

HERON TRACKS

CWC | CHIPPEWA
WATERSHED
CONSERVANCY



The Official Newsletter of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy
Volume 31 Number 4 Fall 2024



*Yellow Birch at Winifred
Sponseller Preserve*

Executive Director's Corner

I recently read a new book titled *How to Love a Forest*. The author, Ethan Tapper, is a forester by training and trade. In 2017, after working as a commercial forester for a half-decade, he bought a property in his home state of Vermont and began what he knows will be a lifelong project to heal the highly degraded land. Some of this work may seem counterintuitive, such as clearcutting acres of beech trees so that other species may grow and thrive, but each action is done with an eye toward creating healthy resilient ecosystems for the future. As Tapper writes, "Someday I will teach my children that this world is not ours to hold, but that we hold it anyway; that each of us is a steward for one brief and precious moment in time."

This reminds me of a quote that I frequently see popping up on the internet: "A society grows great when old men plant trees under whose shade they know they'll never sit." It's one of my favorite sayings but its exact origins are unclear. It has been variously attributed as a Greek, Roman, or Indian proverb. The sentiment of the saying certainly reaches back at least as far as the Roman Republic with Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE – 43 BCE) crediting the earlier poet Roman poet Caecilius Statius (220 BC – 167 BCE) with the statement "he plants trees, which will be of use to another age..."

My favorite version of the saying comes from French theologian Hyacinthe Loyson in an 1866 sermon: "These trees which he plants, and under whose shade he shall never sit, he loves them for themselves, and for the sake of his children and his children's children, who are to sit beneath the shadow of their spreading boughs." May we all choose to act in such a way.

Stay Well and Happy Trails!



CWC Chair Notes

Fall is certainly upon us, and I hope you've been taking the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful colors on some of the CWC preserves, as the show is almost over! I enjoyed a peaceful walk through Sylvan Solace this weekend, and was encouraged to see the parking lot almost full upon the return to my vehicle. What a special place for so many people. Recently, I was on my way into town, and a neighbor who I don't know pulled out of their driveway ahead of me. As I approached, I could see a CWC bumper sticker on their vehicle – that made me smile as well. Whether it's seeing Mike & Autumn at the Farmers' Market this summer, noticing a new and beautiful CWC preserve sign for the first time, overhearing a conversation about visiting a preserve, or being shocked at the number of people coming out to a planned nature hike or work day, I hope you feel the same way I do – momentum is building, and the CWC is truly being recognized as the local treasure that it is. If you joined us at the Fall Fundraiser Dinner (Thank You!), you heard even more of the exciting things that have happened this year - from great summer interns, to fantastic rare plant discoveries, to new/enlarged easements. We are so grateful for all of your support – whether a founding member or a first-time visitor, the CWC is only possible because of its members and volunteers. I hope you can get out and enjoy your own peaceful walk through a preserve soon – and let that be our "Thank You" to each of you. We are looking forward to even greater things ahead, so don't forget to bring a friend with you on that walk! -Keith Tollenaere

Preserve Spotlight: Hiawatha Hills Preserve & Neyer Preserve

Originally established in 1996 and later expanded, Hiawatha Hills Preserve is an approximately 5-acre property located within the Hiawatha Hills residential subdivision. The primary purpose of this forested floodplain property is to serve as a rest and holding area for resident and transient wildlife, as a natural area for limited public access, and as a riparian buffer to screen users of the Chippewa River from the nearby subdivision. A .25 mile-long loop trail winds around the property through wetlands along the Chippewa River.

The nearby Neyer Preserve was established in 2006. This wooded 2-acre preserve protects over 440 feet of Chippewa River frontage in the Hiawatha Hills subdivision in Deerfield Township, Isabella County. A short walking trail loops through the preserve and is used primarily local residents. Despite its small size, the preserve hosts abundant wildlife including deer and wild turkey. A small experimental deer enclosure shows what the forest floor could look like without their grazing.



