Dear Sycamore Friends,

Sycamore maintains public hiking trails at 13 of our nature preserves, to bring people closer to nature and inspire our community to join us in protecting land for future generations. But together, we preserve far more than is visible to the general public. The majority of the 121 properties in our care are managed only for the native plants and animals that live there. For many rare and threatened species, undisturbed habitat means a chance at survival. Fortunately, there are success stories that inspire us and guide our work.

Once extirpated from Indiana, bald eagles have made a remarkable rebound thanks to legal protection, a reintroduction program, and habitat conservation efforts. A pair has nested at our Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve for almost 20 years, returning again this spring. This winter at the nearby Laura Hare Tract of the Dan Efroymson Preserve, which does not have a trail, a neighbor photographed eight bald eagles together in a tree along Beanblossom Creek, above a field where we will plant thousands of native trees this spring.

While clearing invasive brush late this winter to improve habitat at Grandchildren’s Woods, which is also not open to the public, our land stewardship team was thrilled to see great blue herons gliding gracefully into their nesting colony in the preserve. While the herons have a healthy population, their rookeries are vulnerable to human disturbance and habitat destruction. After a few minutes of silently watching, our team retired for the day, giving the herons the privacy they need to feel safe to return.

Bobcat was listed as a state endangered species in Indiana until 2005, but
bobcat populations have been rebounding. Wildlife cameras at preserves in our Beanblossom Creek Conservation Area have shown us both adult and juvenile bobcats, giving us confirmation that they are thriving in this important wildlife corridor.

Sycamore and Indiana DNR staff are working together at our Sam Shine Foundation Preserve and several other non-public properties to monitor reptiles and amphibians, which are indicators of environmental health. Over 150 salamanders were counted in one day this February. The discovery of a state-endangered Kirtland’s snake population highlights the significance of the Beanblossom valley as a habitat corridor for the region’s herpetofauna.

Once eliminated from Indiana, river otters were reintroduced and are returning to many waterways in the state. They have been seen at our Eagle Slough Natural Area in Evansville for the past two winters, highlighting the importance of this publicly-accessible preserve.

And in this issue, we celebrate a new conservation easement to protect important forest habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bat in Harrison County near a Jug Hole Cave, a critical winter hibernaculum for the bats.

Together with over 1,250 members, we are protecting, restoring, and maintaining vital wildlife habitat through ongoing stewardship efforts, and preserving Indiana’s remarkable biodiversity. Thank YOU for making this work possible!

John Lawrence
Executive Director

Follow Leave No Trace principles while visiting our preserves to protect the wildlife populations who depend on this habitat. Learn more at leavenotrace.org.

on the cover
A Jefferson salamander (Ambystoma jeffersonianum) rests on a sycamore leaf at Touch the Earth Natural Area in Columbus. Ben Genter
If you’ve ever hiked with a young child, you know the struggle of keeping boundless energy pointed in one direction. I never mind hiking slowly but with kids it can get ridiculous if you don’t go in with a plan. Luckily I am a storyteller, and as rough as the going gets, I can keep my daughters on the trail as long as I weave a story that carries them along.

My daughter has forgotten we are hiking and is happily splashing in her muck boots through the shallow water on the gravel trail at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. Unlike most hikers, she loves that the trail is now almost constantly under a few inches of water to splash through. But today I am eager to get to the boardwalk, I want to see if the bald eagle family is at their nest. So I begin a story about the beaver family who have flooded the trail.

“Do you know the beavers here are saving the planet?” I ask.

It worked. She stopped trying to wake up the frogs under the ice and ran to catch up. Thanks to Sycamore’s new “Dam Cam,” a wildlife camera we installed at a beaver dam nearby, I have all the inspiration I need to weave a drama that lasts for miles.
A WINDOW INTO THEIR WORLD

Last summer, we set up 12 wildlife cameras in the Beanblossom Creek flood plain north of Bloomington in areas we know are frequented by animals. This includes game trails, creeks, and a beaver dam that creates a natural bridge across a wetland area at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. The footage these cameras capture is helping us get to know the wildlife communities that rely on the land we protect.

After consulting with land trusts across the nation and wildlife camera expert Sally Nasser, we chose Browning Recon Force Advantage cameras with night vision that capture 20-second videos when animals pass within range. Without negatively impacting or disturbing wildlife, our cameras give us a window into their world. The data we collect helps us decide which habitat restoration efforts will be most beneficial to the wildlife living in that area. The needs of each of our properties are as unique as the biological communities they protect.

As we review the thousands of hours of footage we’ve captured, we are transported...
into their world. We feel joy as a deer dances in the rain, dizzy as two mice chase each other’s tails, and wonder at one Virginia opossum constantly dragging a large bundle of leaves. Has her prehensile tail gathered the bundles to build a den for the night, or is something wrong? As we watch these animals and their busy lives, our cameras help us piece together their stories.

We can recognize individuals by their markings and have identified coyote, bobcat, and deer families that travel from camera to camera. Two individuals are particularly easy to recognize—a Virginia opossum and raccoon who are missing their tails, though they appear to be doing just fine (I reassured my daughter).

