Sycamore Land Trust

# THE TWIG

THE SEED ISSUE // SUMMER 2022


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FROM THE

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Sycamore Friends,

Many wonderful Sycamore Land Trust volunteers have worked with our dedicated staff over the past year to start our Native Plant Nursery. We've sustainably collected seeds from Sycamore's preserves and nurtured them to become over 7,000 native plant seedlings for habitat restoration projects in our Beanblossom Creek Conservation Area, as well as to share with conservation partners across the Midwest. Thanks to our collective efforts, these tiny seeds grew into small plants, were transplanted to restore natural areas, and are now becoming thriving native habitats for pollinators and other wildlife.

Likewise, Sycamore has grown from a small, all-volunteer effort in 1990 to a team of eight full-time employees plus seasonal interns, dozens of volunteers, and over 1,300 members who support our work annually. Together, we care for 10,551 acres and counting of critical habitat in our nature preserves and conservation easements, and we connect thousands of people to nature each year through our Environmental Education program and the 30-plus miles of nature trails that we maintain for public use for free.

Nurturing seeds and helping them grow is Sycamore's mission, both literally and figuratively. We plant seeds and seedlings to create pollinator meadows and forests, and then we give them the care and space they need to grow into healthy ecosystems. Our Environmental Education program uses experiences as well as actual plant seeds to help foster a love for nature in the hearts of participants of all ages, inspiring current and future generations to join us in protecting southern Indiana's wild places.

**Mary Welz, Education Director, showing the first seeds to germinate in our Native Plant Nursery this spring: Yellow coneflower *(Ratibida pinnata)*** *Kate Hammel*

Sycamore's Environmental Education program helped plant a seed of conservation into the heart of Ellen Bergan, our Land Stewardship Assistant for the past year, when they were in fifth grade. Ellen's article in this issue of *The Twig* explores how Sycamore helped set them on a path to a career in environmental conservation. Ellen moved to Idaho this summer to pursue a masters of science at University of Idaho and, fortunately for Sycamore, they will continue working with us as our remote Communications and Membership Assistant.

Rob McCrea, our Land Stewardship Director since 2019, has also moved on to a new opportunity in conservation. As the Conservation Law Center's new newly-created Landscape Conservation Attorney, he will be working on the Sentinel Landscape project in southern Indiana and assisting with environmental public interest litigation across the country. Rob has accomplished so much for conservation while at Sycamore. We know he will do great things at CLC, and we look forward to working with him in his new role.

Thank you for all you do to help Sycamore plant and care for the seeds of conservation.

Yours in nature,

John Lawrence
Executive Director

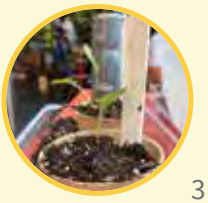
## OUR MISSION

Sycamore Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization founded in 1990 to preserve the beauty, health, and diversity of southern Indiana's natural landscape through strategic land conservation and environmental education. We now protect 126 properties totaling 10,551 acres. *EIN # 35-1830637*



## ON THE COVER

"Bob," a purple coneflower *(Echinacea purpurea)* seedling transplanted during Sycamore's Milkweeds in Milk Jugs program at Bartholomew County Public Library. Participants were encouraged to label their plants, give them a name, and keep a nature journaling sheet about their plants as they grew. *Photo: Kate Grafelman, Children's Programming Librarian, Bartholomew County Public Library*



# *Sycamore's* NATIVE PLANT NURSERY

**BY CHRIS FOX**, LAND STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

MARGARET MEAD

With the help of a group of dedicated volunteers and generous support from the Indiana Native Plant Society, Sycamore has embarked on a new endeavor to create a Native Plant Nursery. This nursery will be used to grow plants for future restoration projects using seed collected on Sycamore preserves.

This new project had its start last summer as staff and volunteers assisted with seed collecting for Project Wingspan, a multi-year, landscape-level collaborative project managed by the non-profit Pollinator Partnership. Project Wingspan seeks to increase pollinator habitat by working with land stewards across a variety of land types to help them create, enhance, or restore pollinator habitat within the landscape. Specifically, the goal of the project is to work with volunteers and partners to secure over 18,000 acres of high-quality habitat that will support monarchs, rusty patched bumble bees, and other wildlife. In the fall of 2021, Sycamore staff and volunteers received training to collect seeds through the partnership and then collected seed for Project Wingspan, which was distributed to various restoration projects in this region.

**Common milkweed seed pod** ***(Asclepias syriaca)***

Through this experience, the idea of starting something similar at Sycamore began to grow. With staff and volunteers already trained in proper seed collecting techniques and several staff and volunteers experienced at growing native plants, we felt the timing was right to start our own Native Plant Nursery, especially with so many large restoration projects on the horizon.

A few months later, the bags of seeds began to pile up thanks to the help of many eager volunteers. Over the winter we sorted and cleaned the seed, built germination boxes, sowed the flats and then patiently waited to see if the seeds would germinate. And germinate they

*Common Milkweed* (*Asclepias syriaca*)

## SEED COLLECTING *Ethics*

If you are interested in collecting seeds from the wild, there are important best management practices you should follow:

- Always request permission before collecting seed from any property.
- Follow established guidelines on how to properly collect from the wild so as to not negatively impact the local plant population you are harvesting from. Learn more at indiananativeplants.org/a-pilot-project-indiana-native-seed-communities
- Understand how to properly propagate the species you are collecting. Plants can have very specific germination requirements.

## *What is a* "LOCAL GENOTYPE"?

Plant species become adapted to their local environments by passing on those genes that favor survival in a particular place. Over time, plants of the same species from different parts of their range may develop different genetic makeups called genotypes, even if they look very similar. Mixing plants of different genotypes could cause problems by introducing less well adapted genes into the population. One way to reduce those problems is to use what is known as a "local genotype." This means using plants propagated from sources from as close as possible to where you will be planting or seeding. Using local genotype material helps ensure that you get plants that are well adapted to your region.

