THE TWIG

SYCAMORE LAND TRUST // FALL 2017

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SAVING WHOOPING CRANE HABITAT

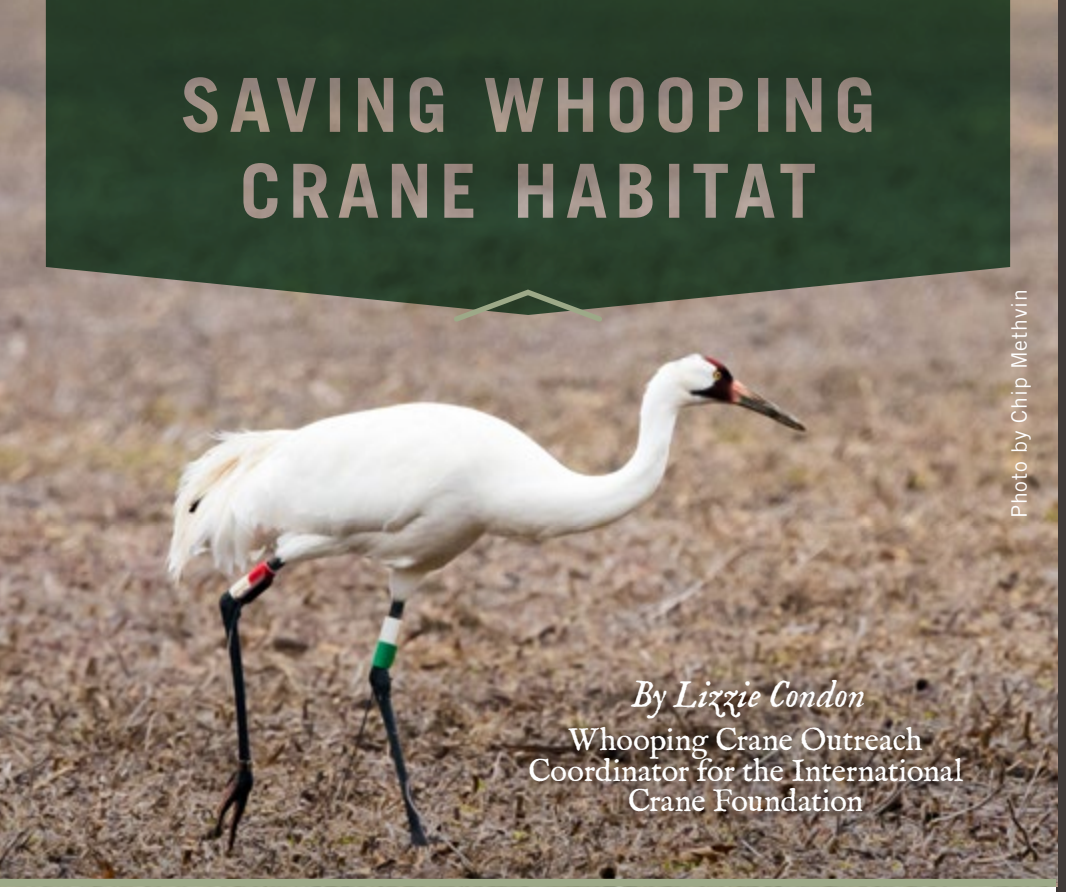


Photo by Chip Methvin

By Lizzie Condon
Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for the International Crane Foundation

The story of the whooping cranes' brush with extinction and fragile recovery is truly remarkable. Unregulated hunting, driven by museum collecting, trophy hunting, and the millinery trade, along with rampant destruction of wetlands, drove whooping cranes to the edge of extinction. In the 1940s and 50s, the species population dropped to about 20 birds. Even optimists had to admit it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to save the species.

Then the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1928 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 made it illegal to shoot whooping cranes. Conservationists began to protect key wetlands for the last remaining wild flock of whooping cranes, which still exists today. It is called the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population, named for the wintering grounds at Aransas Bay on the Gulf Coast of Texas. This population is slowly growing, now at about 320 birds.