Our cameras picked up the quiet sounds of animals communicating with each other, including turkeys talking back and forth in the shade, chatter between a doe and her fawn, and a mother bobcat calling to her kittens. We captured far more bird species than we expected, some by their call alone.

One of our favorite clips begins when the camera is triggered by a raccoon climbing a vine. Many animals climbed this vine on camera (we called it our “Vine Cam”) but this time, an owl in a nearby tree flutters her wings just as the clip begins. The raccoon is startled, falling from the vine with arms outstretched and a surprised and almost comical look in his glowing eyes. The owl’s silhouette is still visible up in the tree, now leaning forward to watch the commotion. Then she bobs her head, making two clearly visible circles. As this glimpse into their world comes to a close, the raccoon appears out of the bushes shaking his head and walks off camera. Did the raccoon startle the owl or vice versa? Piecing together the story is part of the fun.
WATCHING THE SEASONS TURN
This winter, a crow walked slowly across a patch of ice, its black outline a stark contrast against the white snow. It stepped carefully, making slow but steady progress on the slippery surface as it passed our camera.

It reminded us of a teaching by Lao Tzu: “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.” As hectic as our lives become, settling into the rhythms of nature can teach us valuable lessons. A good reminder for my busy family.

As the seasons turn on our preserves, our cameras have allowed us to observe seasonal changes in animal life. We watch appearances change, like the deer antlers that grow to large velvety racks, turning increasingly shiny as the itchy velvet is scraped off on a favorite tree branch.

BUSY AS A BEAVER
Back at the beaver dam, our “Dam Cam” has captured dozens of species crossing the natural bridge it creates. As winter approached, we began seeing the family of beavers almost constantly hard at work to build and repair their dam, swimming and slogging mud and once stopping to touch noses.

“One thing these cameras have reinforced, and something I’m still blown away by, is how big of a deal beavers are in this
landscape,” our Land Stewardship Director Chris Fox said. “You can see on these cameras that where there is beaver activity, there is an abundance of animals. Everything needs water.” We’ve been watching the beaver family’s lodge this winter, heat rising from the hole in its roof like a chimney. They have certainly earned their winter rest.

**A NEW RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS**

My daughters love the precious moments we captured between animal babies and their parents, like a doe and her fawn nuzzling each other in the dark. We also recorded a turkey hen crossing a creek bed with thirteen baby poult’s trailing behind, two bobcat kittens following their mother across the dam, coyote pups playing tag at night with the exuberance of my toddler, and more. When viewed from this perspective, wildlife families don’t feel so different from our own.

Sycamore is creating a new educational resource called The *Beanblossom Creek Wildlife Camera Project*, which aims to help local schools connect thousands of children to nature here in southern Indiana. In January, we sought the help of dozens of local teachers to better understand how our wildlife camera footage can be used in classrooms to foster an appreciation of the outdoors and spark an interest in conservation.

Ms. April Waxler usually takes her kindergarten class on weekly nature hikes to observe and document nature in their neighborhood. But on a day when it was too cold to go outside, she gathered them around to watch Sycamore’s wildlife camera footage instead. She agreed to gather feedback to help us create a new educational tool to enhance her beautiful
Montessori science curriculum. The students watched carefully, discussed what they saw, drew an animal they observed, and used an encyclopedia to learn a new fact about them. “Thank you for sharing this excellent resource,” she said.

“Seeing wildlife in their natural environments and witnessing their behaviors allows us to make stronger connections to wildlife and nature,” said Mrs. Jennifer A. Lewis, Kindergarten/1st Grade Teacher at Marlin Elementary School. “This footage can be used to enhance our teaching for students to see wildlife up close and is even more meaningful when this wildlife is living in our area.”

Ms. Chelsea Blanchard’s art students at Clear Creek Elementary School made a wetlands collaborative mural for a school display case and used Sycamore’s wildlife footage to identify animals to collage for the art piece.

With local teachers to guide us, the Beanblossom Creek Wildlife Camera Project will feature themed chapters including “Animal Families” (animal parents with babies), “Slowing Down” (fast animals like weasels, hawks, and mice in slow motion), “Busy Beavers” (and their magnificent beaver dam) and more. We’ll set the scene by looking around the animals’ world, including wading with our stewardship team through a wetland to check the cameras. An accompanying study guide will help teachers and parents share these animals’ stories and bring children closer to the nature that surrounds us.

It is our hope that these stories will inspire future generations of young conservationists to follow in our footsteps. It certainly works for my family.

Sycamore’s Beanblossom Creek Wildlife Camera Project will be available for free in fall 2022. To learn more about the work that goes into our Wildlife Camera Project and to watch footage from our “Dam Cam,” “Squirrel Log Cam,” “Creek Cam,” “Vine Cam,” and many more, visit sycamorelandtrust.org/wildlife.
Shaping an Ecosystem

BY ELLEN BERGAN, LAND STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANT

LATE LAST FALL,

A HEAVY RAIN INUNDATED A FIELD AT OUR SAM SHINE FOUNDATION PRESERVE.
THE TYPICAL TRICKLE
THAT DRAINS INTO BEANBLOSSOM CREEK

BECAME AN EPHEMERAL CASCADE,

A BRIEF SUBMERGENCE THAT WOULD DRAIN OVERNIGHT.