*Blue Vervain*
(*Verbena hastata*)

did! This spring we had 48 flats full of thousands of seedlings from more than 20 different species of native flowering plants (forbs) and grasses that were collected on Sycamore preserves. We then began the delicate process of transferring these young seedlings into pots to allow them more room to grow strong roots. Later this fall, we will transplant these seedlings out in the field at one of our restoration sites in hopes they will take root and spread more seeds in the newly restored areas.

Over the years, Sycamore has purchased native seeds and plants from reputable nurseries, such as Spence Restoration in Muncie, Indiana. We have partnered with them on many projects and they always provide a quality product. We will continue to work with Spence and other nurseries in the future because we will not be able to grow all the plants and seed we will need for our restoration projects in our new nursery.

However, as the science behind restoration and native plants continues to expand, we are learning more and more about the importance of using local genotypes for successful restoration results. Creating our Native Plant Nursery will allow us to grow plants from seed we can harvest from local populations near our future restoration sites. By focusing our efforts on collecting locally from our preserves, we will ensure that our seed is better adapted to the climate of our area and should therefore provide for more resilient plants which is extremely important as our native plants continue to face challenges from a changing climate and increased pressures from invasive species.

Recently, while working with our volunteers to transplant over 7,000 seedlings into pots, I realized that the nursery has another benefit that may be just as important as the ecological ones. As we filled the pots with soil and transplanted the tiny seedlings into their new temporary homes, there was a palpable feeling of peace and comradery among the group. I began to wonder if this project, that so many have given so

*Giant Ironweed*
(*Vernonia gigantea*)

**Sycamore's Administrative Director Susan Haislip Daleke collects milkweed seeds at Sam Shine Foundation Preserve.** *Ellen Bergan*

**Volunteers potting up native plants grown from seeds collected on Sycamore preserves.** *Chris Fox*

much to, might also be giving something back. Through the process of creating this nursery there has grown a strong sense of belonging and community among the volunteers, staff, local conservation groups including the Indiana Native Plant Society and Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species (MC-IRIS), and other partners who have contributed to the success of our first year including South Central Native Plant Society, Eco Logic LLC, and USPerennials.com.

Nothing builds a sense of belonging and community better than working together for a common goal. Staff and volunteers have endured the heat while gathering seeds in late summer and huddled together in the cold sowing seeds in winter. Those shared experiences help create a bond that has been missing these past few years during the pandemic. As I write this article, I reflect on how this project started as a way to save seed in hopes of preserving our local genetic diversity but I realize this nursery is so much more than that.

Like our young seedlings, the nursery is still small but slowly growing, inspiring and full of potential. Each seed we plant holds hope for a better tomorrow for the land and ourselves. But we can't do it alone, it takes many hands. None of this would have been possible without the assistance of our amazingly talented and dedicated volunteers. They are the sunlight that helps this project grow. We are forever grateful for all you do to help support our mission at Sycamore!

*"All the flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today."*

**If you are interested in assisting with seed collecting, planting, weeding or watering, let us know at info@sycamorelandtrust.org. We can always use more help.**

*River Oats (Chasmanthium latifolium)*

## *Native Plant Nursery*
# WHAT ARE WE GROWING?

For our first year growing our own plants, we chose to focus on common species for which we had ample seed sources and that were likely to thrive. We chose plants that are either adapted to wet areas, as most of our restoration pver the next few years will be in the Beanblossom Creek watershed, or plants that can adapt to many growing conditions. We are growing a lot of milkweed and are also focused on species with a later bloom time (like sneezeweed, ironweed, goldenrod and joe pye weed) to aid the migrating monarchs and other pollinators that might be storing up for winter.

### Wildflowers:

**Common milkweed**
*(Asclepias syriaca)*

**Marsh/swamp milkweed**
*(Asclepias incarnata)*

**Common sneezeweed**
*(Helenium autumnale)*

**Mountain mint**
*(Pycnanthemum virginianum)*

**Blue vervain**
*(Verbena hastata)*

**Smooth beardstongue**
(*Penstemon laevigatus)*

**Grass leaved goldenrod**
*(Euthamia graminifolia)*

**Giant ironweed**
*(Vernonia gigantea)*

**Joe pye weed**
*(Eutrochium spp.)*

### Grasses/sedges:

**Wool grass**
*(Scirpus cyperinus)*

**River oats**
*(Chasmanthium latifolium)*

**Common hop sedge** *(Carex lupulina)*

*Common sneezeweed*

# GROWING HABITAT: *Sycamore's Native Plant Project*

BY MARY WELZ, EDUCATION DIRECTOR

*"To plant in a garden is to believe in tomorrow."*

AUDREY HEPBURN

Sycamore's ongoing Native Plant Project was started in 2015 as a part of our Environmental Education program to involve students of all ages in growing native plants. As a part of this project, students, educators, parents, and volunteers learn about the differences between native and non-native plants and investigate how native plants support biodiversity and the health of our natural resources. As an added bonus, when we enhance schools and communities with native plant greenspaces, Sycamore is able to further our mission to connect people to nature through the resulting health and cognitive benefits to the students, as well as the direct benefits to our environment. Building upon the prior success of our Native Plant Project, in early 2022 we resumed working with several schools and organizations in the Bloomington, Columbus, and Evansville areas, hosting project-based outdoor learning centered around propagating native plants and enhancing outdoor spaces with intentional native plantings.

In our new "Milkweeds in Milk Jugs'' series, we engage with schools, libraries, and other organizations to winter sow native plant seed and later to transplant seedlings into larger pots in preparation for future planting. This year, participants grew native butterfly and rose milkweed to support declining populations of monarch butterflies, as well as other great natives like common sneezeweed, foxglove beardtongue, lance-leaf coreopsis, little bluestem, purple coneflower, and wild bergamot. From winter through early spring, children sow seed into reused 1-gallon drink containers made of clear plastic. The seed is either cold stratified in advance or sown directly into containers that are then kept outside to expose them to cold temperatures and precipitation. Also known as dormant-season sowing, this process provides a period of cold-moist stratification, a requirement that many native plants need to germinate. To complement the goal of connecting kids with native plant communities, this series also promotes environmentally friendly habits by reusing "single-use" containers such as milk jugs to grow native plants.

