



ONAPA NEWS

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Wild Geranium	1-2
Virginia Bluebells	3
'26 Field Trips	4
Stewardship	5
Elfin butterflies	6-7
In Memorium	7
Membership Application and Renewal	8

Wild Geranium - late spring forest beauty

Photo and story by Guy Denny

Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) is one of our most common late spring wildflowers. It occurs in just about every rich moist woodland, especially wooded floodplains in Ohio, as well as throughout most of the eastern United States.

Actually, our wild geranium is quite different from the familiar household potted geranium. Although geraniums sold in the nursery trade are in the Geranium Family (Geraniaceae), they are in the genus *Pelargonium* not the genus *Geranium*. There are numerous species and hybrids in this tropical genus with most members native to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, a very far cry from the woodlands of eastern North America. There are nine species of geraniums occurring in Ohio, of which only four are native - the rest are of European origin. Of those four, Wild Geranium is the most common and has the largest flowers. The rose-purple, five-petaled flowers are about one inch in diameter, which is significantly larger than those of the other three species.

The other three species are Bicknell's Geranium (*G. bicknellii*), Carolina



Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)

Geranium (*G. carolinianum*), and Herb Robert (*G. robertianum*), all of which are much less common than Wild Geranium.

The most distinctive feature of this genus is the seed capsule with its long narrow beak-like appendage emerging from the center of the flower. This beak-like structure is formed by the elongation of the style. The style is the portion of the pistil (female part of the flower) which is the tube between the ovary and the stigma. After the flower is pollinated, the style elongates forming this up to one inch long beak-like seedpod structure that is thought to somewhat resemble the bill of a crane. Hence the species name *Geranium* is derived from the Greek *geranos* meaning

Continued on page 2

Front & back cover photos of Great White Trillium by Ian Adams

Continued from page 1

Wild Geranium was used by many for its rhizome content

“a crane.” Accordingly, another common name for this species is “Wild Crane’s-Bill.” The specific epithet *maculatum* is Latin for “mottled” which is in reference to the light-colored blotches often occurring on older leaves.

Wild Geranium was an important medicinal plant for both Native American Woodland Indians as well as for non-native settlers who learned of its medicinal uses from indigenous people. The major medicinal properties are contained within the thick, knobby horizontal rhizome which is rich in tannic and gallic acids. The rhizome reportedly can contain more



Wild Geranium rhizome at left. Above, mature plant can grow to 1-2 feet in height. Seed pod developing (close to right top of photo) resembles a crane’s head and bill

than 20 percent tannin, which is highly astringent and styptic. The dried and powdered rhizome acts as an astringent causing the skin and mucous membranes to constrict. It also acts as a hemostatic that stops bleeding, and as a diuretic to increase urine flow. Several tribes including Cherokee, Ojibwa (Chippewa), Ottawa, Potawatomi, Meskwaki, and Iroquois used Wild Geranium to treat diarrhea, as a moth wash to treat sores including toothache, and to stop bleeding from minor open wounds. The dried rhizomes were listed in the U.S. Pharmacopeia (an authoritative reference of drug use for pharmacists) from 1820-1916 as an astringent. Reportedly, the high tannin content of the rhizomes was also used historically by settlers for tanning small hides as well for

making dyes.

The next time you encounter a patch of Wild Geraniums while hiking Ohio woodlands, appreciate it’s not only being a beautiful easily-recognized spring wildflower, but it was also a very important medicinal plant gathered by indigenous people who occupied these lands for thousands of years before European exploitation.

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Virginia Bluebells among the favorites of spring

By **Tim Snyder**

Ask me to name my favorite spring wildflower and I'd be hard pressed to come up with just one. But certainly Bluebells would lie near the top of the list.

Mertensia virginica, the Virginia Bluebell, can be found in moist woods and floodplains across a broad swath of North America from southern Ontario and North Carolina west to Minnesota and eastern Kansas. In Ohio, its bright blue, bell-shaped flowers color the spring woodlands across the state except, strangely, the northwest quarter. Since they are found only rarely in the southernmost counties of Michigan, it would appear that we are here at the limit of its range.