BUT BEAVERS HEARD THE RUSHING WATER,
AND THE BEAVERS WORKED,

AND THE LANDSCAPE CHANGED.
Beavers make dams to access food and shelter.

Do they realize the extent of what they build?
THE RICHNESS OF LIFE THAT FOLLOWS THEM?
That they shape entire ecosystems

Through the creation of home.
“THERE IT IS!” I said triumphantly. Peering through the dense brush I could see the lodge. I quickly turned around to Ellen Bergan, Land Stewardship Assistant, and encouraged “Only a little bit further.” We were weaving our way through a thicket of sycamore, red maple and buttonbush exploring a section of the preserve that is normally inaccessible. The plunging temperatures had frozen the quagmire which allowed us to get deeper into the wetland without getting stuck in the muck. This was a massive lodge that must have taken years to build and possibly been in use for decades. The beavers had chosen a spot along the old drainage ditch close to ample food and far from the beaten path. As we worked our way closer to the pile of peeled logs and mud, I noticed a shimmering above the dome. Heat rising from the log home was a sure sign someone was inside. In my mind I imagined the beaver family huddled together, prepared for the long winter and eagerly anticipating a new generation to the colony. Suddenly, a high-pitched screech pierced through the silence and caught my attention. I quickly scanned the horizon and found an adult bald eagle perched in a snag a few hundred yards beyond the lodge. A light snow
had begun falling and the stillness was so intense I could hear the flakes tumbling from the sky. The sun was beginning to set but I lingered a bit longer to soak it all in. I breathed deeply the cold crisp air and contemplated all the pieces that had to fall into place in order to make this moment possible.

Prior to the explosion of the fur trade that would nearly eliminate the North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) from the planet, it is estimated that there were more than 60 million spread throughout the continent from Canada to Mexico. By some estimates, that number could have even exceeded 100 million. Since beavers are ecosystem engineers, each one of those colonies, which consists of the adults, young kits and yearlings, would create and maintain a wetland complex which in turn supported an entire ecosystem. Beaver-created wetlands are among the most biologically diverse and productive ecosystems in the world so it is no wonder that the beaver is often referred to as the quintessential keystone species. A species that supports a whole host of other species ranging from large animals, such as moose and trumpeter swans, all the way down to
small macroinvertebrates which are important food for many species of amphibians and fish, like trout and salmon. And not least of all, the wetland plants that depend on a semiaquatic freshwater environment that a beaver pond creates.

While we now realize that beavers are valuable members of the natural community, prior to this understanding they were nearly trapped to extinction due to the value of their fur fueled mostly by a fashion trend. In the early part of the 19th century, the demand for the fur pelts reached epic levels with the increased popularity of the beaver hat in Europe and the near extinction of their native European beaver (Castor fiber). So great was the fever for beaver pelts that it was a major driving force in the exploration of the west. Meriwether Lewis in July of 1805 while exploring the Missouri river basin near present day Montana wrote “[Captain Clark] saw a number of beaver dams succeeding each other in close order and extending as far up those streams as he could discover them in their course towards the mountains.” Yet, by 1843 when John James Audubon traveled nearly the same route in search of mammals to paint for his latest project, he could not find one beaver. Like so many other once abundant species, the beaver, in a relatively short period of time, was nearly gone and with it disappeared millions of acres of wetlands as dams failed and flooded meadows became eroded streams. The impact to the landscape from the loss of beavers and their wetland complexes is so often overlooked and undervalued in the natural history of this country. In the eloquently written award-winning book, *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, author Ben Goldfarb explains so clearly the
impact beavers had on the land and how they helped shape the continent. As Goldfarb explains, “The truth is beavers are nothing less than continent-scale forces of nature, in large part responsible for sculpting the land upon which Americans built our towns and raised our food. Beavers shaped North America’s ecosystems, human history, its geology.”

Luckily, there have been individuals along the way that understood the importance of beavers and worked to protect and in many cases bring them back. One of the early beaver supporters was Enos Mills, naturalist and author, who in 1913 wrote a book about beavers and proclaimed, “A live beaver is more valuable to mankind than a dead one.” Over the years, beavers have gradually mounted a comeback thanks to the early supporters and the lack of demand for their fur. Their recovery was aided in some case through reintroductions including a rather unique approach taken in Idaho. In 1948, biologist Elmo Hetter was trying to figure out a way to get beavers deep into the backcountry. Travel by mule and horse had proven unsafe and ineffective. One day Hetter had the idea to use a surplus of parachutes from WWII to air drop the beavers using special boxes that opened once safely on the ground. The crazy idea worked and 75 beavers were successfully reintroduced to the wilderness. According to Geriann Albers, DNR biologist, the first reintroductions took place in northern Indiana in 1935 using beavers relocated from Michigan and Wisconsin, minus the parachutes, of course. Recently, I spoke with Bill McCoy (retired refuge manager for the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and current Sycamore Board member), he told wonderful stories about the impact beavers have had on the refuge over the years. He explained that the refuge is listed as a globally Important Bird Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society and one of the factors that led to this designation is the presence of breeding Prothonotary Warblers on the refuge. These cavity nesting warblers are breeding on the refuge because of the abundance of dead trees with abandoned woodpecker nests which are created through flooding caused by beaver dams.

