



# *The* **Rookery**

SPRING 2019





# CREATING A

## *Living Legacy*



Dr. Robert L. (Doc) Nehls was in love with Catawba Island long before many of today's residents were there. He and his wife Norma moved there almost 60 years ago, and he loved the orchards and the wildlife on the island. He knew all the locals, and they knew him - not only was he their veterinarian, but he was a fixture around town. He was a community philanthropist, whether it was helping families around town or sharing his love of singing at nursing homes on the island.

Now, there is a special place on the water that will always remind family, friends and the island of the things Doc loved about Catawba - the Dr. Robert L. Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve.

When he found the property along Muggy Road in 2003, he was excited to be able to purchase it. Previously used for farming and as a campground, Doc first had to clear the land of old trailers. "But later he'd be there often just enjoying it, just spending time there with his family and friends," said Norma. "He never officially designated what he wanted the land to

be used for, but in his mind he always imagined a park, where everyone could enjoy the waterfront."

"It's rare to find waterfront property, especially on Catawba Island," explained Conservancy Executive Director Rob Krain. "This area is particularly important as natural habitat for a number of threatened, rare or endangered species, as well as attracting the largest concentration of waterfowl anywhere in Ohio during migration." It sits along the West Bay area, near a water trail and not far from the Great Egret Marsh Preserve. The Conservancy-protected Cedar Meadow Nature Preserve is just a mile northwest of the property.

With funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, the Conservancy will acquire the property in May (at a below-market sale), and is working with the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore and manage the Preserve. "We're excited about this opportunity," said Jason Lewis, refuge



manager with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. "There's fantastic potential to serve the Catawba community here." He envisions a return to a natural habitat, with public access for bird and wildlife observation, fishing and boating.

***"There's nothing like this on Catawba. This Preserve is just another way Doc can give back to the people and place he loved so much."***

- Norma Nehls





# PROTECTING THE LAND



## *of Ohio Families*

Three northwest Ohio families recently worked with the Conservancy to protect their family farms through the Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program administered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Together, they add another 290 acres to the Conservancy's protected lands portfolio (one farm in Fulton County and two farms in Sandusky County).

Changes are also underway at other conservation properties we protect:

- Cedar Meadow on Catawba Island widened trails for better public access
- A wetland is being installed on a conservation easement property in Williams County
- Tom Bartlett continues to lead bird banding on the Middle Bass Island East Point Preserve (photographed above). This past year they banded 330 birds representing 45 species at this hot spot for research on migratory songbirds
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is enhancing the wetland at Port Clinton's Lakefront Preserve
- The Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin are developing an educational camp area in the publicly-accessible woods on their farm, to enhance their conservation values of public access and education

### *A word from Rob...*

As I write this, bloodroot and spring beauties are blooming in Bell Woods. The herons returned to the rookery in early April and the field staff have been cleaning out nesting boxes and reporting back on chorus frog concerts. I think it's safe to say that spring has finally arrived in northwest Ohio.

Already this year we have created the Little Auglaize Wildlife Reserve and we'll be purchasing the Nehl's Memorial Preserve in May (more on that project in

this issue). A third new preserve is in the works and we anticipate completing that project this summer.

Our wetland restoration project at Carter Historic Farm was just completed. As the field crew was finishing their tree plantings, I had the opportunity to tour the site with Joy Mullinex, the newly appointed director of the Lake Erie Commission, and discuss how projects like this one can help support cleaner water in our region. Similar work continues at our Forrest

Riverland restoration, and there are more projects like these in the works.

We are gearing up for a busy season of inspiring more and more people to care about conservation in our community with nature walks, paddling events and other activities (including the new coloring book / field guide). I hope to see you outdoors soon!