In culmination of the spring semester of our Native Plant Project, Sycamore also worked with two schools to coordinate the planning and installation of two functional native plantings:

- **Pollinator Garden at Northside Middle School in Columbus** with 30 students in the Urban Greenhouse Club, led by school science teacher Anne Freeman and daughter and club founder Annabel Freeman

**Sycamore's Milkweed in Milk Jugs activity engages students to plant native seeds, watch them grow, and transplant them for future plantings.** *Mary Welz*

**This spring, Sycamore staff and volunteers helped Templeton Elementary School plant a raingarden. Raingardens are depressed areas in the landscape that collect rain water and help it soak into the ground, reducing runoff, helping to filter out pollutants, and providing food and shelter for wildlife.** *Kevin Gallagher*

▷ **Raingarden Planting at Templeton Elementary School in Bloomington**, with teacher Kevin Gallagher and his multi-grade class of 60 students, with support from Sycamore volunteers, City of Bloomington Utilities - Stormwater, and Eco Logic

The schools received grants from Native Plants Unlimited and the South-Central Chapter of the Indiana Native Plant Society to purchase native plant plugs for these installations. Sycamore Land Trust was able to provide matching funds to increase the quantity of native plants, thanks to the generous philanthropic support from Psi Iota Xi and The George E. Archer Foundation. Psi Iota Xi funding also made it possible to purchase native seed for the "Milkweeds and Milk Jugs" series.

Sycamore's Environmental Education program will continue to offer our Native Plant Project during the 2022-23 school year, focusing on project-based learning for tree, shrub, pollinator, or raingarden native plantings.

**If your school or organization is interested in this or other nature-based educational opportunities, we'd love to work with you! Contact us at mary@sycamorelandtrust.org or (812) 336-5382 x107.**



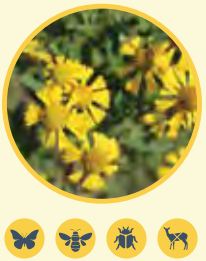
*Native Plant Project*

# WHAT ARE WE GROWING AND WHY?

### Butterfly Milkweed

*Asclepias tuberosa*

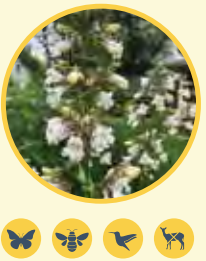
Supports butterflies, moths, bees, milkweed bugs. Provides nesting material for birds. Avoided by deer and rabbits.



### Common Sneezeweed

*Helenium autumnale*

Supports bees, butterflies and moths, and beetles. Avoided by deer and rabbits.



### Foxglove Beardtongue

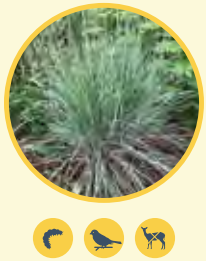
*Penstemon digitalis*

Supports bees, butterflies and moths, and hummingbirds. Avoided by deer and rabbits.

### Lance-leaf Coreopsis

*Coreopsis lanceolata*

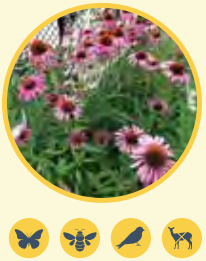
Supports butterflies and moths, bees, birds, and occasionally rabbits and deer.



### Little Bluestem

*Schizachyrium scoparium*

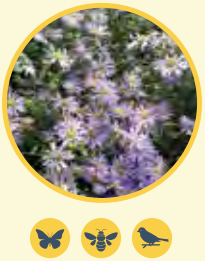
Supports caterpillars, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, beetles, thrips, and birds. Avoided by deer and rabbits.



### Purple Coneflower

*Echinacea purpurea*

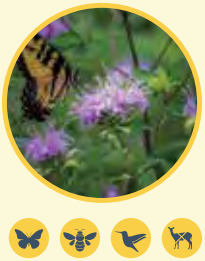
Supports butterflies and moths, bees, birds. Mostly avoided by deer and rabbits.



### Smooth Blue Aster

*Symphyotrichum laeve*

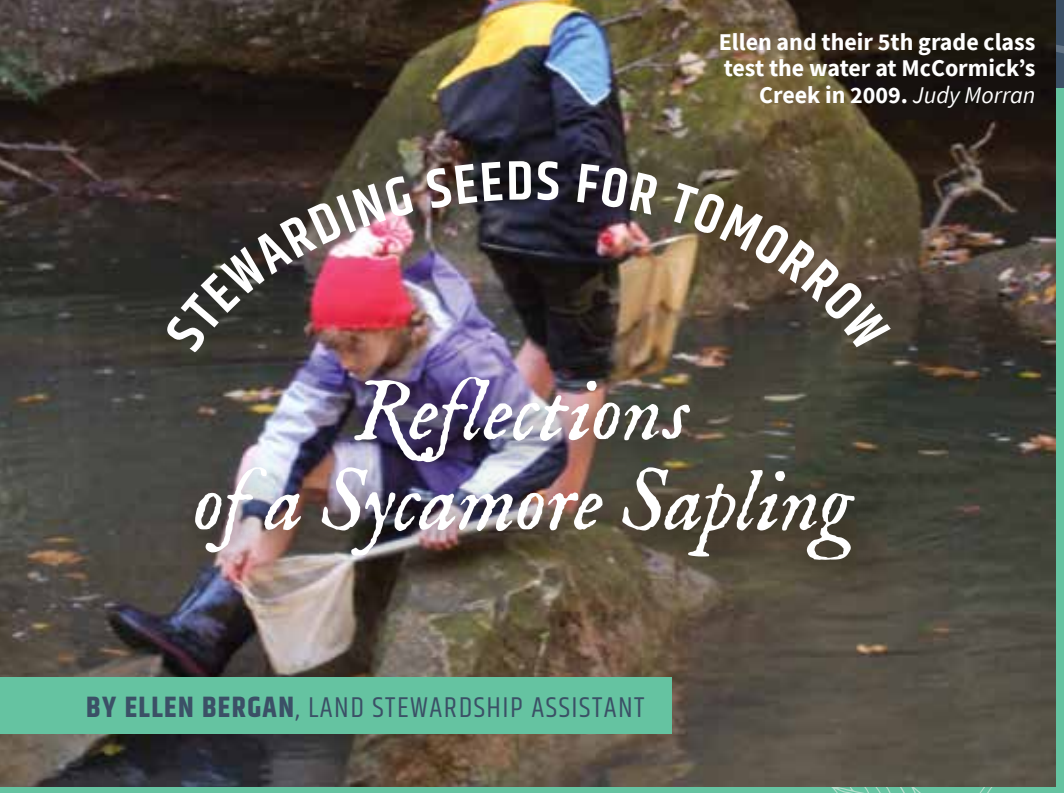
Supports butterflies and moths, bees, hover flies, birds, deer and rabbits.