Today, beavers are becoming more and more common throughout much of their historical range. In fact, they have become so common in some
areas they have created a new threat for themselves. Turns out that beavers and humans prefer similar areas to live. Like us, they prefer flat and fertile valleys with slow moving streams. In the absence of beavers, we had built roads, bridges, farms and homes in many cases directly on top of beaver meadows and right where the beavers would want to live. Once the beavers returned, it was only a matter of time until their water-filled world impacted ours. But, where there are problems there are always solutions. Thankfully, there is a growing movement to help protect beavers and also solve these problems. These energetic and passionate protectors proudly call themselves the “Beaver Believers”. These dedicated individuals have helped relocate problem beavers, created devices to reduce flooding caused by dams and worked tirelessly to educate the public about the benefits of beavers. As Goldfarb states, “Beavers are so important because there’s practically no ecological problem that their ponds and wetlands can’t help us solve. They create habitat for endangered fish and wildlife, capture pollution, restore degraded streams, prevent both drought and flooding, sequester carbon, and dampen the landscape against wildfire.” Kent Woodruff, USFS Wildlife Biologist and Beaver Believer, said “In the beginning, we viewed beavers as a commodity belonging to us. Today, I think we need to view beavers as part of a community to which we all belong. If we do, together we’ll be part of the solution.”

I remember the day when I first began to truly see the beaver as part of the community to which we all belong and it was transformative. It was a cold, grey February afternoon and I was squeezing into my well-worn and mud crusted chest waders. My objective that day was to access damage to the boardwalk at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve from a recent storm. The frustration of frequent flooding and the ensuing repairs had me seriously considering removing all the obstructions in the ditches and drainages, including several large beaver dams.

As I began shuffling through the waist deep muddy water, I knew this would be a challenging walk and I hoped my waders and I were up to the task. Slowly navigating through the flooded forest I could feel the frigid temperatures radiating through
my insulated waders as I worked my way closer to the boardwalk. Luckily, the effort needed to push through the cold water helped warm me against the chill. The deeper I went into the wetlands the deeper my concerns grew. I looked around in all directions and all I could see were trees and water. When I arrived at the boardwalk and saw the damage my heart sank. The boardwalk including all our supplies and tools were completely submerged. It was a disaster and I felt defeated. “How could this happen?” I cried out! And then out of the corner of my eye I noticed some movement about 20 yards away. Perched on the top of a small mound of soil, remnants of an old dug out farm pond and the only dry ground insight, was a large adult beaver. As I turned to get a better look, the furry mammal silently slipped into the water. It quickly swam directly towards me with such grace and ease. Before I realized it, the curious creature was within a few feet of me. I am not sure which one of us was more surprised by the encounter. Mesmerized, I watched as this semiaquatic rodent floated right up alongside me staring back with those dark eyes. It seemed so perfectly adapted to this harsh world. I noticed the small ears sitting on top of the rather large head and the nose curiously sniffing the air yet...
capable of closing while being submerged for upwards of 15 minutes without a breath. When it lifted its head I could see the orange-colored teeth, literally fortified with iron, which allow it to continuously chisel its way through trees and limbs. Barely visible in the murky water were the small dexterous, front feet with long claws powerful enough to dig channels and burrows yet nimble enough to pick up small rocks and vegetation for dam building. Churning the water as it swam by were those webbed, duck-like rear feet that can propel it at Michael Phelps speeds. Trailing behind it was that signature broad, flat tail that is the beaver equivalent of a Swiss army knife serving as rudder, kickstand, seat, warning signal and fat storage device. And finally that brown waterproof fur, perhaps its most remarkable feature, with more hair in a postage stamp patch of skin than on a person’s head. Ironically, that fur which was meant to insulate and protect the beaver, nearly lead to its extinction.

As I looked at this fascinating creature, I realized every part of it was made to live a life in this environment. And this environment, the very wetland in which I was standing, was made possible because of this creature. Then just as suddenly as it began, it was over. The beaver, either satisfied I posed no threat or bored with me, silently swam off and disappeared into the flooded wetland. Disappointed the experience was over but grateful to have witnessed it, I looked around with a new perspective. No longer did I see destruction and chaos but instead saw a perfectly functioning wetland doing exactly what a wetland is supposed to do. As I began making my way back to the truck, I thought about this experience and a smile came across my face. I realized that I had just been taught an important lesson about the resiliency of nature, and maybe on a deeper level the resiliency of life, all by a rodent. Leave it to a beaver!

“In every walk with nature, one receives more than he seeks.”