The plant is unmistakable. It bears broad, egg-shaped leaves up to five inches long on stems that average between one and two feet in height with heavy, pendulous clusters of flowers at the top. Bluebells can be thought as Nature's litmus paper. Each flower begins as a pinkish globe which soon lengthens into a long-necked bell of rich blue. The color change has to do with the changing pH of the flower. In bud, it is more acidic which makes it pink. When the flower matures, it is more alkaline and thus blue.

Since each plant can have over a dozen flowers, and the plants tend to cluster in colonies, the overall effect can be breath-taking. There is an especially good show at Clifton Gorge State Nature Preserve where a big part of the slope above the Blue Hole is covered with a smoky haze when bluebells bloom in April and May.

Although there are no close relatives of this plant growing in Ohio, a pink-flowered *Mertensia* called Sea Lungwort grows on northern Atlantic beaches, and the Tall Lungwort grows on the western plains. The genus name comes from Franz Karl Mertens, a German botanist who lived from 1764 to 1831.

I am not the only one who is fond of Bluebells. They are so popular that they have made the jump from

the wild into domestic gardens, especially woodland gardens. Given enough moisture and a bit of shade, they seem to do quite well. Many garden centers that offer wildflowers will have Virginia Bluebells for sale.

Although it might be tempting to dig up wild plants

to bring home, that is not a wise thing to do. First, their survival will be chancy. More importantly, every plant lost from the wild diminishes the place from which they were taken, no matter how many there seem to be in that particular spot. Nursery-grown specimens have been raised under domestic conditions and will have a better chance of living happily ever after in your garden--- provided, of course

that the nursery actually did raise them itself. As the popularity of wild-flower gardening has grown, some less-than-scrupulous plant dealers have been known to increase their limited stocks by raiding nearby wood-lots--- another good reason to always deal with a nursery you can trust.

Better yet, take some time off to visit a nearby wooded park or nature preserve where you can see this delightful plant in its native habitat. Nobody does a garden quite like Mother Nature.



Photo by Guy Denny

Mertensia virginica



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Don't forget to re-enroll every year!

2026 ONAPA field trips start May 15



Friday, May 15 — Night Owl Moth Survey

9:00 p.m. – Midnight.
Leader, naturalist Judy Semroc assisted by Greg Cudworth. Using special lighting techniques, we

will be inventorying and identifying moths and other night-flying insects at the Denny Nature Preserve in Knox County. In the event of inclement weather, this event will be rescheduled for Monday, June 15. **Registration Required --- participation limited to 25.**

Tuesday, June 9 — Basic Sedge Identification

10:00 a.m. Leader, ODNR DNAP botanist/ecologist, Andrew Lane Gibson will provide a field trip for learning how to identify some familiar sedges. The location to be determined will be in southcentral Ohio. **Registration Required --- Participation limited to 25.**

Saturday, June 13 — Tour of Brown's Lake Bog State Nature Preserve



10:00 a.m., Leader, naturalist and ONAPA Founding Member, Guy L. Denny. **Registration Required --- participation limited to 10.**

Thursday, July 9 — Life Among the Liverworts

10:00 a.m. Leader, Steve McKee, naturalist and retired Director of the Richland County Park District and Gorman Nature Center. Steve will be focusing on the fascinating world of liverworts within the Mohican State Forest Region. **Registration Required -- - participation limited to 20.**

Saturday, July 25 — Tour of Denny's Tallgrass Prairie

10:00 a.m. Prairie experts will be on hand to guide participants around the native flora of this prairie situated in Knox County. Location is 6021 Mt. Gilead Road, Fredericktown. **No registration required.**

Wednesday, July 29 — Who Are the Native Bees in Your Backyard?