Biologists decided to reintroduce additional flocks back into the historic range of the species. Through captive breeding, various reintroduction techniques, and intense research and monitoring, conservationists have established two reintroduced populations. One is a non-migratory population in Louisiana, established in 2011, where historically whooping cranes had been found all year round. The other is known as the Eastern Migratory Population (EMP), which was established in 2001, and now has about 109 birds.

Whooping Cranes in the EMP spend their summer on breeding territories in Wisconsin. Starting in October, they start to head southeast. At the inception of this project, biologists thought that EMP flock would winter in Florida. But many of them have been stopping short. Indiana provides vital habitat for both migrating and wintering whooping cranes, with Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area being the most important spot in Indiana for the species.

The mix of agricultural fields and shallow wetlands at Goose Pond provides ideal habitat for both whooping cranes and their much more abundant relative, the sandhill crane. Sycamore Land Trust has played an instrumental role in the creation and continued expansion of the property, and whooping cranes are loving it. In the winter of 2016-17, 34 individual whooping cranes were recorded at Goose Pond or in the surrounding fields, representing about 31% of the EMP.

I saw my first whooping crane when I joined the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in 2010 as an education intern. My job was to give tours of our headquarters in Wisconsin to schools and the public. I even got to wear a crane caretaker costume, a white tunic with a mesh panel for me to peer out of so that the whooping crane chicks would not imprint onto the human form.

Once, a wild whooping crane mistook me for another one in its territory, and I found myself face to face with a five-foot-tall

ON THE COVER

Photo by Chip Methvin

Sycamore supporter Chip Methvin loves photographing birds, and was thrilled to spot a whooping crane with a sandhill crane at Goose Pond FWA last February. See more of his photos on Instagram @chip.methvin.

bird that was threatening me with the red patch on top of its head. One of our professional aviculturists, dressed in a crane caretaker costume, stepped between us and walked toward the wild whooping crane until he got the message and backed off. It was both a thrilling and terrifying experience. I knew I wanted to work with this species again.

After graduate school I landed back at the ICF as their Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator. My job is to raise awareness about whooping cranes in communities where they occur across North America, including southwestern Indiana. Sounds easy, right?

Sycamore members are likely aware of the story of the whooping crane, but our research through surveys and focus groups indicates that the general public has a very low level of knowledge and awareness about them. Unfortunately, this has led to some terrible consequences for the species, such as shootings. Indiana has the highest number of whooping crane shooting incidents in the EMP.

Two of these shootings have occurred in the Goose Pond area, both on nearby private property. Hunters are not the problem. The majority of whooping crane shootings are completely unrelated to a hunting season, but are instead done by vandals. Whooping cranes are tall, white, and live in open habitats, often visible from the road. This makes them easy targets.

The ICF is launching a campaign in Indiana to change this. Our outreach plan includes working with Indiana organizations such as Sycamore Land Trust on K-12 education, media campaigns, presence at gun and hunting shows, hunter education, and support of the Marsh Madness Festival at Goose Pond. As a supporter of Sycamore Land Trust, you can help us by spreading the word on whoopers through conversations with friends and family and through social media. Please follow the International Crane Foundation on Facebook to learn more about how you can help.

It appears that the Texas wintering grounds for the Whooping Crane were gravely affected by Hurricane Harvey, and at the time of publication, little was know about what type of habitat will await the returning cranes. Go to fws.gov/refuge/aransas for the latest updates from the USFWS.

PROTECTING AND RESTORING *for* FOREVER. SOUTHERN INDIANA LANDS

A new video created by Blueline, showcasing the beauty of southern Indiana and our responsibility to protect it.

For Forever will premiere on Friday, October 20 at the sold-out 27th Anniversary Annual Celebration, our largest fundraising event of the year.

After that, you can find it at **sycamorelandtrust.org**, watch it live at the Reel Rock Film Festival (see p. 20), and enjoy a shortened version which will play at AMC Showplace 12 on the west side of Bloomington, now through the end of the year!

BRILLIANT FALL HUES

WHERE THEY COME FROM AND WHERE TO SEE THEM

By Abby Henkel, Communications Director

We in southern Indiana are rightfully proud of this beautiful landscape, perhaps in the fall more than any other time. Entire hillsides and forests erupt in vivid colors every September, and the color tends to stay longer here than in some other parts of the country. Ever wonder how this happens? And where are some places off the beaten path to enjoy them?

