ONAPA NEWS

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Prickly tales of thistle in the field

By Tim Snyder
(Photos by Guy Denny)

Never grab a thistle by the stem. That is a lesson I have to learn every year about this time. Thistles have a pernicious determination to survive in my garden, and they are no respecter of gloves.

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

Swamp Thistle

And yet even thistles have their positive side. Anything that attracts flocks of darting Goldfinches, those connoisseurs of thistle seed, cannot be all bad. The Scots think highly of thistle, having made it their national flower, in part, perhaps, because of its rugged, independent character. Traditionally, the Scottish reverence for thistles goes back to the depths of the Middle Ages when a Danish raiding party, trying to creep into a sleeping village of Scots, took off their boots to silence their advance, only to encounter a phalanx of thistles. The resulting commotion roused the Scots to a successful defense.

Thistles belong to the Composite family, as a close look at their flowers will show. What appears to be a single feathery bloom is actually a tightly clustered congregation of tiny flowers held together by a cup made of tiny, overlapping, leaf-like and spine-tipped phyllaries. Flower heads commonly range in color from pink through rose to purple, but white versions are found now and then. While we may consider thistles a nuisance, bees are quite enamored of them, especially bumblebees, for the flowers are sweet-scented and

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Front and back cover photos of Headlands Beach by Ian Adams

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Thistle tales

contain an abundance of both pollen and nectar.

The most common thistles encountered in Ohio are imports. Bull Thistles can be 3-to-6 feet tall. Canada Thistle—which, in one of the perplexing oddities we find in common names, is not from Canada at all, but from Eurasia—thrives in roadsides, abandoned fields and other disturbed ground. Its small flower heads color whole swaths of ground dull pink while the massive ranks of their spiny stems give full expression to the scientific name of one of its varieties, *horridum*.

The native varieties are not much friendlier. There are at least five thistles considered to be original to the state, all of them sharing the prickly disposition of the imports, along with the typical tufted purple to pink flower heads. The rarest of these are the Carolina Thistle, a southern species that can be found in the southeast quadrant of the state, and Hill's Thistle which prefers sandy open fields in the eastern-central counties.

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

Bull Thistle (above) and Canada thistle (below) are both imports to North America.

Bull Thistle (leaves and flower on left) is similar in appearance to native Field Thistle on right. Leaves of Bull Thistle are green on both sides and leaves of the native Field Thistle are whitish on the underside.

2025 ONAPA field trips continue through October

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; 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.

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.**

Photo by Guy Denny

Walking Fern

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.**

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.**

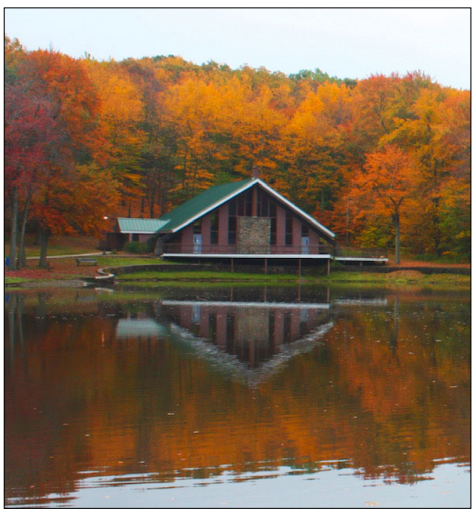
Annual Prairie Seed Collecting Event

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.**

Save the date

ONAPA Annual Meeting
Saturday, August 23, 2025

Charles Alley Park
2805 Old Logan Road SE
Lancaster, OH 43130



Keynote Speaker: Andrew Lane Gibson - lifelong admirer of the natural world. He has spent over the last decade as a field botanist with the Ohio Division of Natural Areas & Preserves with a focus on surveying, monitoring, and managing the state's rare flora and habitats.Andrew is a graduate of Ohio University and Hocking College with degrees in plant biology and wildlife biology. Vascular plants are his passion -- especially the realms of Cyperaceae, Orchidaceae, and Pteridophyta.