-JOHN MUIR
BY ROB MCCREA, LAND PRESERVATION DIRECTOR

The historic range of the Indiana bat (Myotis Sodalis) includes most of the eastern United States. Like many species that have very specific habitat requirements, Indiana bat populations have declined throughout their range as winter hibernacula (e.g. caves) have been disturbed. The loss of summer foraging and roosting habitat along with the increase in a fungal disease called “white nose syndrome” have also impacted this species.

The Indiana bat is called the Indiana bat because it was first discovered in Indiana in 1928 at Wyandotte Cave in Harrison County. The name is fitting also when considering that the caves and forests of Indiana provide habitat for 33% of the known population of Indiana bats. Unfortunately, Indiana has also been one of the states with the most significant declines in overall numbers—down 22% since 2007. This decline is in spite of the fact that the Indiana bat was listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act in 1967.

The good news is that Sycamore is working with conservation partners on projects to restore and protect critical habitat for Indiana bats in close proximity to hibernacula with established populations. In 2021, Sycamore partnered with Resource Environmental Solutions (“RES”) to serve as the holder of two conservation easements totaling 193 acres on property owned by RES located within one mile of the opening to Ray’s cave in Greene County. Ray’s cave is important because it is the sixth largest known Indiana bat hibernacula.

RES is a for-profit ecological restoration company involved in endangered species habitat
mitigation. RES provides a service to companies engaged in development projects that adversely affect Indiana bats such as the construction road or wind energy projects that cause incidental fatalities of individual Indiana bats. In 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved the Indiana Bat En-Lieu Fee Program that authorized compensatory mitigation for the Indiana bat pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. This program allows companies like RES to sponsor “conservation banks” for the preservation and restoration of Indiana bat habitat. Each conservation bank has a certain number of credits that can be sold to offset impacts from development projects that adversely affect Indiana bats.

An important feature of this program requires that the land included in the conservation bank be protected into perpetuity with a conservation easement and an organization like Sycamore Land Trust to be the holder of the conservation easement. In our partnership with RES, Sycamore will monitor these protected properties to ensure that RES is adequately restoring them and that they remain protected forever. In addition to the two conservation easements near Ray’s cave, Sycamore is working on additional projects with RES and other mitigation companies specifically for preservation of critical habitat for Indiana bats, including a site near Jug Hole Cave—the second largest Indiana bat hibernacula in the United States. In total, Sycamore expects to take on over 1,000 acres of conservation easements specifically to protect Indiana bat habitat over the next two years.
Indiana Bat *(Myotis sodalis)*

Indiana bats are small, weighing only one-quarter of an ounce, but are long-lived with some individuals in the wild living up to 15-20 years. They hibernate in limestone caves in the winter and roost under the bark of large trees like American sycamore and shagbark hickory in the summer. Female Indiana bats provide care for their young at summer roosting sites and each female raises one pup. Indiana bats are communal, social animals and it is believed that they communicate using sound. Indiana bats exclusively eat insects and they can eat up to half of their weight in insects each night!

The combination of specific winter hibernacula and summer roosting habitat requirements are the primary factors when considering the protection of this species. Indiana bats require humid cave conditions with temperatures that range between freezing and 50 degrees Fahrenheit. There are very few cave habitats like this and it is easy to see how an entire population could be impacted by a single event. After hibernation, female Indiana bats often form communal roosts where they raise their young. They utilize dead standing trees and the nooks and crannies of larger living trees as summer roosting habitat.

The habitat that Sycamore is helping to protect is this critical summer roosting habitat near two of the largest hibernacula in the United States.
All Creatures,
Especially the Small

“*A land without insects is a land without most forms of higher life.*”
- E. O. WILSON

The transition from the quiet introspective pause at the end of winter into the sensory delight of spring is a very special time of year. With the lengthening and warming of days, the emergence of soft green vegetation, colorful native flowers, and the symphony of insects, birds, frogs, and other animals, comes that feeling of longing to get out and cherish each new day. The call to get outside to witness the array of life is balanced by an almost instinctual urge to literally dig into the dirt. For gardeners like myself, it is at this threshold that we must remember to allow a little extra time and space for nature to emerge and thrive.

Just as with the native plant communities in the wetland, woodland, and grassland ecosystems at Sycamore’s preserves, in ALL seasons the outdoor spaces and native vegetation at our homes, schools, workplaces, and other places can offer habitat. Put simply, habitat is “home” to native plants, animals, or other types of organisms, providing food, water, shelter, and space to live.
their lives. In terms of providing habitat to support the greatest biodiversity, we look first to the relationships between plants and insects. Native plants, as the foundation of the food webs for our ecosystems, support insects both directly or indirectly. In turn, insects, as the most diverse of all animal groups, play essential roles as pollinators, decomposers, and sources of food for our other wildlife.

Diapause is a term used to describe the adaptations that animals use to survive the winter.

Purple coneflower in Mary’s garden this winter. To provide habitat and support biodiversity, remember a little mess is best. Leave leaves and brush. Use leaves for mulch. And downed logs and snags are keepers!