Changing daylight means changing colors

Bye bye, chlorophyll

Before they're brown, they're bright and colorful

Why are they so vibrant here?

Our favorite Sycamore nature preserves for leaf-watching

While the weather can affect the intensity of the colors, it's the length of nighttime that causes leaves to start building up a corky ("abscission") layer that eventually prevents nutrients from passing through the branch to the leaf.

As the abscission layer builds up, chlorophyll production slows and eventually stops, and what's left in the leaves is broken down into its component parts and pumped back into the tree to be used for next year's new leaves. Since chlorophyll is what makes leaves green, and it breaks down when exposed to sunlight just like a photograph does, eventually the leaves lose their green color.

Hiding beneath the chlorophyll are carotenoids and xanthophylls, which produce those yellow and orange pigments. Red and purple come from anthocyanins, which are produced by sugars in the leaf. Then as these pigments all break down in the light, the only ones left are tannins, which are brown. Research has found that aphids and other insects that like to burrow in tree bark in cold weather are turned off by the brightest leaf colors, which send the signal that the tree is strong and will defend itself with extra toxins.

The more diverse the trees species in a forest or region, the greater chances of having an extended season of fall colors because the species go through this process at slightly different times. Because southern Indiana gets plenty of sunlight in the fall (unlike Europe), our forests aren't usually dominated by a couple species (unlike New England), and our first frost isn't until mid-October, Hoosiers can enjoy about a month of autumn's colorful beauty. Factors like a rainy spring/early summer can signal brighter colors in the fall, because the leaves don't seal those barriers too early. But rain later in the summer causes too much cloud cover as well as wind and rain, which can cause leaves to fall prematurely.

You'll see beautiful fall colors anywhere you go here, but these preserves offer some of my favorite views of the hills covered in bright autumn colors. Share your fall pictures on Instagram and tag @sycamorelandtrust!

Monroe County: Scarlet Oak Woods, Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve at Downey Hill
Brown County: Laura Hare Nature Preserve
Bartholomew County: Touch the Earth Natural Area
Greene County: Dilcher-Turner Canyon Preserve

-FROM THE-

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

John Lawrence birdwatching on a staff trip to Stillwater Marsh in 2007.

MORE LAND, MORE RESPONSIBILITY

By John Lawrence

It's hard to believe how much Sycamore Land Trust has grown since I joined the staff eleven years ago. Three of us shared a small two-room office in the Showers building; now we are adding our seventh full-time position and are fortunate to have Cedar Crest as our lovely and spacious headquarters. Most importantly, the amount of land Sycamore protects has ballooned from 3,400 acres in June 2006 to over 9,100 acres today. We've nearly tripled in size!

Superhero fans will recall the words that drove Peter Parker to use his powers for good as the Amazing Spider-Man: "With great power comes great responsibility." Had Peter not been bitten by a radioactive spider and instead went into land conservation (anything can happen, especially in comic books), his Uncle Ben would have similarly counseled him that with more land comes more responsibility. "Completing" a land acquisition project is really just the beginning – protecting a parcel of land forever means taking on the responsibility of caring for it forever.

Sycamore now owns and manages nearly 50 individual nature preserves, and is responsible for over 30 conservation easements. At a minimum, every preserve or easement requires at least annual monitoring and follow-up, and many preserves are intensively managed to restore or improve habitat and to provide public access on trails. All those properties are spread across southern Indiana, too. From Eagle Slough in Evansville, to Beanblossom Bottoms north of Bloomington, and all the way to Pfrimmer Farm near Corydon, we have a lot of ground to cover. Even with all the help of our dedicated volunteers, we've got our work cut out for us!

Fortunately, our good friend Darlene Gerster has made a generous donation and pledge to help us keep up with our increasing responsibilities. With her assistance, Sycamore has just hired our first full-time position dedicated entirely to caring for our nature preserves and easements. Chris Fox is joining us as our new Land Stewardship Manager, and I'm excited to begin working with him to expand our land management program. You'll get to know more about him in the next Twig, so suffice to say for now that he brings a great combination of experience and enthusiasm to our team. He might not have radioactive superpowers, but he will do an amazing job caring for the land we protect.