10:00 a.m. Leader, Denise Ellsworth, retired Program Director, Pollinator Education, OSU Entomology OSU Extension. This event will be held at Denny's Tallgrass Prairie in Knox County. **Registration Required.**

Saturday, August 15 — Glacial Geology Auto Tour

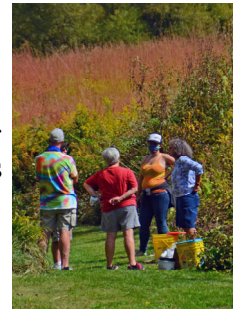
10:00 a.m. Leader Tim Snyder, naturalist and ONAPA Board Member will conduct a driving auto tour across the landscape of west central Ohio. **Registration Required --- participation limited to six vehicles with carpooling required.**

Saturday, August 29 — Thompson Ledges Township Park

10:30 a.m., Leader, retired Chief Naturalist for the Geauga County Park District Dan Best. Dan will focus on the unusual ecology and geology of the Sharon Conglomerate cliffs and caverns of Thompson Ledges in Geauga County. **Registration Required.**

Saturday October 3 — Annual Prairie Seed Collecting Event

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



For those field trips requiring pre-registration, email guy.denny7@gmail.com: details where to meet and items you may need to bring with you, as well as of notification if the event 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.



Stewardship trudges through winter

Story and photos by Jennifer Windus

In spite of some challenging winter weather, the stewardship team has been working through the snow and cold temperatures. During November-January, we accomplished 10 projects at different preserves and wildlife areas around the state:

- **November** – Lake Katharine, Cedar Bog, Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area (Holmesville meadow), and Travertine Fen
- **December** – Clifton Gorge, Resthaven Wildlife Area, Daughmer Savanna, and Honey Run Highlands Park
- **January** – Lakeside Daisy Preserve, Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area (SR 83 meadow)

We worked with various partners including the Division of Natural Areas & Preserves, Cedar Bog Association, Division of Wildlife (Districts 2 and 3), Greene Parks and Trails, Crawford County Park District, and Knox County Park District. At all the sites, we cut and treated invading woody species to maintain open areas or removed invasive shrubs in the understory (e.g., Lake Katharine, Cedar Bog, and Clifton Gorge). We have more projects scheduled, so we hope you can join us. It is a great way to get outside and do something worthwhile with like-minded people!

**Clockwise from top:
Clifton Gorge,
Travertine Fen,
Resthaven Wildlife Area, and
Daughmer Savannah
with Columbus MetroParks**



Ohio's elfins provide early spring rewards

Story and photos by John Watts

Among butterfly enthusiasts, early spring ventures to southern Ohio for the first broods of spring butterflies is akin to birders heading to their favorite spots during spring migration. Spring arrives a little earlier in the southern counties, especially those along the Ohio River, and places such as Shawnee State Forest start to pop a little by the end of March. An early April spring day chasing butterflies can produce as many as a dozen species or more including first brood Zebra, Tiger, and Spicebush Swallowtails, Falcate Orangetip, Spring Azure, Gemmed Satyr, Mourning Cloak, Comma, and Question Mark.

April also marks the emergence of the Elfins, a small group of butterflies that are mostly brown ground colors with various underside markings to distinguish species. Generally, a low flying species ranging from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to just over 1 inch in size, the brown ground color blends into the early spring bare ground making them almost impossible to see until flushed. While they can be observed nectaring or defending a territorial perch, they are often most easily observed on the ground mineralizing moist soils and mud early in the mornings through midday.

Elfins belong in the family Lycaenidae or Gossamer-winged butterflies. The small size and delicate-seeming construction of their wings combine to create an impression of sheerness and delicacy; hence the name "gossamer-wing (Cech & Tudor 2005). This family contains the Harvester, Blues, Coppers, and Hairstreaks, which is where the Elfins are included. Across North America approximately 135 species make up this family; 28 of which have been documented for Ohio. Of this group, the Elfins are represented by four species in Ohio: three species found mostly in southern and eastern Ohio and one found in the Wild Lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) habitats of north-western Ohio.