**Rob Krain**  
Executive Director

# A Place to and a



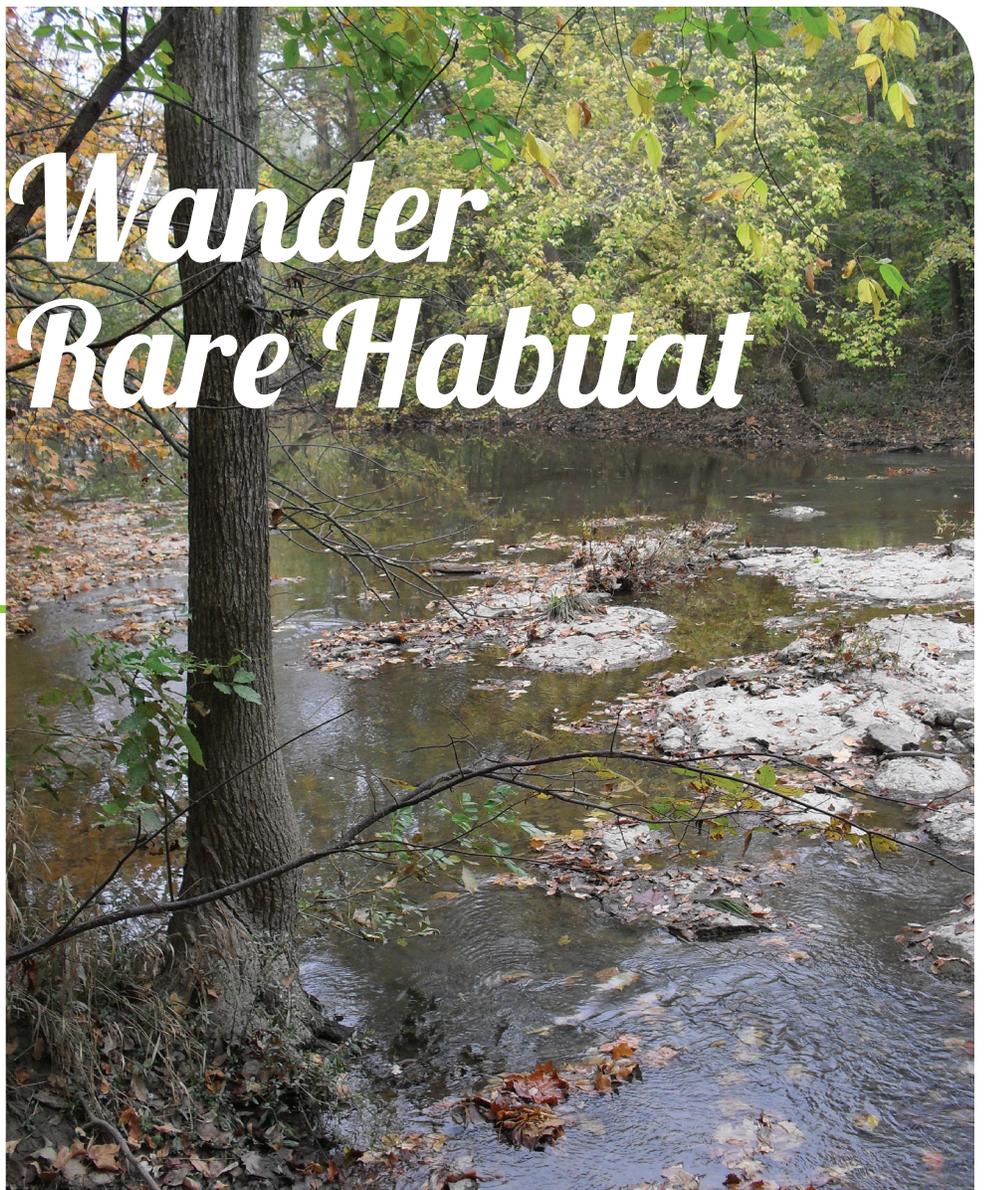
## in this Hancock County Preserve

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The concept of “forest bathing” is described as quietly taking in the experience of the land with all of your five senses, and connecting with the nature around you. That connectedness experience is available nearby, with a visit to the Blanchard River Preserve in Hancock County.

Nestled into a curve of the Blanchard River south of Mt. Blanchard, this 64-acre Preserve is a high quality riverfront habitat with a diverse collection of wildflowers. Visitors are encouraged to walk the trail slowly and take in the relatively undisturbed “mixed floodplain forest.” Hiking, birdwatching and photography are encouraged as you head towards the Blanchard River, keeping watch for the wetlands and vernal pools that are nearby. Also at the Preserve you’ll find the globally rare habitat of the alvar - an area of shallow or exposed bedrock that is prone to flooding in the spring and affected by drought in the summer. Found exclusively in northern Europe and in the Great Lakes regions of the U.S. and Canada, they’re rare even in these areas. Northwest Ohio’s classic example of alvar habitat can be found at Side Cut Metropark in Maumee. Alvars are unique in that they support plants and animals that are commonly found on prairie grasslands, not in the woods.