Bloomingfoods Shoppers Make Positive Change

Thanks to all the Bloomingfoods shoppers who rounded up their purchases in June! Together, you raised nearly $8,125 for Sycamore!

Pictured here: Susan Haislip, Abby Henkel, Ann Connors, and John Lawrence of Sycamore with Natascha Jacob (center) of Bloomingfoods.

PHILANTHROPY -IN THE- CLASSROOM

Shane Gibson instructs a class from the Harmony School at Yellowwood Farm, which has a conservation easement with Sycamore.
Photo by Rachel Hartley-Smith

By Shane Gibson, Environmental Education Director

Not too long ago, I visited a school with a club that was raising money to protect animals in Africa. I thought to myself, "Why not protect wildlife in your hometown? Why not protect land where you can touch the soil you helped save?"

Thus was born the classroom membership. A classroom membership to Sycamore Land Trust is only $20. The first $20 donated by a classroom goes toward operational expenses related to land conservation. Additional amounts are invested in our Monarch Environmental Education Endowment Fund to ensure that the educational programming provided by Sycamore will forever be free, in much the same way that Sycamore's land acquisitions will forever be protected. We are nearing our goal of $1 million for this endowment; contact us to learn more about how you can contribute!

In the spring of 2017, Stinesville Elementary students and I finished planting our native seeds early. STEAM (Science, Technology, Environment, Arts, and Math) Coordinator and teacher Jaimie Miller had a backup plan if we finished early. She gathered the students in front of the projector screen and began discussing philanthropy. I had no idea what her backup lesson would be, but just like the perfect lead-in question in an infomercial, I answered, "Well, I have the perfect philanthropic opportunity for you, a Sycamore Classroom Membership."

I asked Mrs. Miller why she felt philanthropy was important to discuss with these young students. She said, "Learn to Give is a great resource when starting to teach philanthropy or giving. We define philanthropy as the giving of one's time, talents, or treasures to improve and give back to the world around us. Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corp. students are developing new, practical skills through STEAM classes, and with the help of community partners like Sycamore Land Trust, they're able to employ those skills to meet needs they see in their immediate environment and to feel empowered as young land stewards for their communities."

Jennifer Lewis is a first grade teacher at Marlin Elementary with Monroe County Community Schools (MCCSC). In the spring of 2017, her kindergarten class became the first official Sycamore Classroom Member. Sycamore's Environmental Education program partnered with this class throughout the entire 2016-17 school year.

Mrs. Lewis shared, "through the Sycamore Land Trust's environmental program, my students learned not only about their environment but what they could do to protect and preserve it. I think it's important for children to understand that in order to do that, it takes a concerted effort. They learned through raising money for our classroom membership that they could make a difference and be part of something bigger to help our environment - even if they were just 5- and 6-year-olds."

At MCCSC's Templeton Elementary, Sycamore's Environmental Education program partners with many classrooms. Students, teachers, school custodians, and Sycamore staff have worked together to revamp the Children's Garden and to plant native plants in the circle drop-off drive. This project is funded by a grant from Duke Energy and includes site preparation, mulching, and planting.

Templeton K-6th grade teacher Rise Reinier expounded on her students' experience working with Sycamore and becoming a classroom member: "participating with and working on Sycamore projects helps students understand the interconnectedness of all things in nature. Physical involvement, be it digging holes, moving mulch, or gathering seed from native plants, is something tangible – active bodies : active minds. A community of people who value the environment and generously and collectively work to make the world a better place is the reason I think this is a wonderful opportunity for students."

To become a classroom member, contact Shane Gibson at shane@sycamorelandtrust.org.

Enjoy Yourself, Enjoy Nature

AMY WEINGARTNER BRANIGIN PENINSULA PRESERVE

NATURE'S POTENTIAL

By Shayna Steingard, IU SPEA Communications Fellow

The highest slots on my environmental bucket list are filled with goals to see old-growth forests and unexplored wilderness-- to visit the rainbow hot springs in Yellowstone or stand under a giant Redwood in Fern Canyon. I celebrate with a triumphant internal fist pump whenever I hear that environmentalists were able to protect land from damage and development. The more these places are protected, the more likely we all have a chance to hike forests filled hundred-year-old trees, watch hatchling sea turtles crawl towards the ocean, and see a towering glacier firsthand. Sometimes I focus so much on the protection of environments that have the least amount of human interference, that I overlook the natural potential in places much closer to home.