Floodplain Forest at Neyer Preserve



Great White Trillium at Hiawatha Hills Preserve

CWC Discovers Rare Plant

At our Fall Fundraiser we were pleased to announce the discovery of a rare plant, the Forked Aster (*Eurybia furcata*) on one of our preserves. In early September, a plant survey uncovered a population of the plant in one of our preserves along the Chippewa River. Because of the rarity of the plant we sought confirmation from an outside expert and we were fortunate enough to have a botanist from the Michigan Natural Feature Inventory visit the site and agree with our identification!

The Forked Aster is found only in six states ranging from Michigan south and west to Iowa and Missouri. It has only been previously recorded in three Michigan counties: Midland, Mason, and Monroe. In the latter, the last sighting was in 1906. The plant is considered rare across its range with less than 120 known populations. In Michigan, Forked Aster is a state-threatened species. Because of its rarity and protected status, the exact location of the recently discovered population is being kept secret.

Discovering a plant such as the Forked Aster on one of preserves shows us the important role that protected lands can play in species conservation. It would have been very easy for us to overlook this plant. On private lands that are open for development, nondiscovery may easily result in the species being eradicated without anyone noting its loss. Now that we know Forked Aster can be found along the Chippewa River in Isabella County, we can be on the lookout for additional populations. Cataloguing species such as this helps the CWC make more informed management decisions of properties and can direct our future conservation and restoration efforts.



You can read our blog article about the discovery here: <https://cwc-mi.org/cwc-discovers-rare-plant/>

2024 Fall Fundraiser and Bob Ball Award Presentation

On Thursday, October 3rd, supporters and friends of Chippewa Watershed Conservancy gathered at Little Flower Barn in Lake Isabella to celebrate our fourth annual Fall Fundraiser. We are thrilled to announce more than \$19,000 was raised for the Conservancy!

The evening began with a social hour which allowed everyone to catch up, enjoy an appetizer, and grab a drink at the bar. The social hour also gave people the opportunity to purchase tickets to win one of a dozen raffle prizes. Popular raffle items included a custom-built wooden bench, a bird-themed gift basket provided by the Chippewa Valley Audubon, a Midland experience package, a hand-crocheted afghan, a pollinator-themed gift basket, and much more. The social hour also provided time for guests to take a few photos and (with the help of some fun props) share some laughs, in a photo booth. The wonderful fall weather also allowed for the chance to relax on the rockers on the porch or to stroll the beautiful grounds of Little Flower Barn.

The social hour was also a great time to check out the works created by our 2024 Artists-in-Residence. With six pieces inspired by CWC preserves on display, artists Kate Brown, Natalie Smith, and Rachel Davis Smith were all on hand to discuss their work.

The social hour was followed by a brief welcome from CWC Board President Keith Tollenare and then a fall-themed buffet dinner. After dinner, CWC Executive Director Mike LeValley gave a brief presentation about our efforts to catalog species on Conservancy properties and how those efforts inform our preservation and restoration work. Mike highlighted several species of plants and animals and shared news of the discovery of a rare plant species, the Forked Aster (*Eurybia furcata*), on a CWC preserve this fall. Following this presentation, the 2024 Bob Ball Award was presented to Anne Messinger for her ongoing contribution to the CWC.

The evening was capped off with the drawing of raffle winners. We began by drawing winners for the in-person raffles. It was fun watching people scanning dozens of raffle tickets for winning numbers with yelps of excitement and surprise from winners and groans of disappointment from those who hadn't won. The final drawings of the evening were for our 50/50 drawing, won by Brian Clayton, and the Drummond Island Trip Package, won by Andrea Ritter.



Bob Ball Award Recipient: Anne Messinger

A highlight of the evening was the announcement of the 2024 Bob Ball Award recipient. The Robert (Bob) Ball Award is given annually to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the CWC's purpose of protecting natural habitat and open space. This year's recipient is Anne Messinger.

