How vultures locate carcasses from such heights in the sky had long been a matter of speculation until the 1960s when researchers determined that turkey vultures possess an incredible sense of smell which enables them to home in on decaying meat without even being able to see the carcasses. The area of

both species are known to spend the winter in southern Ohio. Unlike other birds of prey which have strong grasping feet with sharp talons for capturing prey, vultures have only blunt talons. Although vultures may occasionally kill and feed upon nestling songbirds and small mammals, they are primarily scavengers on dead flesh. However, there are several disturbing accounts in recent times of groups of black vultures ganging up on and killing newborn livestock such as lambs and calves; an aggressive behavior not shared by turkey vultures.

As primarily carrion feeders, vultures have to search vast areas for food and may go several days before finding a carcass upon which to feed. Consequently, they must take every opportunity to conserve calories. Researchers have discovered that during the night a turkey vulture's body temperature drops a few degrees, resulting in a slight savings of its energy resources. Each morning it

*Continued on page 7*



Photos by Mike Mainhart

### Turkey vultures (left) and black vultures (right)

the brain controlling the sense of smell is three times larger in turkey vultures than in black vultures. Black vultures rely more on sight while turkey vultures rely more on smell to locate food. Black vultures often shadow turkey vultures relying on them to locate food and then follow the turkey vultures down to that source to help themselves to the meal.

Equally incredible is how turkey vultures can eat decaying flesh so contaminated with botulism that it would kill most other animals. Vultures have both botulism-resistant nervous systems and heavy-duty immune systems that protect them from bacterial toxins. Their digestive systems contain juices so powerful that essentially all disease-bearing bacteria are destroyed during digestion. The genus name of the turkey vulture,

*Cathartes*, is derived from the Greek *Katharos*, “a cleanser”, while the suffix *tes* denotes “an agent or having to do with.” The specific epithet *aura* is Latin for “air.” Thus, loosely translated, the scientific name for the turkey vulture is “one who cleans the air,” a most appropriate name for this scavenger which rids the landscape of foul-smelling, disease-bearing, rotten flesh.

All other things aside, vultures are truly majestic creatures of great beauty in the sky. They are amazing birds which play an amazing and essential role in cleansing and maintaining the natural world around us. Consequently, it is quite appropriate to welcome them back each spring.

## ONAPA welcomes new member — Garden Club of Ohio

### By Chris and Randy Haar

The Garden Club of Ohio’s (GCO) mission is to support gardening in Ohio through educational programs, horticulture and floriculture. In 2024, GCO had 2917 members in 103 clubs throughout the state, and is a member of the National Garden Clubs Inc. Some of the educational opportunities available through GCO include landscape design and an environmental school. The GCO also has a goal of responsible stewardship of our land and has long supported conservation activities through donations. Recently the GCO reviewed previous conservation partners, and began looking to see if they could find a partner who more closely aligned with their goals. Specifically, GCO was looking for a conservation partner who:

- Operated entirely in the state of Ohio
- Had a low overhead
- Was of the size that donations from the GCO would have an impact

Subsequent discussions between GCO and ONAPA leadership confirmed that ONAPA checked all of those boxes. We operate entirely in Ohio. We are a volunteer group as is GCO,

with the majority of our funding going to stewardship activities and our overhead is low. Historically, three quarters of the budget goes to stewardship work. ONAPA is close to the size of the GCO, so donations will have a significant impact on ONAPA’s mission.

ONAPA leadership was thrilled to learn that the Garden Club of Ohio decided to make ONAPA a new conservation partner. The Club kicked off our partnership with a wonderful article that you can find at the GCO website [gardenclubofohio.org](http://gardenclubofohio.org) or you can find the link on the ONAPA website under About Us/ ONAPA Member Organizations. The members of the Garden Club of Ohio are quite obviously plant lovers, so this looks to be a long and successful partnership. We are happy to report that so far 10 of their individual clubs have joined as members of ONAPA. ONAPA will be giving presentations to some of the individual clubs regarding Ohio’s State Nature Preserves and other important natural areas this year.





## Ohio Natural Areas & Preserves Association

PO Box 415  
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*Protecting Ohio's Natural Legacy*  
www.onapa.org

### NEW MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL

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**Make check payable to ONAPA and mail to: ONAPA, PO Box 415, Johnstown, OH 43031**

ONAPA is an all volunteer 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Your dues and donations support critical land stewardship and restoration work in highest-quality nature preserves throughout Ohio.

Thank you for making this work possible. Dues increase to above rates January 1, 2025.