Land damaged by decades of mining, landfills contaminated by PCBs, or farmland that has gone through countless seasons of plantings could easily be passed over in our mission to protect the environment. These developed and highly used places can often seem too far gone. But with a one-track mind towards untouched nature, a place like Beanblossom Bottoms could have seemed unworthy of saving.

Truthfully, it's hard to find untouched nature. Human influence ranges from raising modern cities to pre-colonial activities of native people. Traces of human activities can be found in even the most remote places, from the depths of the Mariana trench to the top of Mount Everest. Most "natural" spaces are products of human decisions and influence. We've changed ecosystems through species loss, pollution, and habitat destruction. But we also construct "natural" spaces when we choose to preserve, conserve, or rehabilitate them.

Sycamore's Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve was cultivated farmland for generations, and what it has become now — 25 years later — is no less a product of human cultivation. Be it the planting of

Columbia Mine Preserve in Pike & Gibson counties is mostly mineland, reverting to nature on 1,050 acres of lakes and woods. Rare species including bobcats and Bell's vireo have been seen there.

50,000 native trees, the removal of reed canary grass and Japanese honeysuckle, or the construction and maintenance of wet meadows for the Kirtland's snake, humans are an integral part of this ecosystem. We have sometimes gently, sometimes actively steered its growth toward an ecologically brighter future.

It's important that we see the potential in human-touched places like Beanblossom Bottoms, in part because that's simply our ecological reality: We live in a world that is highly human. The more we focus on an environment that is separated from human interaction, the more limits we impose on the places where we can do important environmental work. We should look at farmlands, neighborhoods, and backyards just as frequently as "untouched land." It's in these places where we can make the simple changes -- to plant native species like butterflyweed or purple coneflower, install nesting boxes, weed instead of apply herbicides -- that can decrease our negative impact on the environment. And it is in these places where people have the opportunity to make the simple connections — to learn to identify a red-bellied woodpecker or taste wild clover, sassafras, and wood sorrel — that can lead to a lifelong environmental ethic and an ability to see the natural potential in all spaces.

Someday, we may find that we've helped create the spaces within our communities and neighborhoods that allow us to check a couple of items off our bucket list.

THOUGHTS FROM AN ARMCHAIR HIKER

By John Scully, Sycamore member and volunteer

Hi. You probably don't know me and I probably don't know you, even though I may have stuffed, sealed, and stamped an envelope to you from Sycamore Land Trust. I'm sure we've never met on any of the many trails in the thousands of acres managed by Sycamore. As I told the people here when I started volunteering in early 2016, I'm an avid indoorsman. I've been helping out with office chores since then because I'd rather face the inside dangers of paper cuts, database error messages, and taping my thumb to a parcel, than the outside dangers of a scurrilous squirrel, a tenacious tick, or a chancy chipmunk with a chip on his shoulder, a sneer on his lip, and a cold dead look in his eyes that makes you wonder where he's been and what he's seen.

Wild animals and I have a healthy respect for each other. When a bird was caught in my garage once, I called 911 because I had seen Hitchcock's documentary "The Birds." I bathe in bug spray every afternoon to go get the mail. When I was a child with my family in a restaurant and the waiter told us that the special was steamed clams, I demanded to know what they were steamed about and if they were going to take it out on me.

So I'm very happy volunteering once a week in the office here at Cedar Crest; helping with mailings, updating the database, changing the clocks twice a year, whatever needs to be done. I even ventured outside the building once onto the driveway to help wrap tree seedlings for the Arbor Day give-away. It was touch and go for me, but the wonderful people here were very supportive and got me through it.