Henry's Eflin (*Callophrys henrici*)



Considered to be a fairly rare occurrence in eastern North America, the Henry's Eflin is the most commonly encountered of the Elfins in Ohio (Iftner et al, 1992). Populations can be localized and tend to be associated with stands of Redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) along wood edges, powerlines, and other openings. Henry's is the earliest of the group to fly and may be encountered during the last week or so of March in some years. Peak numbers

typically occur in mid-April and drop off substantially after the peak bloom of Redbuds. The underside of the Henry's Eflin is two-toned brown usually being darker on the inner half of the wing. The dividing line between the brown tones, the post-median line, shows distinct white marks at both ends, especially the top edge. This is the key feature to note when identifying this species.

Brown Eflin (*Callophrys augustinus*)



The Brown Eflin is a fairly rare inhabitant of wood edges and cuts near woodlands in southern Ohio that supports Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) and blueberries (*Vaccinium sp.*). Most records are from Shawnee State Forest; however, other adjacent counties have produced records and

this species should be sought in those counties near stands of Mountain Laurel and blueberries. The underside of the Brown Eflin is a rich brown darker towards the inner wing base contrasting to a reddish-brown on the outer hind wing and lacking the white marks of Henry's Eflin.

Eastern Pine Eflin (*Callophrys niphon*)

In contrast to the preceding two species, Eastern Pine Elfins are stunningly banded underneath with a pattern of light and dark lines that create an unmistakable pattern among the Elfins. Pine Elfins, are mostly frequently encountered in southern



Ohio along edges and openings near oak forests and successional fields containing species of hard pines which is their known foodplant. Other areas in Ohio, such as Mohican State Forest and other areas containing planted hard pines, may contain disjunct populations. Of the three southern Ohio Elfins, this is generally the last species to emerge and thus peak populations tend to occur in early May lasting until late in the month while occasionally observed in very early June.

Frosted Elfin (*Callophrys irus*)

The Frosted Elfin, is one of eight species of butterflies listed as endangered in the State of Ohio. With the exception of two records from Hamilton County, all the known viable populations have been associated with the Oak Openings sand and prairie habitats located in north-west Ohio and specifically Lucas County (Iftner et al, 1992). Their primary food plant is Wild Blue Lupine but Wild Indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*), which is also present in that region has been reported as a host plant (Opler & Krizek, 1984). The underside hindwing margin shows an area of “frosting” that contains a black spot against a brown ground color. These are the best identifying marks along with its occurrence on or near lupine colonies. This species was formerly common in the 1930’s. Despite management efforts this species has continued to decline in numbers to very small localized populations still present today.

References:

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IN MEMORIAM

ONAPA lost two members whose experience in sharing our natural world with others will be missed.

Kenneth Roger Troutman, one of the founding members of ONAPA, and well-known naturalist, died on October 19, 2025. Roger was interested in Ohio prairies. In 1978, Roger and Allison Cusick published *The Ohio Prairie Survey Project: A summary of Data to Date*. Roger visited hundreds of prairies throughout the Midwest and in 1978 hosted the 6th North American Prairie Conference. He worked on the systematics of two herbaceous plant genera, *Asclepias* and *Liatris*, common in Ohio prairies. Roger was an avid birder. He participated in 120 annual Christmas bird counts. At the time of his death, he had compiled more annual bird counts than any other Ohioan. Once he participated in 12 Christmas bird counts in 11 days in three states.

(By Barb Andreas)

Stanley Stine, premier naturalist and natural history educator, passed away on January 26, 2026, in Dayton, Ohio. As a well-known field botanist, field trip leader, conference creator, and stewardship expert, Stanley employed his talents for many environmental organizations, such as DNAP, Portage Park District, Quail Hollow State Park, The Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the City of Twinsburg. He never ceased to search for and discover rare plants. He encouraged young people to experience the wonders of nature. In later years, he transformed the environs around Twinsburg into a native plant and meadow showplace to educate scores of people to embrace conservation, protect rare habitats and plant native species. Stanley was especially proud of the nature programs he developed for the students in the City of Twinsburg schools and eagerly looked forward to the Spring when the salamanders would begin their treks to the vernal pools — area families would join in to learn about their amazing life cycles. His passing will leave a huge void in the Ohio natural history community—many are grateful for the time they spent with him.

(By Judy Semroc)