Visit onapa.org for more information on registration and field trips.

Snappers!

By Guy Denny

It looks as if it just walked out of the Age of Dinosaurs and, as a matter of fact, it sort of did. About 200 million years ago during the Triassic Period, an ancient turtle, incredibly similar in appearance to our present-day common snapping turtle, lived among the giant dinosaurs.

Today, the common snapping turtle (*Chelydia serpentine*) is more widely distributed in North America than any other turtle. It ranges over the entire eastern half of the United States from the Atlantic Coast to the Rocky Mountains. Although probably the most abundant turtle in Ohio, snappers are not seen as frequently because, unlike most other aquatic turtles, they seldom leave the water to bask in the sun. They can be found in just about every—and any—aquatic habitat with permanent water, from lakes and large rivers to farm ponds and small drainage ditches. Although they forage mostly by night, much of the day is spent hiding in vegetation and mud at the bottom of the bodies of water they inhabit. Common snapping turtles eat just about anything they can capture and gulp down or tear apart with their strong front claws, including aquatic insects, snails, crayfish, fish, amphibians, snakes, small mammals, birds, carrion and even aquatic vegetation. According to one study, up to 36 percent of a snapper's diet may consist of plant material. Like most aquatic turtles, snappers never feed unless underwater, for only then are they able to swallow. Contrary to popular belief, snappers do not cause significant mortality to hatchling waterfowl, although given the rare opportunity, they are not above snatching a duckling or two.

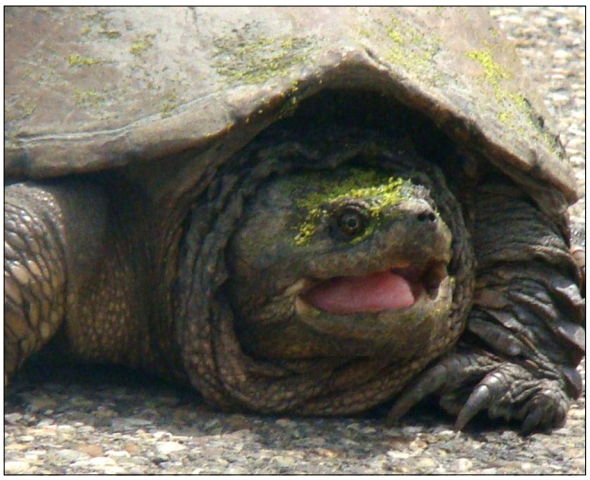
Common snappers grow to be our largest turtle. Adults range in carapace (upper shell) length from 8-14 inches or more, and may weigh 10-35 pounds—or in rare cases, up to 70-plus pounds. Snapping turtles are considered a game species requiring an Ohio fishing license to harvest. They are hunted for their meat, which is very tasty and makes excellent stew and soup. However, this species has a relatively high tolerance of polluted waters and studies have shown specimens taken from such waters have high levels of toxins in their body tissues.

Photo by Jeff Frischcorn

Snapping turtle in its usual habitat.

Caution also needs to be exercised when catching and handling snappers, for when out of water they will aggressively defend themselves—lunging, pivoting and snapping at the slightest provocation. A "snap" from their powerful, keen-edged, hooked jaws can be extremely painful and they can lunge out with their long neck with surprising speed. However, stories of their being able to bite broom sticks in half or sever fingers are folklore nonsense.

To pick up one of these guys, grasp it by its very long, saw-toothed tail and lift it up, holding it well away from your body. If you are unfortunate enough to be bitten, a snapper will usually hold on with a pit bull-like grip. To get it to release, submerge it in water. Once in water, snappers are shy and usually try to escape and hide rather than defend themselves. This is why the practice of "noodling" for snappers (groping underwater with bare hands to catch snappers hiding under overhanging banks, submerged logs, rocks or roots) is not as hazardous as it may appear. Snappers usually do not bite an aggressive hand under water, unless of course they mistake it for something to eat. When first pulled out of water, in addition to aggressively snapping at every and anything, they may also emit a foul-smelling , musky, yellow liquid from between the plastron (lower shell) shields as an additional defense mechanism. Incidentally, if captured at a young age, small snapping turtles quickly settle down with handling and become quite docile once they realize they are not in imminent danger.