### Wild Bergamot

*Monarda fistulosa*

Supports bees, butterflies and moths, hummingbirds. Avoided by deer and rabbits.



**Ellen and their 5th grade class test the water at McCormick's Creek in 2009.** *Judy Morran*

STEWARDING SEEDS FOR TOMORROW

# *Reflections of a Sycamore Sapling*

**BY ELLEN BERGAN**, LAND STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANT

## I suppose this story can begin with seeds.

It was fall of 2009, and Carroll Ritter, the Environmental Education Director of Sycamore at the time, stood in front of my fifth-grade class as we passed an old milkweed seed pod around Edgewood Intermediate School's courtyard garden. We poked and prodded the spiny, teardrop-shaped husk, studying its small brown seeds with earnest curiosity. Our class, pupils of the indomitably spirited and sage Judy Morran, had spent the summer acting as stewards of the courtyard's native pollinator garden, pulling weeds and mulching among the milkweeds, black-eyed Susans, and purple coneflowers. Over the course of those summer workdays and the fall semester, we had witnessed our milkweed plants host dozens of monarch caterpillars — ones that we then watched metamorphose into butterflies and tagged before their journey south. Now, holding the delicate milkweed seeds with their tufts of feather-light fluff, it seemed almost impossible to imagine them becoming the towering, vibrant plants we stood among now.

My classmates and I soon found ourselves reckoning with an equally (seemingly) insurmountable feat as we stood gathered at the base of a massive pin oak tree, all of us craning our necks to take in the full scope of the outskirts of a place dubbed the Well Site, a 20-acre parcel of forested wetland behind Edgewood's soccer field that our class, and years of Mrs. Morran's classes before us, used as an outdoor classroom. As per tradition, our visiting class had to gain the blessing of the sentinel pin oak, nicknamed "Grandpa Pin", before we could enter the natural haven of the Well Site.

"HELLOOOOOO, GRANDPA PIN!" we called out, and then became quiet as Mrs. Morran put her finger to her lips. Gazing up the tree's looming trunk, the moment

**Ellen and friends at Edgewood Intermediate School spent the summer stewarding the school's pollinator garden.** *Judy Morran*

stretched around us as we stood in silence, taking in an unbroken stillness save for the soft rustle of leaves. Suddenly, a piercing cry sounded above us, and a blue jay alighted from its perch among Grandpa Pin's branches. Mrs. Morran laughed as we all jumped, jostling each other in our muck boots borrowed from the school's storage closet. "We have permission to enter," she said with a wink as she motioned for us to step inside the tree line.

Within the cool, green shelter of the Well Site, Mrs. Morran explained the important mission she was entrusting to our youthful hands: we were to have this wetland designated a public nature preserve, forever protecting its ecosystem and for the generations of classrooms and visitors to learn from in the future. Our class would have the support of Sycamore Land Trust, primarily through their Environmental Education program and the guidance of Carroll Ritter, as we worked towards this goal.

Of course, we tackled the assignment with the exuberant vigor found so easily in a group of children who have just been told to put on their boots and stomp around the woods. Through environmental education

**Mrs. Judy Morran's 5th grade class in 2009 with the Well Site in the background.**

spearheaded by Carroll Ritter and supported by partnerships with Monroe County Parks and Recreation (including outstanding naturalist and Sycamore supporter Cathy Meyer), state department officials, and town administrators, my class dove into the world of conservation and the complex scientific and social aspects it contains.

Over the next several months, we learned about watershed hydrology and how to conduct water quality tests, gaining the language to communicate the importance of the Well Site as headwaters of McCormick's Creek. We learned how to make a topographic map of the property, how to conduct comprehensive surveys of its flora and fauna, and how to read tree rings (I still have the tree cookie I received during this lesson hanging by my bedside). We researched the history of the Well Site and the role it played as the original water source for the town of Ellettsville. In preparation for our appeal to the Ellettsville Town Council, we learned about the structure and function of our government and the power we each have to make a difference in our world.

The day finally arrived when our class marched into the Ellettsville Town Council meeting, armed with a hefty report detailing the ecological and historical significance of the Well Site. I still remember us sitting in the rows of chairs, feet just barely able to reach the ground, eagerly waiting for the board to commence their meeting agenda. I still remember the passion with which we delivered our appeal for the protection of this 20-acre wetland that we, and hundreds of students before us, had become so connected to. And I still remember, finally, the thrilling rush of fulfillment when we learned the town council had approved our request.

We had done it! Hoots and hollers and hugs abounded as we celebrated the success of our months of diligent work. My classmates and I were soon to learn, however, a very important lesson in conservation: the work is always far from over. For the rest of the school year, Carroll Ritter regularly led my class, with our assemblage of shovels, loppers, and rakes, to the Well Site Nature Preserve as we began building an official trail through its interior. It was during this time other Sycamore staff, including former Executive Director

Christian Frietag, came into our classroom to tell us about Sycamore Land Trust's work, contextualizing the important impact we, as young students, had made in our environment.