At the river, visitors can fish and launch canoes and kayaks from a primitive access site. This spot will become the starting point for the 37.6-mile Blanchard River



Water Trail (currently under development), which will end at another Park District property - the Blanchard River Landing.

The Conservancy acquired the Preserve in 2013 with funding from Clean Ohio, and gifted it to the Hancock Parks District. “We have put this property on a pedestal, because it’s such a high quality area and so different from our other parks,” said Gary Pruitt, Hancock Park District director. “With the State Water Trail designation, we’ll improve access to the river. And we hope to work with area schools and universities to develop programs that will help them appreciate this gem for what it offers our community - a glimpse into what this region was before.”

The Preserve is located at 22006  
County Road 17, Forest, Ohio.



*A Western Chorus Frog at Blanchard River Preserve  
(photo by Christina Kuchle).*



# Growing Up in Nature

## Drives this Food & Farm Participant

In just months, the air around the Conservancy's Homestead will be filled with the intoxicating scent of herbs and flowers, as one of our first farms in the Black Swamp Food & Farm Initiative gets underway. More than 30 varieties of herbs, edible flowers and peppers will be grown in a wholesale operation on a  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre plot on the Conservancy grounds, along Sugar Ridge Road in Pemberville.

"The Black Swamp Food & Farm Initiative aims to bridge the gap among people, their food and the land they live on," explains Sarah Williams, Conservancy farmland associate. "Farmers who are passionate about growing good food and protecting our ecosystem are a crucial part of this goal, as are landowners who want their farms' legacy to be taken up by the next generation."

Mike Schiewer's passion for farming was born of two intersecting life experiences: a childhood in the fields and a health scare forcing him to re-evaluate his life and diet. Before he was out of high school, Schiewer had worked on a number of farms and had learned a great deal about the restaurant industry from work in his brother's restaurant. At age 24, after a life-threatening autoimmune disorder, he and his new wife decided to focus on growing much of their own food.

They grew edibles in their South Toledo yard and began selling to friends and local restaurants. Then, in 2016, he found a tiny spot at the community garden of University Church in Toledo, where he created his business, Herbaceous Ltd. (the first all-herb farm in the state of Ohio). He cultivated 30,000 plants and began to build his operation, which currently has 24 wholesale business and restaurant customers. But he found that the space would no longer be available to him and suddenly, his business and passion were in jeopardy. Availability of the Conservancy's space was the perfect solution.



*"I've been working in nature all my life," Schiewer says, "and I've found that it's best to work alongside nature than against. She's much smarter than me!"*

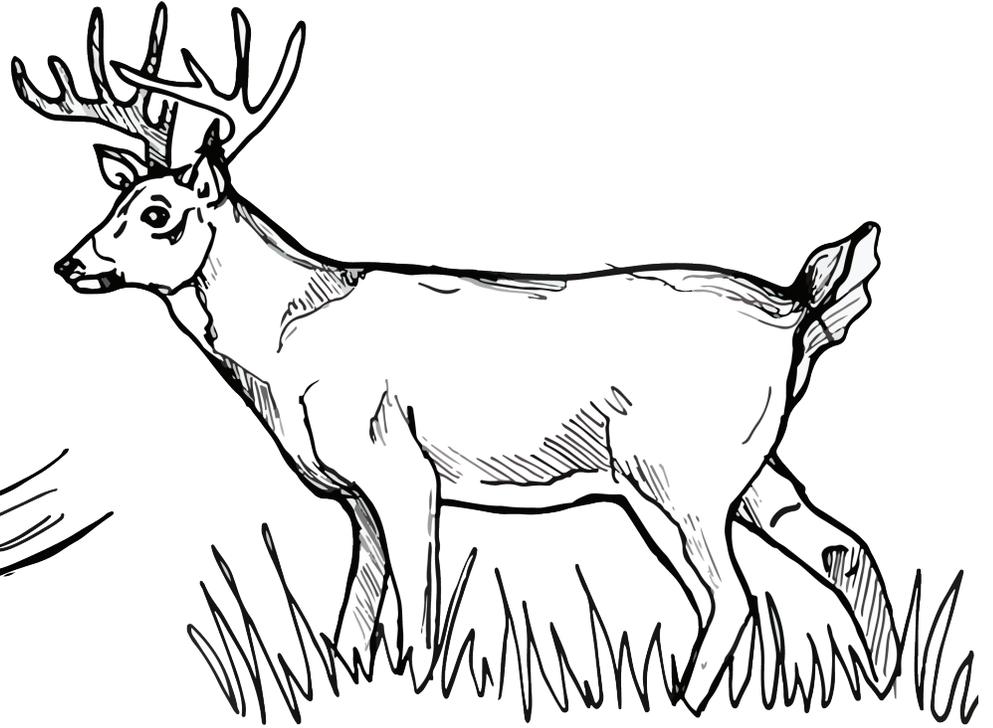
The new Conservancy space offers more than 20 times the growing area of his previous farmland. "I'm focusing on all culinary herbs and edible flowers in this new space," he says. "We'll have the popular stuff, but also herb varieties and flowers that are not as well known." He has been working with commercial greenhouses in Walbridge and Holland to start his seeds for this spring's planting. "Everyone has been wonderful in helping me get started. This is truly something northwest Ohio believes in," he says.