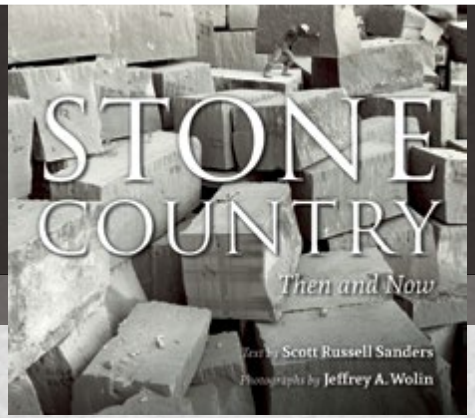
No, I prefer working in the basement where I can see 12 acres of beautiful woods but am protected from it by plate glass. I like the idea of nature, it's just that I don't like it on me.

But that's not to say that I don't value the idea of wild places and safe habitats for the flora and fauna there. I do. And it breaks my heart to see all the forests, wetlands, and pastures that are lost every day to development. So I appreciate very much what Sycamore Land Trust does to protect the wilderness we have left and even expand the boundaries of it. And I love volunteering here and working with all the dedicated people who could make more money in the private sector but believe in making the world a better place and spend many more than 40 hours a week to that end.

I hope you'll support them too, in whatever way you can. And please get out and enjoy the marvelous trails and wilderness areas supported by Sycamore. I'll be with you…in spirit.

Grand Bloomie Award

Sycamore staff were thrilled to be honored with the Grand Bloomie award for our ad design in Bloom Magazine! Attendees at Bloom's 11th Anniversary Gala in August voted for our ad as the top design among many beautiful ads from local businesses. Thanks to Bloom for providing the ad space, to Steve Gifford for taking the photo, and to Bill Whorrall for conceiving of the message.



Sanders and Wolin traveled Indiana to uncover the history of the limestone industry and the people who built it.

Stone Country: Then and Now

By Scott Russell Sanders (text) and Jeffrey A. Wolin (photographs)

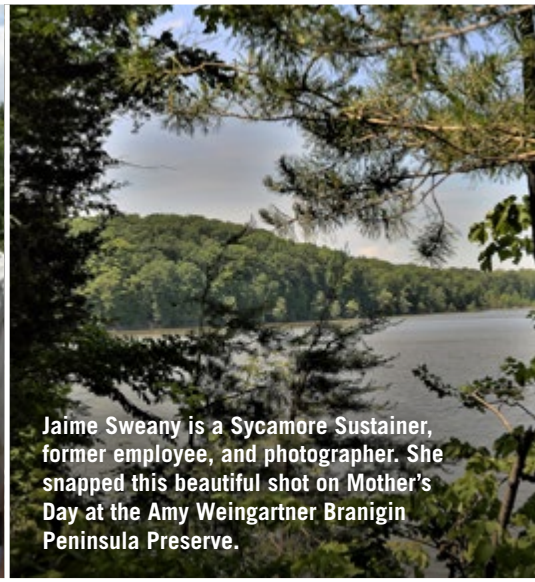
New edition now out in paperback from the Indiana University Press

Buy your copy today and support local publishing: **iupress.indiana.edu**

Sycamore Sightings

Participants at the Fossil Hike hosted by Sycamore Branches show off the fossils they found in the creek at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve.

Indiana Public Broadcasting reporter Nick Janzen interviewed Bill McCoy, director of the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge, who manages our Columbia Mine Preserve. Hear the interview at sycamorelandtrust.org/media.



Jaime Sweany is a Sycamore Sustainer, former employee, and photographer. She snapped this beautiful shot on Mother's Day at the Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve.

-THE-
GROUNDSWELL
Fall 2017

OWNED LAND & EASEMENTS		PROJECTS ASSISTED	
103	9,160	9	10,095
PROJECTS	ACRES	PROJECTS	ACRES

Join us for a hike or workday! Hikes are free for members; the fee for non-members is $5/person or $10/family unless otherwise specified. Volunteer events are free. For more details on an event and to RSVP (required for hikes and volunteer days), visit **sycamorelandtrust.org/events**.

OCTOBER

10/4

WEEKDAY WALKERS: MIGRATORY BIRDS

Wednesday, October 4, 10am-2pm

Trevlac Bluffs & Lake Lemon (Brown & Monroe Counties)

Led by conservation expert Lee Sterrenburg, participants will hike the upper trail of Trevlac Bluffs, visit the Little Africa property on Lake Lemon's South Shore Drive, and finish with a stop at a private property on Lake Lemon.