These keystone native plants in Indiana have the largest impact on supporting existing and restoring biodiversity:

**TOP WOODY PLANTS**

- Oaks, Cherries & Plums,
- Willows, Birch, Poplars (like Aspen, Cottonwoods), Maples

**TOP HERBACEOUS PLANTS**

- Goldenrod, Asters,
- Sunflowers, Joe Pye Weeds & Bonesets, Sedges, Violets
Consider all the wondrous and varied life-stages of insects and the places that can harbor this life during the dormant season. While our beloved monarch butterfly migrates south in fall, most insects stay here to overwinter as either egg, larva, pupa, or adult stages, depending on the species. The mourning cloak butterfly, one of the first you may see in spring, spends the winter as an adult tucked away in bark crevices of trees. Whereas the banded hairstreak butterfly will overwinter as eggs on twigs, then in spring the caterpillars hatch and fall to the ground to feed on the leaf litter below. The striking luna moth weathers the winter as a pupa (or cocoon) in leaf litter. The larva of long-horned and other beetles spend much of their life, including winter, boring under the bark of living trees or dead snags and downed logs. Tree roots provide food and shelter for a variety of insect larvae or nymphs, including beetles, gall-wasps, and cicadas. Native bees spend the winter as pupae in nest cells either in the ground or in cavities. Ground-nesting bees, like bumblebees, wait out the cold season in underground chambers. Cavity-nesting species like leaf-cutter bees use holes in wood or the hollow or pithy stems of native plants like beebalm, goldenrod, smooth hydrangea, raspberry, elderberry,
and sumac. The aquatic dragonfly, mayfly, and stonefly nymphs are active in streams or ponds all winter before they emerge as adults in spring.

As we learn about the creatures with whom we co-exist, large or small, this inspires us to be more mindful in all we do. Rather than rush to follow that impulse to “spring clean” the native plantings in our landscapes, give it a little more time in consideration of the small yet mighty insects that have taken up residence. If we allow ourselves to wait until late spring or early summer to cut back dead stems and foliage from the previous growing season, abstain from clearing out leaf-litter from under trees and shrubs, leave room for downed logs or brush piles, and limit the areas covered by either wood mulch or turfgrass, then our insect neighbors will thrive for the benefit of all life.
IN DECEMBER, Sycamore received the gift of 10 beautiful acres from Connie and Terry Marbach, long-term Columbus residents. This is a key addition to our Touch the Earth Natural Area (TTE), one of Sycamore’s thirteen public nature preserves and, at 108 acres, one of the largest natural areas in Bartholomew County.

This important parcel fills in a gap at the center of the preserve. It features a multi-acre native wildflower and grass meadow which is visible from the existing public trail that was created and maintained by the Marbachs.

In the 1990s, the Marbachs enabled Sycamore to acquire the farmland that would become TTE. Since then, Sycamore has stewarded the property to become a diverse habitat of successional forest and open meadows, home to a number of threatened species, including the American woodcock and the eastern box turtle. Sycamore also created a two-mile hiking trail, parking lot, and educational kiosk.

We asked the Marbachs about their decision to donate this new parcel and why they funded the acquisition of the land that became TTE.
They told us:

“The impetus for acquiring the original TTE property was several fold. Development was clearly headed westward from Columbus and the TTE area was a potential attractive development property. The Bartholomew County Parks were mostly former elementary school sites that did not promote interaction with nature. The TTE site would expand the land available to county residents for recreation by more than 50%. The property had a mixture of open and wooded space that served as home to a diversity of trees, plants, and animals. We had been the beneficiaries of past generations’ efforts to create national and state parks. This was our attempt to do the same on a local level for future generations.”

The Marbachs are passionate about protecting land for the benefit of the public, as well as the plants and animals that live there and migrate through.

“The public needs places where they can recreate and re-create. The Covid crisis has made this very clear. There are very few places in the county where people can take a 2-3 mile walk away from man-made interference. Hopefully people using the property will become supporters of Sycamore Land Trust and its mission to protect the natural beauty of southern Indiana. The population of Bartholomew County continues to grow. County government has failed to add natural areas to its park system to keep pace with this growth.”

For the 10-acre property that Connie and Terry just donated, they have done a great job of taking care of the land—removing invasive plants, planting a wildflower meadow, and having a controlled burn to maintain the open space. They explained how the very large pollinator meadow will benefit nature:

“The work to establish a pollinator meadow on the 10 acres came about because TTE has lots of great wooded areas but lacked an abundance of wildflowers.”

The gap at the center of Touch the Earth Natural Area is now part of the public nature preserve.
Connie and Terry visit TTE often, and are also involved in stewardship projects there. They shared some of their favorite memories about Touch the Earth:

“Favorite memories include hiking on the property with our out-of-state grandchildren. Meeting excited little kids on the trail. Seeing woodcocks doing their spring mating. Working with Sycamore staff and volunteers to build bridges, kiosks, benches, and maintain the trails.”

They added:

“In a small way the 10 acre gift is in recognition of and acknowledgment that the land was taken from Native Americans centuries ago. When we dedicated the original acquisition we said, ‘From the beginning of time until the early 1800’s, this land “belonged” to no one. Now 176 years after it was first surveyed, this land once again belongs to no one.’ Rather, it is for the use of everyone, thanks to Sycamore Land Trust.

