

Moles are Positive Role Models

This article appeared in the Winter 2017-2018 issue of The Quarry Farm newsletter. It bears repeating. Your, and our, yard is better for the presence of moles.

Not long ago after autumn rains had softened the baked lawn around Red Fox Cabin, little volcano-shaped mounds erupted here and there, heralding the arrival of moles. Moles don't alarm me because their burrowing hasn't seemed to cause lasting damage in the garden. However, convinced that the humans on a nature preserve should be knowledgeable about their fellow inhabitants, I went online to learn more about moles.

Members of the family Talpidae, moles are found in most parts of North America, Europe, and Asia. Seven species live in the U.S., the Eastern Mole being common in our region. They are 5 to 7 inches long, larger than shrews and voles. Males are called boars; females are sows; and the young are pups. A group is a labor (perhaps because they are so industrious?). They are carnivores, not herbivores. Their diet is primarily earthworms, grubs, and the occasional mouse, but not our garden plants. Once they have eaten the food in one area, they move on.

Moles are amazingly adapted to a subterranean life. They can distinguish light from dark but not colors. Although their eyesight is dim, their hearing and sense of smell are so acute that they can detect prey through many inches of soil. They have large, powerful, outward-pointing front legs and claws for pushing dirt aside as they "swim" through soft, moist earth. They are able to disappear from rare ventures to the surface in 10 seconds flat, to tunnel 1 foot in 3 minutes and to run through established tunnels at about 80 feet per minute. Their short, velvety fur is non-directional, causing little resistance as they move rapidly through tunnels. (Their soft, dense pelts once supported a thriving moleskin industry.) Moles can survive in their low-oxygen environment underground because they can tolerate the high carbon dioxide levels in the exhaled air they reuse. Their saliva paralyzes prey, which they store, still alive, in underground "larders" for future consumption. Moles can detect, capture, and eat their prey faster than the human eye can follow.

Moles make 2 types of tunnels: feeding runways close to the surface where the molehills pop up and permanent tunnels about a foot or more underground, leading to a nest about 2 feet deep. What might look like the work of many moles can be the product of one busy tunneler.



Moles have polydactyl forepaws: each has an extra thumb (also known as a prepollex) next to the regular thumb. Photo by Didier Descouens

Moles are solitary and highly territorial, coming together only to mate. Breeding season runs from February to May. From 2 to 5 pups are born after a 1-month gestation, and leave the nest 30 to 45 days later in search of their own territories. Although tunnels may overlap, moles avoid each other and will attack and even fight to the death when they meet.

Many online gardening experts write about moles in terms of their being destructive pests that must be eradicated. They suggest many methods of doing so: poisons; traps that choke, spear, slice or confine for removal; buried repellents like broken glass, razor blades, or thorny branches; or natural, more humane repellents like plantings that smell bad to moles (daffodils, alliums, marigolds, castor beans, etc.), castor oil drenches; and reducing lawn watering that could force moles close to the surface.

However, I lean toward a smaller set of gardening experts represented online who believe that moles are more beneficial than destructive. Rather than taking offense at molehills, they point out that moles improve soil by loosening, aerating and fertilizing, and the cones subside quickly. Any soil that has been lifted off roots can be pressed down again with a foot. Moles receive the blame for plant damage caused by chipmunks, mice and voles, and generally receive little credit for destroying lawn grubs. I myself would rather let moles eat pesky soil-dwelling larvae than chase moles out by spreading harmful poisons to kill the grubs. In the view of one expert, Roger Mercer, "Moles aren't all bad. In fact they're 99% good." As a 15th century saying goes: "Do not make a mountain out of a mole hill."

—The Gardener at The Quarry Farm

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Do you have questions, want to schedule an outing or workshop for your group or keep up with what's happening here? Email thequarryfarm@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and visit www.thequarryfarm.org or call 567-376-0705.

Donations to The Quarry Farm Nature Preserve & Conservation Farm, a 501(c)(3) public charity, are tax-deductible.

Spring 2024 Programs & Events

Dress for the weather, including good walking shoes, and meet in Seitz Family Pavilion, 1/8 mile north of 14321 Road 7L, Pandora. There is no fee to participate unless noted otherwise. However, tax-deductible donations are appreciated.

Total Eclipse on the Prairie

Monday, April 8, 2:30 p.m.

A total solar eclipse is a rare and spectacular phenomenon that occurs when the Moon blocks the Sun's light completely. This eclipse will be the first total solar eclipse to be visible in the U.S. since August 21, 2017. We will have a front row seat for what is dubbed the Great North American Eclipse by media. So that we won't impact sensitive plant populations in the prairie viewing area, including emerging spring wildflowers, we are limiting the amount of foot traffic for this event. **Registration for the prairie is limited to 35 people. Please call 567-376-0705 on or before Thursday, April 4 to register with name and number of individuals in your group.** If you prefer not to hike, you may view the eclipse from the gardens.

Spring Bird Migration Hike

Wednesday, May 8, 9 a.m.

Birds are everywhere, all the time, doing fascinating things. Right now they are moving from their southerly winter retreats to spring nesting grounds and summer homes. Dress for the weather and bring your binoculars as we document the many species of birds that migrate to and through Northwest Ohio. All recorded species will be submitted to the international Great Backyard Bird Count.