Snapping turtles are often seen out of the water traveling to nest or find other bodies of water.

Photos by Su Snyder

In June, adult females are often encountered on land, occasionally covering up to half a mile or so from water just to find a suitable soft soil nesting site to dig a nest and lay their eggs. A female may lay up to 80 or more, but normally they lay only 20-30 perfectly round white eggs that have the appearance of somewhat undersized Ping-Pong balls. Unfortunately, a very high percentage of these nests and eggs are dug up and eaten by predators—especially skunks and raccoons. Hatchlings from nests that do survive, emerge in fall or overwinter in the egg and emerge the following spring.

When adult females emerge from the water on their quest overland to find a place to dig a nest and lay eggs, that is when most people have their first surprised encounter with a large snapper. In addition to straying from water to lay eggs, when ponds and streams occasionally dry up by fall, both male and female snappers may travel overland in search of new bodies of water. Some are killed while crossing highways. On a number of occasions I have seen dead snapping turtles along the sides of major highways. Although long on tenacity and brute strength, snapping turtles are no match for cars and trucks.

In spite of nest predation, over harvesting, and highway deaths, common snapping turtles have survived on earth for a very, very long time and aren't likely to disappear any time in the foreseeable future—and I personally find that reassuring.

Spring weather does not deter stewardship

By Jennifer Windus

In spite of some crazy winter and spring weather, ONAPA's stewardship team conducted 12 projects during February-April. In addition to the scheduled stewardship projects, we also coordinated and conducted 7 days of prescribed burning with a variety of partners in March and April. These burns were conducted at Cedar Bog, Singer Lake Bog, Honey Run Highlands and Wolf Run Parks (Knox County Park District), Saures Farm and Crall Woods Parks (Ashland County Park District), The Wilderness Center, and Heron Bay (private development near Buckeye Lake). ONAPA helped these partners accomplish important habitat management, as well as train their staff in prescribed burn techniques.

In February and March, we mostly worked on woody species control, while in April, we focused on garlic mustard, Dame's rocket, and other herbaceous invasives. The projects we accomplished were:

FEBRUARY-MARCH
Singer Lake Bog
Travertine Fen
Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area
Cedar Bog
Medway Prairie Fringed Orchid meadow
Daughmer Savanna
Wolf Run Regional Park

APRIL
Crane Hollow (clean-up in the pine plantation)
Bonnett Pond Bog
Rhododendron Cove
Clifton Gorge
Lake Katharine

In March, we also conducted four interviews for new stewardship assistants. We had 18 interested applicants this spring which was encouraging. We chose two individuals, Annalora Nguyen and Camryn Ford, who are recent college graduates from Ohio University and The Ohio State University, respectively. Annalora has already started in April and Camryn will join us in early June. We will share more about them soon, but you can look forward to working with them in the field this season.

Above: Crew at Crane Hollow (*photo by Jennifer Windus*) Prescribed burns: (top of page) Knox County Park District's Honey Run Highlands Park and (right) Wilderness Center (*Guy Denny photos*).

Fowler Woods is our favorite state nature preserve

Story and potos by David M. Jarzen, Ph.D, and Susan A. Jarzen

Traditionally, every weekend Fowler Woods State Nature Preserve holds the distinction of being one of Ohio's first state preserves, officially so dedicated in 1972. But the land has a much earlier history of being an untouched area of forest not previously harvested. The land was originally purchased in1832 from the federal government by John Dobbin. Interestingly enough, President Andrew Jackson's name is on the original property deed. The land changed hands a few times, and in 1917 was bought by Chester and Hettie Fowler. In 1970, the Fowler's left the property, uncut or modified, to the State of Ohio. It was legally dedicated as a State Nature Preserve in 1972. For a more detailed account of the nature and history of Fowler Woods see Moseley (2020).

Preserve's boardwalk offers gentle time to reflect.