Though I had long been an avid nature lover, it was through this experience that my passion for conservation became most tangibly realized. The seed of stewardship was planted through the months of work to attain protection for this small, beloved preserve, and in the months of monitoring and maintenance that followed. We spread wheelbarrows of mulch, picked up long-discarded trash, and pruned back branches to build our trail – all while discovering the striking aroma of spicebush as we crushed its leaves in our palms, or dancing as a surprise storm showered the wetland and left us absolutely drenched (much to our delight). The last days I spent as part of Mrs. Morran's class are, still, defined by the enrichment I felt while caring for the land we had protected with Sycamore Land Trust's support.

And so, it seemed only natural that, a decade later, I found myself in the middle of a wetland spreading mulch along a Sycamore Land Trust trail. I had signed up for a volunteer event as part of the continued renovation work of the Beanblossom Bottoms boardwalk trail. As conversations I had with staff transpired, however, that single day soon became many, many more – an initial summer internship, which then became a worksite placement through my time at Indiana University, which further evolved into my current position after my graduation last spring.

> *"This work is rooted in love."*

Over these past few years, the seed that Sycamore Land Trust helped plant in my childhood has been able to flourish, growing with me as I gained skills and strength through stewardship work. But I've also learned that conservation is not glamorous. It is hard, and exhausting, and never-ending. In the face of the overwhelming, heartbreaking anger of climate change and its intersecting injustices, environmental conservation can begin to feel like a futile act in a grief-stricken world.

There is a very special fulfillment in Sycamore's work, however, that roots me. It's derived from the tangible difference I see being made by this organization every single day, driven by the most hard-working, dedicated staff members, supporters, and partners in conservation. It's the feeling of wholeness that first drew me to this field during those days at the Well Site, and one that now sustains me in an increasingly precarious world.

It's the feeling after a long, hot day of pulling a whole truck bed-load of garlic mustard to provide space for native species to grow. The high-fives exchanged after you and your coworker just successfully ordered over 22,000 trees for restoration plantings. Looking up while brushcutting invasive bush honeysuckle and seeing a colony of Great blue herons return to their rookery for the first time that year. The steady rhythm of swinging a pulaski as you, and dozens of Hoosier Hikers Council volunteers, carve a new trail through a wooded hillslope for others to soon enjoy.

**Ellen and the "Stew Crew" removing brush at Grandchildren's Woods in 2021.** *Mary Welz*

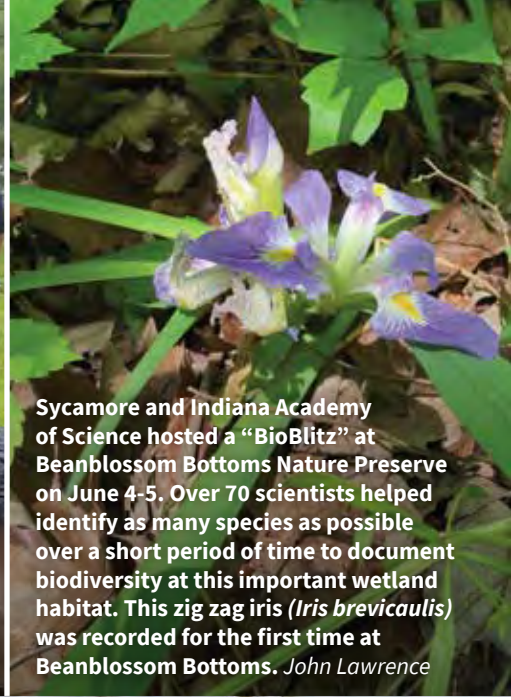
Witnessing two bobcat kittens grow, safe in the company of their mother, over the course of hours of trail camera footage. The inevitable pause while conducting an annual property visit to admire an immense tree whose canopy extends over this remote stretch of land, and the knowledge that it will be protected in perpetuity. Holding the thrumming heartbeats of young tree swallows, just recently hatched within the birdbox you helped install earlier that spring. Walking through the section of trail at Beanblossom Bottoms where a tornado tore through nearly three years ago – though trees remain bent and canopies snapped, it is now bursting with a lush diversity of wetland plants, with dragonflies and swallowtails dancing around their stems.

This feeling reminds me that hope is pervasive, that it is healing, and it is worth protecting. It's a reminder of a lesson I was first taught by Sycamore staff in an elementary school classroom, one that has echoed in my mind through the years and across the ecosystems I've helped care for: **This work is rooted in love**. It's a seed I can only hope to pass on and nourish in others, as Sycamore Land Trust has done for me.

*Starting this fall, Ellen will be attending the University of Idaho to pursue their masters of science and continue research in dendrochronology.*