10/16

SECOND MONDAY PRESERVE-A-PRESERVE DAY

Monday, October 16, 12:30-4pm

Sam Shine Foundation Preserve (Monroe County)

We'll continue work on removing Asian bush honeysuckle and other invasives at this newer preserve along Beanblossom Creek. Note the different day this month!

10/20

27TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL CELEBRATION SOLD OUT

Friday, October 20, 6pm

Monroe Convention Center (Bloomington)

Tickets to the Annual Celebration, our largest fundraiser of the year, are sold out. Thanks to all our sponsors, auction donors, volunteers, and ticket buyers!

NOVEMBER

11/7

WEEKDAY WALKERS: GREENE COUNTY TOUR

Tuesday, November 7, 10am-1pm

Greene County (meeting location TBA)

Explore cultural sites of interest in Greene County as we visit Tulip Trestle with Purdue Extension Coordinator Malea Huffman, then we will hike the Sculpture Trails Outdoor Museum.

11/12

REEL ROCK FILM TOUR

Sunday, November 12, 7:30pm

Buskirk-Chumley Theater (Bloomington)

This film fest brings the best of climbing and adventure films of the year to live audiences around the world. The Bloomington screening is produced in partnership with Mountain Folk Adventure to raise funds for Sycamore Land Trust. Tickets: $15 general, $10 students.

11/16

THIRD THURSDAY PRESERVE-A-PRESERVE DAY

Thursday, November 16, 1-4pm

Touch the Earth Natural Area (Bartholomew County)

Privet, autumn olive, and other invasive bushes will be our target as we continue follow-up from a recent large-scale control project.

DECEMBER

12/1

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Friday, December 1, 5-8pm

Cedar Crest (Monroe County)

Sycamore members are invited to this festive party with carolers, hors d'oeuvres, drinks, a crackling fire, and plenty of merriment at our headquarters.

12/3

LITTLE HIKERS: HABITATS

Sunday, December 3, 12-2pm

Yellowwood Farm (Brown County)

Explore habitats of creek, meadow, and upland woods with our nature group for young children and their guardians on this conservation easement in Brown Co.

JANUARY

1/6

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION HIKE

Saturday, January 6, 12-2pm

Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill (Brown County)

New Year's Resolution Hike: Be healthy. Be active. Be immersed in the beautiful Brown County Hills. Join us for a hike that is sure to burn off some of those holiday pounds.

1/7

LITTLE HIKERS: WHO'S BEEN HERE?

Sunday, January 7, 12-2pm

Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve (Monroe County)

Good questions often to lead to wonderful discoveries. We'll read a few pages of a book by Lindsey Barrett George then get on our way to using our senses and asking "who's been here?"

FEBRUARY

2/3

SOLITUDE HIKE

Saturday, February 3, 12-2pm

The Cedars Preserve (Monroe County)

Often interpretive hikes involve so much discussion that you may never be fully aware of the sights and sounds around you. Join this hike to quietly explore The Cedars with shared readings and inspirational quotes along the way.

2/10

LITTLE HIKERS: PINE NEEDLE TEA

Saturday, February 10, 12-2pm

Cedar Crest (Monroe County)

We will learn how to identify local evergreens including the white pine, which we will use to make a delicious and nutritious tea to warm our souls on this winter day.

2/15

WEEKDAY WALKERS: FRESH AIR & FITNESS

Thursday, February 15, 10am-12pm

Yellowwood Farm (Brown County)

Enjoy a refreshing winter hike through meadow, creek, and upland forest at this conservation easement located at the edge of Yellowwood State Forest in Brown County.

BUSINESS AND FOUNDATION SUPPORTERS

AUGUST 1, 2016 THROUGH JULY 31, 2017

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Thank you!

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

It's the perfect holiday gift for anyone who loves nature, critters, and passing on a conservation ethic to future generations.

Buy your loved ones gift memberships to Sycamore for just $40, and inspire a lifetime of giving back.

sycamorelandtrust.org/donate

TAKE A STAND
- FOR THE -
ENVIRONMENT

Become a member of Sycamore Land Trust

Your gift of $40 or more renews your annual membership, and sends the message that you believe in protecting the future of southern Indiana's wilderness.

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