“Hopefully, as part of a land trust, Touch the Earth Natural Area will always be here providing a place where nature can pass through its natural cycle undisturbed. An area free from the intrusion of blacktop, malls, billboards, and nightlights; where the sycamores can grow untouched, the birds can soar far and wide, the deer can graze at leisure, and the wild flowers can delight us with their blooms.”

To learn more about how you can support Sycamore’s work, contact Ann Connors, Development Director, at ann@sycamorelandtrust.org or 812-336-5382 ext 104.
Welcome!

Susan Yoon  
Board Member

Susan joined Sycamore’s board in January 2022. She is the Senior Director of Development at Indiana University Maurer School of Law and has worked in the law school’s advancement office for over six years. She was an IU student at the Kelley School of Business and the Maurer School of Law. She and her husband have two children and have lived in Bloomington for 17 years. Her favorite activity is hiking. Hiking the trails around Bloomington has provided her with a deep appreciation for the mission of Sycamore Land Trust.

Mary Welz  
Education Director

Mary joined Team Sycamore at the end of 2021 to lead our Environmental Education program, which offers free nature education for all ages. Mary is also a board member for Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species and previously served as a Regional Specialist with Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management. She has a B.S. in Biology from Indiana University. “As a lifelong student of nature myself, I am dedicated to providing access to outdoor education and connecting our community with the natural world,” she said.
Mary Welz, Education Director, teaches students at Evansville Montessori Academy how to grow native milkweed in Sycamore’s new “Milkweeds in Milk Jugs” program.

Warm rains in late winter can trigger migrations of early salamanders to breeding ponds. At Touch the Earth Natural Area, our herpetological study with Indiana DNR found over 150 salamanders in one day. Ben Genter

In February, staff cut down an invasive Callery pear tree near our headquarters that was nearly 50 years old. Mary Welz, Education Director, demonstrates how to prevent regrowth. Kate Hammel
This eagle pair was visible in their large nest from the boardwalk at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. *Liz Robb*

Barbara Restle, who donated the first parcel of land that would become Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve, shared three editions of *The Balancer* from 1968-69 when she was one of the Soil and Water Conservation Supervisors for Monroe and Brown Counties. To read, visit sycamorelandtrust.org/balancer.
Join us for a hike, workday, or special event! Hikes are free for Sycamore members, suggested donation for non-members is $5/person or $10/family unless otherwise specified. Volunteer days are always free. For more details on an event and to RSVP (required for hikes and volunteer days), visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events. For questions about stewardship days, please contact mary@sycamorelandtrust.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

APRIL

ROUND UP WITH BLOOMINGFOODS POSITIVE CHANGE PROGRAM
During April, support Sycamore Land Trust by rounding up your purchase at Bloomingfoods in Bloomington through the Positive Change Program. Learn more at bloomingfoods.coop/positive-change.

WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS
Wednesday, April 6, 10am-12pm
Weed Wrangle events are fun and educational opportunities to learn how to identify and control the invasive plants that are negatively impacting our preserves and in your community. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

PRETRE-E-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS: EARTH DAY EDITION
Thursday, April 21, 9am
Help Sycamore’s Land Stewardship staff and fellow volunteers take care of the land by pitching in during our monthly Land Stewardship workdays! Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

37TH ANNUAL WILDFLOWER FORAY WEEKEND
Friday, April 22 – Monday, April 25
Experience hikes, nature and flowers during this three-day, co-operative event throughout Brown and Monroe Counties. Visit wildflowerforay.com to register.

ARBOR DAY VIRTUAL HIKE
Friday, April 29, 11am
Join Executive Director John Lawrence on Facebook Live for a virtual tour of a Sycamore preserve and guided plant identification hike.

ARBOR DAY TREE GIVEAWAY - EVANSVILLE
Friday, April 29, 11am
Old National Bank Atrium, One Main Street
Pick up a free native tree seedling, get planting advice, buy Sycamore merchandise, renew your membership, and celebrate everything that makes trees amazing! The giveaway will end when supplies run out, follow us on social media for updates.

ARBOR DAY TREE GIVEAWAY - BLOOMINGTON
Saturday, April 30, 10am
Bloomingfoods East and Near West
Pick up a free native tree seedling, get planting advice, buy Sycamore merchandise, renew your membership, and celebrate everything that makes trees amazing! The giveaway will end when supplies run out, follow us on social media for updates.

MAY

WETLAND BIRDING WALK
Sunday, May 1, 2pm
Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve (Monroe County)
Join guest hike leader Cathy Meyer for a wetland birding adventure along the boardwalk and other trails at Beanblossom Bottoms. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS: MAY THE FOREST BE WITH YOU EDITION
Wednesday, May 4, 10am-12pm
Weed Wrangle events are fun and educational opportunities to learn how to identify and control the invasive plants that are negatively impacting our preserves and in your community. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.
CONSERVATION CONVERSATION: NATE ENGBRECHT
Thursday, May 12, 7pm
In a virtual lecture and Q&A, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Herpetologist Nate Engbrecht will discuss the results of amphibian and reptile surveys conducted at Sycamore Land Trust properties along the Beanblossom Creek Corridor. Sign up at sycamorelandtrust.org/conversations.