**Ellen measures a large chinquapin oak at Sycamore's Hoot Woods.** *Mark Sheehan*

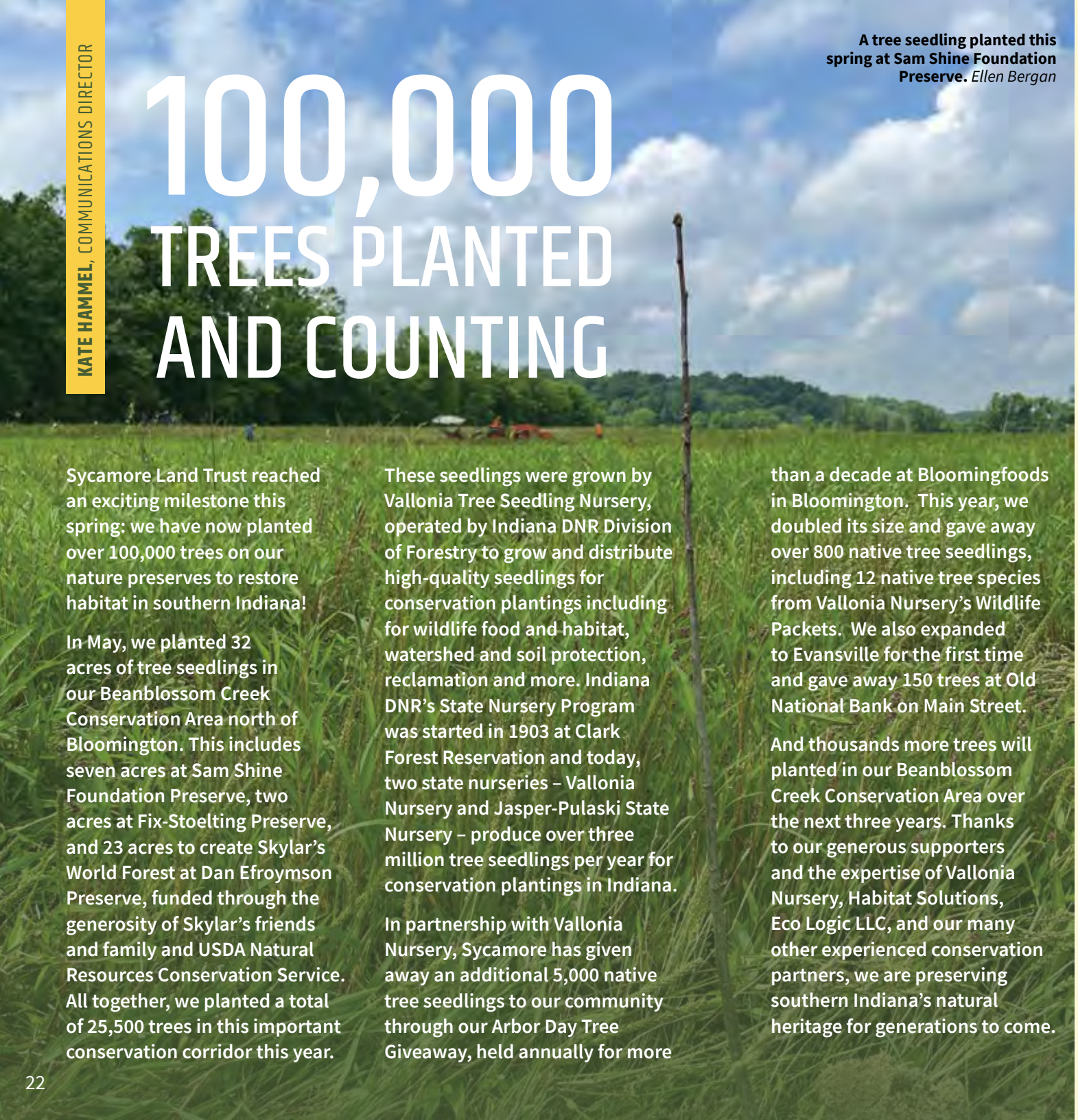
**In June, generous volunteers from Cummins Corporation helped to pick up trash at Sycamore's Tangeman Woods & Outdoor Lab Trail near Columbus.** *Ann Connors*



**Sycamore and Indiana Academy of Science hosted a "BioBlitz" at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve on June 4-5. Over 70 scientists helped identify as many species as possible over a short period of time to document biodiversity at this important wetland habitat. This zig zag iris *(Iris brevicaulis)* was recorded for the first time at Beanblossom Bottoms.** *John Lawrence*

## Sycamore Sightings

**Twenty-three acres of native trees were planted this spring to create Skylar's World Forest at our Dan Efroymson Preserve. Toby Cheeseman lives next door and his beautiful backyard photography has been documenting the bald eagles and other wildlife who rely on this protected habitat. To see more of Toby's photos of the animals who call Skylar's World Forest home, visit sycamorelandtrust.org/news.** *Toby Cheeseman*



**A tree seedling planted this spring at Sam Shine Foundation Preserve.** *Ellen Bergan*

**KATE HAMMEL**, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

# 100,000 TREES PLANTED AND COUNTING

Sycamore Land Trust reached an exciting milestone this spring: we have now planted over 100,000 trees on our nature preserves to restore habitat in southern Indiana!

In May, we planted 32 acres of tree seedlings in our Beanblossom Creek Conservation Area north of Bloomington. This includes seven acres at Sam Shine Foundation Preserve, two acres at Fix-Stoelting Preserve, and 23 acres to create Skylar's World Forest at Dan Efroymson Preserve, funded through the generosity of Skylar's friends and family and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. All together, we planted a total of 25,500 trees in this important conservation corridor this year.

These seedlings were grown by Vallonia Tree Seedling Nursery, operated by Indiana DNR Division of Forestry to grow and distribute high-quality seedlings for conservation plantings including for wildlife food and habitat, watershed and soil protection, reclamation and more. Indiana DNR's State Nursery Program was started in 1903 at Clark Forest Reservation and today, two state nurseries – Vallonia Nursery and Jasper-Pulaski State Nursery – produce over three million tree seedlings per year for conservation plantings in Indiana.

In partnership with Vallonia Nursery, Sycamore has given away an additional 5,000 native tree seedlings to our community through our Arbor Day Tree Giveaway, held annually for more than a decade at Bloomingfoods in Bloomington. This year, we doubled its size and gave away over 800 native tree seedlings, including 12 native tree species from Vallonia Nursery's Wildlife Packets. We also expanded to Evansville for the first time and gave away 150 trees at Old National Bank on Main Street.

And thousands more trees will planted in our Beanblossom Creek Conservation Area over the next three years. Thanks to our generous supporters and the expertise of Vallonia Nursery, Habitat Solutions, Eco Logic LLC, and our many other experienced conservation partners, we are preserving southern Indiana's natural heritage for generations to come.



## Conservation Conversations

*Virtual Lecture Series*

Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/conversations to watch recordings of our Conservation Conversation lecture series with authors and local leaders in conservation, including:

**A Conversation with Carroll D. Ritter**
*Author of Magnificent Trees of Indiana*
"Appreciating our Grand Forest Heritage"

**A Conversation with Nate Engbrecht**
*Herpetologist, Indiana Department of Natural Resources*
"Amphibians & Reptiles of the Beanblossom Creek Watershed"

**A Conversation with John C. Robinson**
*Author of Birding for Everyone: Encouraging People of Color to Become Birdwatchers*
"Discover the Awe of Birdwatching"

### UPCOMING:

SEPTEMBER 1 | 7PM
**A Conversation with Allisyn-Marie Gillet**
*Ornothologist, Indiana Department of Natural Resources*
"It Takes a Village to Raise a Chick"

Indiana DNR monitors and manages more than 50 at-risk bird species, each facing their own unique suite of threats. Allisyn-Marie Gillet will talk about the state's nongame bird program, taking a deep dive into two conservation projects: Shrubs for Shrikes and Motus. Learn how you can get involved and contribute to the conservation of our state's beautiful avifauna.