"In working with Mike and others, we hope to demonstrate that these smaller-scale, ecologically-conscious methods not only lead to a high-quality harvest and stronger communities, but are economically sound practices as well," says Williams.

Schiewer is accustomed to sustainable practices, including the use of the praying mantis as pest control. He'll use mint-family herbs and marigolds to ward off deer around the new property. In addition, all of his plants go to flower over the season and are used by his customers. But they're also great for pollinators.

If you're interested in donating land, or are a sustainable farmer who needs an affordable, stable place to farm, please contact Williams at [swilliams@blackswamp.org](mailto:swilliams@blackswamp.org) or 419-833-1025.





# Conservancy Helps Create *Ohio Wildlife: A Coloring Field Guide*

Learn about the daily habits of the Red-tailed Hawk, the life cycle of White-tailed Deer, and where you're most likely to see an Eastern Box Turtle - all thanks to the newest Ohio-focused field guide on the market. *Ohio Wildlife: A Coloring Field Guide* offers information about fish, amphibian, reptile, bird and mammal species found in Ohio. It's a family-friendly guide that also includes ideas for projects, activities and outdoor exploration, and species checklists, all presented in a coloring book format.

The Conservancy worked with author and outdoor educator Amalia Celeste Fernand and illustrator Anna Bazyl, along with local designer Margo Puffenberger, to create the new field guide. Thanks to funding from the Reed Fund of the Toledo Community Foundation and the Toledo Community Foundation Seed-to-the-Sower Fund, we'll have 1,000 copies

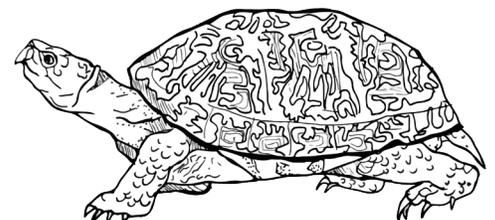
of the Ohio guide to distribute to area kids at programs this spring.

Fernand, a native of Michigan, has degrees in environmental studies and ecological leadership and education, and established Nature Explorers International to inspire excitement and curiosity for the environment through art, science and outdoor experiences. Her first publication was *Michigan Wildlife: A Coloring Field Guide*, which was illustrated by Bazyl and Patrick Bradley. Designer Puffenberger operates m.e.puff design in the Toledo area, and has worked with the Conservancy for several years.

We are planning several places for you to pick up your copy of the new guide, including an event May 11th at the Rotary Pavilion at Side Cut Metropark from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., featuring

author Fernand leading activities for families. We'll also be giving away copies of *Ohio Wildlife: A Coloring Field Guide* on May 18 during the Fremont Fishing & Outdoor Festival, and at "Oak Openings Region Family Day," Sunday, May 19, at Secor Metropark, during Blue Week activities. Learn more about these events on the Conservancy's website and social media pages.

Once the free copies have been distributed, the guide will be available for purchase.