Anne is being honored for her volunteerism and advocacy of the organization. One of our most dedicated supporters, Anne is always working behind the scenes to support the CWC. Anne signed a conservation easement on her property in 2015 and later amended the easement to add additional acreage in 2018. Based on her positive experiences, she actively encourages friends and neighbors to place their properties in easements as well. When a call for volunteers goes out, Anne is always near the front of the line – including volunteering at the Fall Fundraiser. Anne also serves as a member of our Relationships Committee which, among other duties, plans fundraising activities and outreach events across the year. Most of all, she shares her passion for our mission with anyone who is willing to listen. Organizations like the CWC cannot thrive without supporters like Anne.



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CWC Initiates New Art Residency Program

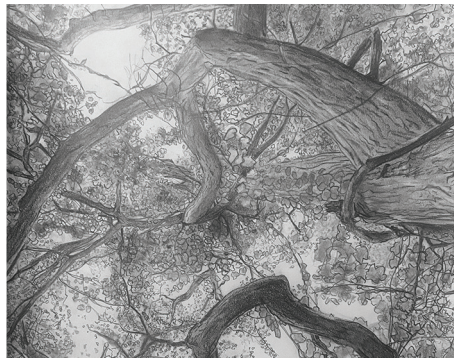
Art can play a crucial role in nature conservation by raising awareness, inspiring action, and fostering a deeper connection with the natural world. By integrating art and nature, we can encourage a more profound understanding of the environment and encourage a sense of stewardship for our wild spaces. With this in mind, CWC began the Art Residency Program, a unique opportunity for local artists to collaborate with the Conservancy to explore these ideas.

We were blown away by the response to this program. We had ten applicants and have received numerous inquiries about next year. The three artists selected for the 2024 Residency were Kate Brown, Natalie Smith, and Rachel Davis Smith. We began with a group meeting, giving CWC staff and artists a chance to discuss ideas and expectations. Artists had three months to visit CWC preserves and create a body of work inspired by their explorations. The art was displayed at our annual Fall Fundraiser, where the artists were available to discuss their experiences with attendees.

To read more about this program, hear more about the artists' experiences, and see complete bodies of work, please visit our website: <https://cwc-mi.org/artist-residency-program/>



Kate Brown



Natalie Smith

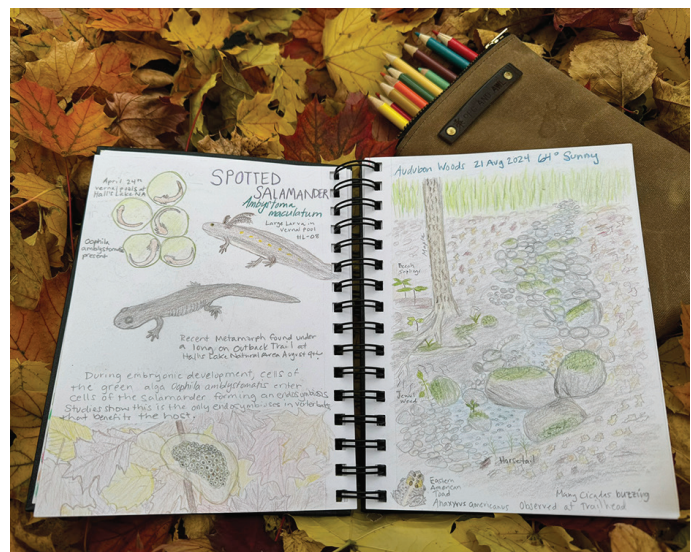


Rachel Davis Smith

CWC Nature Journal Club

We started a new program this summer aimed at encouraging attendees to slow down while they observe and document their surroundings through the art of nature journaling. Nature journaling combines creativity, observation, and mindfulness, fostering a deeper connection with the environment while enhancing appreciation for biodiversity. It sharpens observational skills, promotes mental well-being by reducing stress, and serves as a powerful tool for reflection and personal growth through artistic expression.

Every month we visited a CWC preserve for a brief hike before settling in to record what we observed. Each person focused on various aspects of the natural world, capturing everything from the broader landscape to the smallest details in their observations. Shortly after the Nature Journal Club began, interest grew in offering a similar program for young people, leading to the creation of CWC Junior Nature Journaling. It put a huge smile on our faces to see how excited the children were to explore and document nature. These experiences are at the core of our mission, and we look forward to continuing this program next spring!



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