*Conservation Conversation Zoom lectures are followed by a Q&A. Tickets are free for Sycamore members and a suggested donation of $5 for non-members.* ***Sign up at at sycamorelandtrust.org/conversations.***

# INVESTING TO HELP SYCAMORE TAKE CARE OF THE LAND

**ANN CONNORS**, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

**Dedicating the native pollinator prairie at Cedar Crest, Sycamore's headquarters in Bloomington, in honor of Darlene Gerster and Jerry Brunning in 2016.** *Ann Connors*

*"Natural places can offer respite, open us up, calm us down. These recent times have been stressful and discordant. By protecting natural places, we also protect our health and sense of well-being. We all have a stake in committing to earth care. This is our corner of the earth to care for. I am hopeful about the future because I know I am part of a large and still growing community of Sycamore Land Trust earth caretakers."* – DARLENE GERSTER

Growing up on a farm outside of Milan, Indiana, Darlene loved sitting in the little woods near the house, quietly waiting to see what animals would come by. After Darlene graduated from IU and moved to Chicago for work, she would spend time in the woods when she came home on weekends. Until one day, the woods were cut down, and she realized what a loss that was.

Darlene has been involved with Sycamore since 2000, when two college friends, Mary Kay Rothert and Tom Zeller, who helped found Sycamore in 1990, told her about it. After Darlene's husband Jerry Brunning passed away, in 2008 Darlene moved from Bloomington to Indianapolis to be near family, and donated her home for Sycamore to sell to use the proceeds to support the organization. This generous gift made a huge difference for Sycamore, and each year Darlene also donated beautiful artworks for Sycamore's Annual Celebration silent auctions, helping to raise funds for Sycamore's operations.

In recognition of her valuable support and for her love of flowers, in 2016 we dedicated the new native pollinator prairie at Sycamore's Cedar Crest office in Bloomington, in honor of Darlene and Jerry. Thinking about the lost woods of her childhood, Darlene told us:

"Seeing this garden is like completing a circle for me. You don't know how to reach out and get back what was lost. But the prairie is a living symbol of what Sycamore Land Trust shares with the community."

Darlene then thought, "What do I need to do next? Who will take care of the garden and all of the many, many acres of open spaces that Sycamore has saved in this area?" Following conversations with Sycamore about its land stewardship needs, in 2017 Darlene decided to donate $200,000 over four years so Sycamore could hire its first full-time land stewardship position. After a national search, Sycamore hired Chris Fox, Land Stewardship Manager (now Director), who is doing a tremendous job.

Darlene understands what it takes for Sycamore to care for the over 10,000 acres of land that we protect, which includes enhancing our 13 free public nature preserves and hiking trails and working with partner organizations and government agencies to restore healthy habitats. This summer, Sycamore planted over 25,000 trees and is starting the creation of an 80-acre wetland along Beanblossom Creek. And she is aware of other major habitat restoration plans for the coming years.

"I have often said that I am deeply gratified to know Sycamore will be here long after I am gone - Forever. Yet, I do not take Sycamore for granted. I have seen many amazing results of the

stewardship work. Acquisitions and stewardship go hand in hand. Funding the Land Stewardship Endowment is vital to ensure permanent support of two stewardship positions. Every seed, every dollar matters."

And Darlene knows that impact having a second full-time land steward will make. So earlier this year, Darlene gave Sycamore a $250,000 gift (with an additional $50,000 in 2023) so we can hire a Land Stewardship Manager to report to Chris. Darlene is very strategic in her investments in Sycamore - to "plant a seed" to move the organization to the next level of capacity and capabilities. We asked her what has inspired her generosity and what was her thought process behind these transformational gifts?

"Sycamore Land Trust plants many seeds. As important as planting seeds, are those seeds planted in people. Every time parents, grandparents, teachers, bring children to walk the Sycamore properties, more seeds are planted. A sighting of a red-headed woodpecker, a trout lily, or a swallowtail is another seed. With each visit, the sense of wonder and spirit grow. Sycamore properties must remain havens to grow wonder and spirit.

"It is important to me that Sycamore is here 100 years from now, 200 years from now. That generations of people will commit themselves to protecting the environment. If you have a buck, $20, $200, $2,000 or whatever it is, Sycamore will be here only if it has continued support from all of us."

**Darlene Gerster and Chris Fox, Land Stewardship Director, at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. Dalene donated the funds to hire Chris for Sycamore's first full-time land stewardship position.** *Ann Connors*



## *There are many ways to show your love of nature by supporting Sycamore's work:*

Become a member and make an annual membership gift to support conservation in southern Indiana.

Sign up for our e-news at sycamorealandtrust.org/subscribe.

Donate appreciated stock, securities or other property.

Create a conservation legacy by adding Sycamore as a beneficiary to your will, estate plans, IRA, or insurance.

Spread the word about our programs and the importance of conservation to your family or friends.

Give in honor or memory of a loved one.

Volunteer for a workday, join us for a guided hike, or attend a special event.

Give from your company or foundation or request a matching gift from your employer.

However you choose to support Sycamore – now and in the future – thank you!

To learn more, visit **sycamorelandtrust.org/give** or contact Ann Connors, Development Director, at ann@sycamorelandtrust.org.

### WHY DO YOU SUPPORT SYCAMORE?

"I have included Sycamore Land Trust in my estate plans for the future because it feels like the best gift I can leave Mother Earth and a heartfelt way to honor my parents."