# Notes from the Field

Melanie Coulter, Conservation Manager

Early April was my 2-year anniversary working for Black Swamp Conservancy! As my field work has ramped up these first few weeks of Spring, I've been reflecting on this opportunity to get to know northwest Ohio and the 137 properties that the Conservancy protects.

It is so enjoyable and rewarding to explore the great diversity represented by these protected properties. Just so far this Spring, I visited a farm in Defiance County with a small grove of ancient apple trees and a ditch that was healthy enough to support fish and even a mink! The Conservancy protects many working lands with agricultural and conservation easements.

The same day, we monitored a privately owned 100-acre woods with old growth white oaks and endangered plants. We protect a diverse array of natural habitats owned by conservation-minded private citizens.

We monitored Hancock County Parks' Blanchard River Preserve where our host showed us a sandbar with rare freshwater mussels, a small stand of

surviving chestnut trees, and his favorite spot to look for darters. We help protect 17 such publicly owned parks and preserves, including Wood County Park District's Carter Historic Farm where we coordinated a 15-acre wetland restoration that was just completed!

This Spring I've been visiting and managing our now seven Conservancy-owned nature preserves in three counties: Paulding, Wood and Sandusky. Highlights of visits so far include the calls of chorus frogs and wood frogs, and lots of salamander egg masses in the deep woods wetlands of Forrest Woods Nature Preserve. Plus I've been getting to know the woods and wetlands and river banks of our newest addition, Little Auglaize Wildlife Reserve. And I've been visiting Redhorse Bend, our still-farmed property along the Sandusky River, making plans for wetland, woods and prairie restoration to come.

It's been a pleasure introducing our new employees, Elisabeth Anderson and Sarah Williams, to these treasures this Spring. We're all looking forward to more time in the field. Hope you are too.



## Thank you!

Stay Swampy my friends,



*Melanie Coulter*

## IN REMEMBRANCE

Organizations don't make great things happen, the people behind them do. Black Swamp Conservancy's accomplishments are the result of the collective efforts of many dedicated volunteers and staff members over the past twenty five years. The Conservancy has recently lost three special people who dedicated themselves to this organization.

Former advisory council member **Steve Stranahan** was an ardent supporter of Black Swamp Conservancy, which was founded by his mother

Virginia Secor Stranahan. A strong believer in agricultural conservation, he also served on the national board of American Farmland Trust and protected his 4,000 acre Colorado ranch with a conservation easement.

Past president **Paul Tait** continued to serve on our stewardship committee years after he had termed out as a Trustee and up until his death. Paul was ever the ambassador for conservation in northwest Ohio.

**Pat Mauk**, wife of founder Clint Mauk was a great friend of the Conservancy. She frequently attended our nature walks and shared the beautiful photographs that she captured along the trail.

We remember these special people and are thankful for all of their contributions to our conservation community.





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**Clean Water, Good Food, Wild Places**

**At Black Swamp Conservancy...**

We take direct action to permanently preserve northwest Ohio's natural habitats and family farms for the benefit of future generations. By protecting our valuable land and water resources we are supporting healthy communities with strong, sustainable economies. Our work ensures the diverse habitats of our region will be protected for generations and that our children and their children will forever be able to enjoy this special place.

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**Sarah Williams**, Farmland Associate

*Our front cover features a secretive Least Bittern stalking a cattail marsh in northwest Ohio, photographed by Brian Zwiebel. Contact him at Sabrewing Nature Tours, sabrewingtours@gmail.com.*

Your support helps to protect and restore northwest Ohio's rivers and streams, providing critical habitat for wildlife.



*The*  
**Rookery**  
SPRING 2019

or Current Resident



*Upcoming Walks*

*April 27th - Sawyer Quarry  
10:30 am with Denise Gehring*

*May 4th - Bell Woods  
8:00 am Photo Workshop with Mike Basista  
9:00 am Wildflower Walk with Elisabeth Anderson  
10:00 am Mushroom Walk with Jim Toppin*

*May 20th - Explore Pearson North  
6:00 pm with Tim Schetter*

*Upcoming Paddles*

*June 22nd - Green Creek & Sandusky Bay  
10:30 am with Rob Krain*

*Downtown Toledo Farmers' Market Paddles  
departing at 8:30 am and 10:30 am  
from the Swan Creek Boat Launch*

*June 15th  
July 13th  
July 20th*



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