

# HERON TRACKS

The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy  
Volume 31 Number 3 Summer 2024



*Moth Viewing Party at Bundy Hill Préserve*



## Executive Director's Corner

Serendipity can be defined as luck that takes the form of finding valuable or pleasant things that are not looked for.

I believe that when I am exploring nature, if I get a whim or if something catches my eye then I should follow that whim or object and see where it leads. I may not always see what I want to see, but I believe that I see what I was meant to see. Sometimes I end up wandering into the right place, other times those moments where I follow whims delays me until the right time. Some of my most fortunate discoveries and favorite photographs have come about this way. Serendipity has a way of putting us in the right place at the time we meant to be there.

This summer, our intern Ivy has had serendipity on her side during her plant survey of Hall's Lake Natural Area, discovering populations of not one but two different orchid species: Showy Ladyslipper and Small Green Wood Orchid. Both discoveries are exciting in their own way.

The Showy Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium reginae*) is considered a very conservative plant with very little tolerance for human disturbance. It's presence is indicative of a very high quality natural habitat. There has been only one previous report of this species for Isabella County on the citizen science website iNaturalist.org. Unfortunately, for us this species was past blooming when discovered.

Also known as the Club-spur Orchid, the Small Green Wood Orchid (*Platanthera clavellata*) is less conservative than the Showy Ladyslipper with a ranking of 6 to the Ladyslipper's 10. This species was previously unrecorded in iNaturalist. Additionally, the website michiganflora.net (operated by the University of Michigan Herbarium) shows no records for this species in isabella County.

Ivy was not specifically searching for either of these species but came upon them nonetheless. When not in bloom, the foliage of the Showy Ladyslipper is quite inconspicuous and the diminutive size of the Small Green Wood Orchid makes it easy to overlook. Both could easily be missed by an action as simple as walking around a downed tree on the right rather than on the left. A pair of serendipitous finds indeed!

Since their discovery, CWC staff has conducted further surveys for both species and found that there appear to be healthy populations of both with the Small Green Wood Orchid being particularly widespread. Because of the sensitive nature of their habitats, we ask that the public refrain from searching for these species. With a little bit of luck (and planning) we should be able to catch both species in bloom next summer and will be able share more images then.

In addition to these finds, I stumbled across a small population of Spotted Coralroot orchids (*Corallorhiza maculata*) at Hall's Lake. This species has been previously recorded on iNaturalist at Hall's Lake (and at Audubon Wood Preserve) but again lacks an herbarium specimen for Isabella County. To cap everything off, while performing vernal pool surveys, Autumn discovered a population of Downy Rattlesnake Plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*) that we had not previously known about, well-separated from previously known sites.

I hope these discoveries will inspire you to get outdoors and see where serendipity leads you.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!

*Mike LeVilly*



Spotted Coralroot



Small Green Wood Orchid



Downy Rattlesnake Plantain



## Friday Night Under the Lights

An excited group gathered at Bundy Hill Preserve for this year's Moth Viewing Party. As the sun was setting we got treated to an aerial show by several bats flying over the open field nearest the parking lot. Once it was fully dark, the moths and other insects started coming to the lights. By the end of the evening, we had observed approximately thirty species of moths and eventually identified over half of the species.



Cranefly species

Lesser Maple Spanworm

Pale Metanema Moth

Painted Lichen Moth



Badwing Moth

Grapevine Leaffolder with  
Common Gluphisia Moth and  
Leafhopper

Variable Fanfoot

North Bush Katydid

## Intern Insights

Hi! My name is Reese Wallace, and for the past few months, I have been working with the CWC as a part-time intern/volunteer. I heard of the organization through my time at Central Michigan University, and decided to reach out to Mike in June. I was looking to gain valuable insight and experience into the work that they do as a Conservancy, and I have gotten just that. It has demonstrated to me just how much time and effort goes into what they accomplish, and the passion that both Mike and Autumn have for the environment. I often work alongside both of them, as well as the full-time intern Ivy Little. Between upkeep on various preserves, plant identification, and public outreach, I have been kept busy! My experience here has been valuable to say the least, and I hope to see more young people like Ivy and I get involved in what the CWC is doing in the future.





## Intern Insights

This summer at Halls Lake Natural Area, I was lucky enough to spend a lot of time in the field. This property is made up of three different preserves, totaling around 150 acres all together. There are around 2 miles of trail open to the public after a new addition of the Outback Trail in summer of 2021. This property is quite diverse, made up of numerous vernal pools and other important wetland habitats, as well as 2,500 ft of views of Hall's Lake.