**Loretta Vinson**
*Sycamore Legacy Circle member since 2011*

*Swamp Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata)*

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.**

## AUGUST

### WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS: JAPANESE STILTGRASS CONTROL

*Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill (Brown County)*

**Wednesday, August 3rd, 9am**

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 our communities. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

### SYCAMORE SATURDAYS: JAPANESE STILTGRASS CONTROL

*Scarlet Oak Woods (Monroe County)*

**Saturday, August 13th, 9am**

Join us for a land stewardship volunteer activity to control invasive Japanese stiltgrass with Mary Welz, Sycamore's Education Director. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

### PRESERVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS

*Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill (Brown County)*

**Thursday, August 18th, 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 updated details and to register.

## SEPTEMBER

### CONSERVATION CONVERSATION WITH ALLISYN-MARIE GILLET: "IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHICK"

*Virtual Zoom lecture*

**Thursday, September 1st, 7pm**

See page 23 for details.

### WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS: WOODY INVASIVES CONTROL

*Canyon Forest Nature Preserve (Greene County)*

**Wednesday, September 7th, 9am**

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 our communities. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

### CONSERVATION CONNECTION FIELD DAY: 2022 BEANBLOSSOM CREEK

*Various locations in the Beanblossom Creek Area* | **Friday, September 9th**

Sycamore is partnering with Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and local landowners to host a conservation field event for landowners. Participants will visit various non-public properties to learn more about forest stand improvement, invasive plant control, wetland restoration, and tree and shrub planting. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for details and to register.

*Blue Vervain (Verbena hastata)*

### PRESERVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS

*Location TBD*

**Thursday, September 15th, 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 updated details and to register.

### PORTER WEST WEED WRANGLE WORKSHOP

*Porter West Preserve (Monroe County)*

**Saturday, September 17th**

Join Sycamore for this special Weed Wrangle for landowners hosted in partnership with Monroe County - Identify & Reduce Invasive Species (MC-IRIS) and Eco Logic LLC. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and how to register.

### BIRDWATCHING HIKE WITH INDIGO BIRDING

*Touch the Earth Natural Area (Bartholomew County)*

**Thursday, September 29th, 9-11am**

Join us for a guided birding tour led by David Rupp with Indigo Birding Tours. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

## OCTOBER

### WEED WRANGLE WEDNESDAYS: WOODY INVASIVES CONTROL

*Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve (Monroe County)* | **Wednesday, October 5th, 10am**

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 our communities. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

### OCTOBER BIG DAY EVENT: WETLAND BIRD WALK

*Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve (Monroe County)*

**Saturday, October 8th, 9am**

A guided wetland walk and bird count with naturalist Cathy Meyer, hosted by Indiana Audubon Society and Indiana Land Protection Alliance as part of a state-wide October Big Day celebration on World Migratory Bird Day. Contribute to citizen science! Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for more information.

### PRESERVE-A-PRESERVE THIRD THURSDAYS

*Location TBD*

**Thursday, October 20th, 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 updated details and to register.

### SYCAMORE SATURDAYS: HALF EARTH DAY WEED WRANGLE

*Tangeman Woods & Outdoor Lab Trail (Bartholomew County)*

**Saturday, October 22nd, 1pm**

Join us for an invasive species control work day to control woody vegetation in observation of Half Earth Day. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

### GUIDED TREE ID HIKE WITH CARROLL RITTER

*Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve (Monroe County)*

**Friday, October 28th, 10:30am-noon**

Join us for a guided hike with Carroll D. Ritter, author of *Magnificent Trees of Indiana*, to identify trees, note their associated flora in the understory and mid-story, and understand the dynamic roles of trees in the environment. Visit sycamorelandtrust.org/events for updated details and to register.

## ANNUAL CELEBRATION UPDATE

We will unfortunately not be meeting in person this year due to the uncertainty regarding large gatherings during COVID. Please look for a video coming this fall celebrating all we have accomplished this year!

## BUSINESS AND FOUNDATION SUPPORTERS

APRIL 1, 2021 TO MARCH 31, 2022

$20,000 AND ABOVE

$1,000 TO $19,999

Ayres Foundation

Benevity Community Impact Fund

George E. Archer Foundation

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Hirt Family Foundation

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## LEADERSHIP SOCIETY

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

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2021

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An anonymous component fund of the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County
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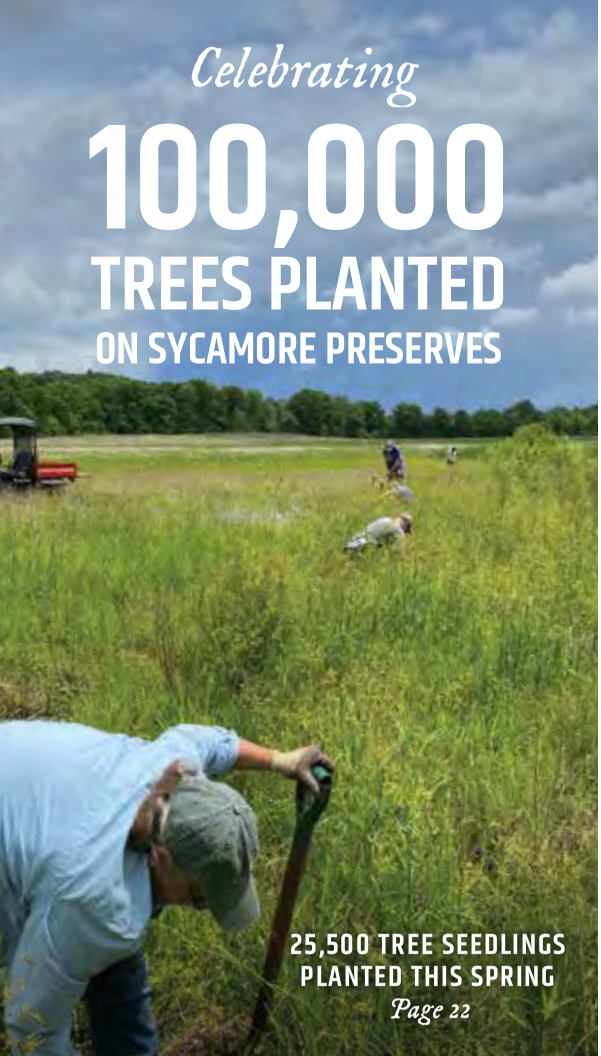


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