The Fowler Woods 187-acre preserve is one of our favorite sites in that each spring, the mixed hardwood forest abounds with a display of wildflowers unmatched by many other areas in northeastern Ohio. Located in Richland County at 7815 Olivesburg-Fitchville Road, Greenwich, Ohio, it is here that we have seen and photographed firsthand, being careful not to stray from the continuous 1.25-mile boardwalk, the many flowers of early spring including abundant Marsh Marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) and Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*). In May the forest floor at Fowler Woods is a playground of a grand diversity of wildflowers including the ubiquitous Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*), Trilliums (*Trillium* spp.), Violets (*Viola* spp.), Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) and many others. The beech-maple mature forest also provide the bird-lover with a plethora of spring bird migrants. Additionally, the full-time residents as cardinals, jays, several hawk species and owls may also be observed. We found that visiting in the early spring and during the fall months allows for a more peaceful walk without the invasion of biting insects. However, even a walk along the recently replaced boardwalk in the winter months provides a peaceful and quiet time to reflect on the past summer months and anticipation of the forthcoming spring.

In 2014 most of the original boardwalk was closed to the public due to the invasion of the Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis*). This beetle has caused damage and death to many of our native ash trees. The damage and dangers caused by falling ash trees led the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) to close the boardwalk at Fowler Woods for several years. Earlier, when the boardwalk suffered damage from falling trees, Susan and I donated a token amount of money to help replace some smaller sections of the old boardwalk. The cost of the major replacement project was funded by a Federal Recreation Trail Grant and money from the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, Income Tax Checkoff Program (Moseley & Windus, 2020). The final job is a truly magnificent, new, expanded, handicapped-accessible boardwalk with scenic viewing areas.

One of our special finds at Fowler Woods was the presence of a rare tree species in northern Ohio, the Pumpkin ash (*Fraxinus profunda*). This ash tree is a native tree found only rarely in Ohio. In fact, it is found only in specific habitats of lowland, till plains, in wetter environments. It's considered uncommon and of limited local interest. The ODNR lists this species as endangered in Ohio. Mature specimens of Pumpkin ash have large fruits (samaras) and dense hair on twigs and lower leaf surfaces. It can grow to be 125 feet tall, but typically matures at 60-80 feet. The swollen base of the trunk is sometimes a distinguishing feature of the species.

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Squirrel Corn (above)
Dutchman's Britches (at right)

Pumpkin ash prefers moist to wet loam soil in full sun or light shade. It's often found in swamps, floodplains, river valleys, and low areas. Fowler Woods is one such place. It is most common along the Atlantic and Coastal Plain as well as the Mississippi hardwood and cypress swamps. According to Braun (1989) the Pumpkin ash is known in Ohio only in two tracts of swamp forest in the Illinoian Till Plain. Richland County and therefore Fowler Woods, are not in the Illinoian Till Plain; however, the rare range extension may be an earlier migration northward along the Illinoian glaciated plateau.

Sadly, due to the invasion of the Emerald Ash Borer, the specimen which we photographed died and was removed by the ODNR. Whether or not other individuals of the species remain at Fowler Woods, remains to be determined.

Fowler Woods is our favorite State Nature Preserve for several reasons. For starters, Fowler Woods has a variety of habitat types including mature hardwood forest, lowland wet areas which grade into more true swampy conditions. Dick Moseley has been quoted as noting that "the site was determined to be all original forest with no multiple trunk trees and no stumps". The woods provides places where a hiker/walker may take refuge from the so-called stresses of the day and find a reason to take note of the wonderful and perfect world of which we are a part.

Interestingly, the map makers of the Delorme Atlas & Gazetteer for Ohio (2018) have designated Fowler Woods as one of several "Family Outings" and have so identified the location as a place for the entire family to enjoy. Thanks to the efforts of ONAPA and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Fowler Woods will remain a place to visit and enjoy, hopefully for centuries to come.

(David M. Janzen, Ph.D., and Susan A. Janzen are longtime members of ONAPA, joining in March, 2013.)