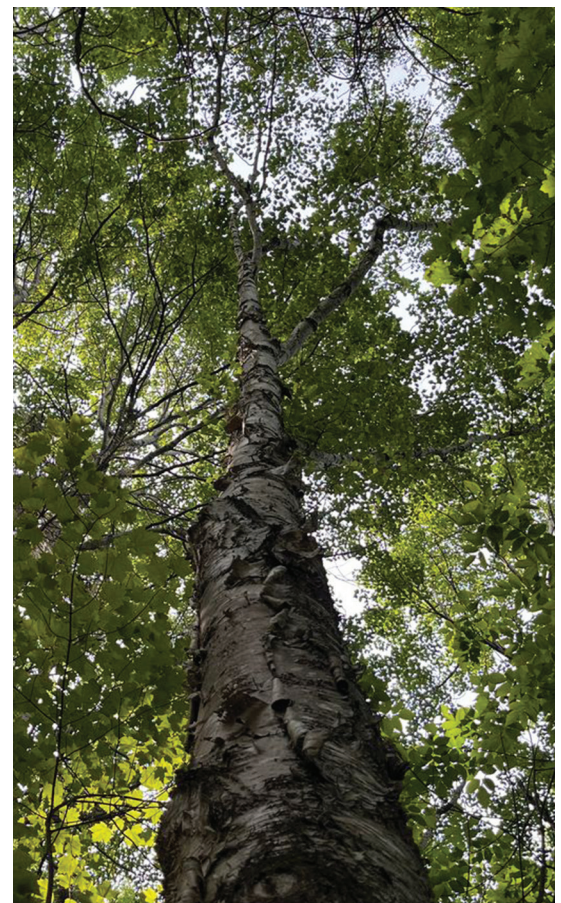
Although the preserves were acquired between 2008 and 2014, there had yet to be an extensive plant species survey done on the property. So, I got to slow down and notice all of the diversity that hides at the edges of cedar swamps and on the floor of a hardwood forest. So far, I have identified 215 different species of flora on the property. That is only a fraction of what is out there, this will most likely be a multiple yearlong project with help from other internships or from volunteers! This survey will be beneficial to the conservancy because in order to be aware of what habitats need more protection, you need to know what species are present or absent to be able to indicate the health of that area. The identification of plants is a small piece to the puzzle, but an important one.

Aside of the diversity of native species out at Hall's Lake, there is still a few invasive species that can be found at the property. I spent some time removing some of the invasive Autumn Olive shrub in the Neely Preserve, but throughout all three preserves you can find it, as well as a few species of Honeysuckle, Japanese Barberry, Multiflora Rose, Buckthorn, and others. Despite these invasive plants being present, you can see many native species thriving on the property. To name a few of my favorites, Jack in the Pulpit, Red Columbine, Swamp Milkweed, White Birch, Sugar Maple, Enchanters Nightshade, Blue skullcap, Highbush blueberries, and more. You can find numerous different fern species like Sensitive Fern, New York Fern, Marsh Fern, Cinnamon Fern, Bracken Fern, Interrupted Fern, and the Royal Fern. There are tons of different kinds of sedges on the wetter parts of the property, like the Awlfruit sedge or the Troublesome sedge. You can't miss the diversity and amount of moss on the property, and you can also find some unique mushrooms if you look closely!



Ivy Little excited about her discovery of Showy Ladieslipper, *Cypripedium reginae*

Paper Birch, *Betula papyrifera*



Left: Cinnamon Fern, *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*





Not only did this project help the work of CWC, but I personally have gained some very useful skills throughout this summer. I enjoy understanding the world around me, and knowing how to identify trees, shrubs, and flowers that I have been surrounded by my whole life has been an amazing experience. I mainly used the application called "PictureThis" to help me quickly identify a plant by snapping an image of the main parts of the species. I recognize and appreciate the amount of work and time that this tool saved me, I recommend trying it out yourself! For the sake of confirmation, I used the website Michigan Flora to make sure the species my app told me was one that has been found in Michigan by other researchers. Thanks to Mike, I also had access to many handy hard copy field guides to assist in identification.

To round out my experience with the CWC, I was able to sit the table at the Mt Pleasant Farmers Market. Outreach is an important element of conservation that allows us to communicate the work the CWC does to both those who are familiar to the organization and to those who are not. I am grateful to have gotten the chance to be a part of the conservancy and the incredible work they do for the area. -Ivy Little



Jack-in-the-pulpit, *Arisaema triphyllum*



Frost's Bolete, *Exsudoporus frostii*



Sensitive Fern, *Onoclea sensibilis*



*Join us*  
for our **FALL**  
**FUNDRAISER**



Little Flower Barn  
565 N. Coldwater Rd.  
Lake Isabella

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50/50 Drawing

The fall fundraiser will be held on  
Thursday, October 3rd  
from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
with dinner, drinks, art show and  
ticketed drawing to raise funds  
for local conservation!



<https://bit.ly/2024cwcfallfundraiser>  
to register online



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