SYCAMORE SATURDAYS
Saturday, May 14, 1-3pm
Join us for a guided hike or land stewardship activity at our nature preserves. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

PRESEVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS
Thursday, May 19, 9am
Help Sycamore’s Land Stewardship staff and fellow volunteers take care of the land by pitching in during our monthly Land Stewardship workdays! Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

JUNE

WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS
Wednesday, June 1, 10am-12pm
Weed Wrangle events are fun and educational opportunities to learn how to identify and control the invasive plants that are negatively impacting our preserves and in your community. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

INDIANA NATURE PLAY DAYS: SYCAMORE SCAVENGER HUNT ADVENTURE
Saturday, June 4 – Sunday, June 12
Sign up for our e-news or follow us on social media to discover how to participate in our DIY scavenger hunt designed to get kids outside to play!

SYCAMORE SATURDAYS
Saturday, June 11, 1-3pm
Join us for a guided hike or land stewardship activity at our nature preserves. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

PRESEVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS
Thursday, June 16, 9am
Help Sycamore’s Land Stewardship staff and fellow volunteers take care of the land by pitching in during our monthly Land Stewardship workdays! Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

JULY

WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS
Wednesday, July 6, 10am-12pm
Weed Wrangle events are fun and educational opportunities to learn how to identify and control the invasive plants that are negatively impacting our preserves and in your community. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

CONSERVATION CONVERSATION: JOHN C. ROBINSON
Thursday, July 7, 7pm
A virtual lecture and Q&A with John C. Robinson, author of Birding for Everyone: Encouraging People of Color to Become Birdwatchers. Sign up at sycamorelandtrust.org/conversations.

SYCAMORE SATURDAYS
Saturday, July 16, 1-3pm
Join us for a guided hike or land stewardship activity at our nature preserves. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

PRESEVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS
Thursday, July 21, 9am
Help Sycamore’s Land Stewardship staff and fellow volunteers take care of the land by pitching in during our monthly Land Stewardship workdays! Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.
BUSINESS AND FOUNDATION SUPPORTERS

DECEMBER 1, 2020 - NOVEMBER 30, 2021

Laura Hare Charitable Trust

Bartholomew County SWMD
Lil Bub’s Big Fund
Stars End Inc. dba Tracks
The GoodCoin Foundation
Ayres Foundation
Gregoire Family Charities
Hirt Family Foundation
Lorenz Family Charitable Trust
Louden Family Foundation
Sarkes and Mary Tarzian Foundation, Inc.
Wylie Foundation
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Chris Fox

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Communications & Membership Director
Kate Hammel

Land Preservation Director
Rob McCrea

Communications & Development Fellow
Madeleine Thompson

Education Director
Mary Welz

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Chris Fox

Administrative Director
Susan Haislip Daleke

Communications & Membership Director
Kate Hammel

Land Preservation Director
Rob McCrea

Communications & Development Fellow
Madeleine Thompson

Education Director
Mary Welz

LEADERSHIP SOCIETY

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO HAVE GIVEN $1,000 OR MORE IN THE PAST YEAR.

JANUARY 1, 2021 - DECEMBER 31, 2021

Mark Adams and Nicole Swann
Matt and Eva Allen
Annette Alpert and Darrell Haile
Anonymous (8)
Mike and Beverly Baker
John and Susan Hollis Basset
Patrick Bogan and Gina Rheineberger
Judy Borron
Paul and Judi Bosler
The Bridavsky Family
Paul and Terri Brumleve
William and Becky Campbell
Heather Blair and Craig Coley
Dan and Debbi Conkle
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Jim and Nora Crane
Mike and Betty Davis
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Jim and Brenda DeCourcey
Jim Diehl
Will and Nancy Ditzier
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Tim and MaryAnn Dunfee
Todd and Sam Eads
Katie Edmonds and Sam
Tobin-Hochstadt
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and Phil Emmi
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Higginbotham
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Mark Mahern and Clark Brittain
Connie and Terry Marbach
Tom Mayer
Vicky Meretsky
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Virginia Metzger
Greg and Sue Meyer
Cathy Meyer
Andy and Pat Nelson
Del and Letty Newkirk
Ann Nolan
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Richard S. Peine
Carol Petty
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Loretta Vinson
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Wargel Fund in the Vanderburgh
Community Foundation, an
affiliate of the Community
Foundation Alliance*
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Bill and Mary Weeks
Larry and Carol Weingartner
Jeff and Legene White
Brian Will
Arlie and Carol Williams
Myriam Revel Wood*

* deceased

GET IN TOUCH!

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P.O. Box 7801, Bloomington, IN 47407-7801
www.sycamorelandtrust.org
info@sycamorelandtrust.org
Thank you for being a part of the Sycamore community.

Our work is powered by our members, whose ongoing support helps us continue to protect habitat and connect people to nature in southern Indiana.

You can renew your annual membership online at sycamorelandtrust.org/donate

Pictured: Important new addition to Touch the Earth Natural Area, read more on page 30.