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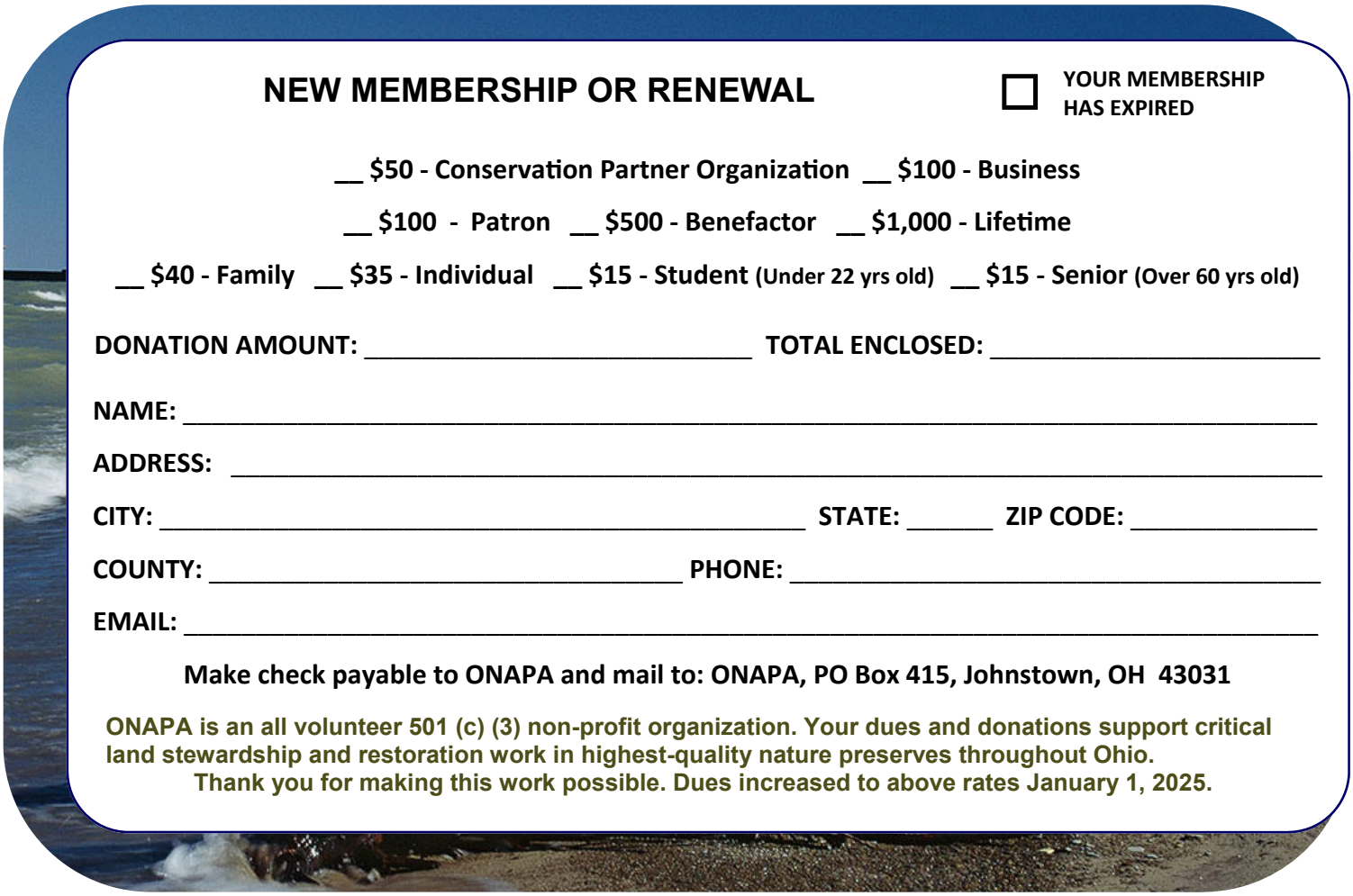

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Thank you for making this work possible. Dues increased to above rates January 1, 2025.