Full Flower Moon Hike

Thursday, May 23, 7:30 p.m.

May's full moon is commonly called the Flower Moon. Pack your flashlight and wear good walking shoes to walk the trails to look for spring wildflowers and listen for toad and frog calls in the moonlight. If the moon is behind the clouds, we will still enjoy a lantern hike through the woods.

First Day of Summer Sketch

Thursday, June 20, 3 p.m.

Pack your sketch pad, pencils, paints and other drawing materials to join us in the pollinator gardens for an hour of creativity. All skill-levels welcome. If we are lucky, Steve may be baking something delectable in the house that is a kitchen.





Mission Statement

It is our goal and mission to provide the opportunity for people of all ages to increase their understanding of the natural environment of Northwest Ohio and to interact with their fellow inhabitants in a sustainable manner.



This Gray Catbird is one of several that, due to its cat-like mew, has us looking under shrubs and in trees for lost kittens. (Photo by Deb Weston)

The Quarry Farm Newsletter is a quarterly publication for supporters of The Quarry Farm Nature Preserve & Conservation Farm, a nonprofit organization in Pandora, Ohio.

On the cover: An Orchard Oriole shelters in a Honey Locust, but new spring leaves couldn't hide it from Deb Weston and her lens.

All photographs printed in this newsletter were taken on The Quarry Farm Nature Preserve & Conservation Farm.

www.thequarryfarm.org



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Under One Big Sky

The first American Woodcock made its presence known on the evening of February 22. The distinctive PEET buzzed low on the ground, followed by whistling wings overhead as the silhouette of a long-beaked, winged baseball flew over the farm animal sanctuary. The next day was cold, but on warmer nights we heard two hurtling around in the prairie.

It was chilly enough for coats on March 2 for our first "Follow the Tracks" hike in the nature preserve. Visitors followed deer, turkey, squirrel and other tracks around the trails and searched for praying mantis cases in the gardens. We heard and saw other signs of wildlife, including woodpecker calls and a fish skeleton left by a feasting Great Blue Heron.

On March 29, birders Deb Weston and David Smith disturbed several American Crows who were already upset by a predator. Deb suspected an owl got a bit too close. It is a joy to hear these intelligent characters as they have been scarce here since the West Nile virus infected the corvid population.

Chris Brown's 7th Grade Science students from Glandorf Elementary visited The Quarry Farm to demonstrate how to safely view the April 8 total solar eclipse and to make a solar eclipse viewer from a cereal box, as well as one made out of a paper towel roll. Videos of the students are posted to The Quarry Farm YouTube Channel and Facebook page. The videos, recipes and posters were also designed by the students and those are shared on Facebook. The farm animal sanctuary residents provided video commentary.

Debbie Leiber, Deb Weston and David Seitz have been working hard to keep the trails clear, what with all of the high winds dropping branches from treetops. They have been harvesting bush honeysuckle trunks which are made into hiking sticks throughout the year. The Quarry Farm is part of Toledo's Imagination Station Ambassador program. As such, we were provided with lesson plans, solar eclipse glasses and photo-sensitive beads that will change color during totality. Those beads will be available for registered participants to string on the handles of hiking sticks during our April 8 "Total Eclipse on the Prairie" program.



"Follow the Tracks" hikers also searched for praying mantis cases in the pollinator garden on March 2.



In preparation for the April 8 total solar eclipse, Glandorf Elementary 7th grade students filmed three videos with the farm animal sanctuary residents on March 15.



March 1 was a bit chilly starting out, but a good day to work in the woods, according to David Seitz. He posed here next to one of the mammoth, invasive bush honeysuckle shrubs that he has been removing from the nature preserve for five years and counting. He does a brushcutter sweep periodically to keep fast-growing seedlings from filling back in. This gives native wildflowers and trees a chance to grow in their place. Dave has also cut scores of wild grapevine and poison ivy that pull down and siphon energy from the native trees.

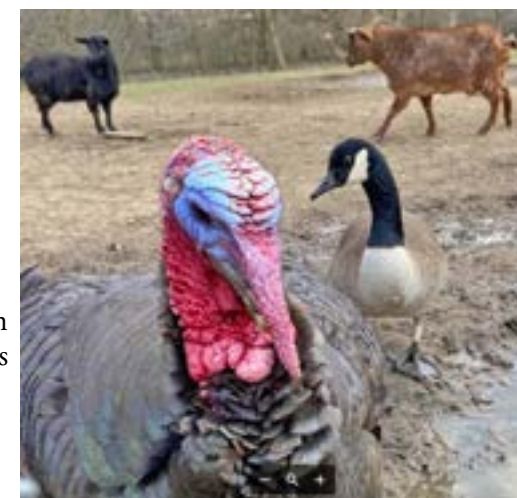
Resident Spotlight: Bruce & K

Spring has sprung, officially if not in reality. Spring wildflowers—Wild Ginger, Bloodroot, Spring Beauty—have yet to poke through the cold floor of the floodplain and upland woods. There were bursts of warmth in February and March but the botanicals weren't fooled. The mammals and birds, however, know that it's spring. They droop dejectedly when the weather seesaws down with snow flurries and bask in the glory of the warm, sunny upswing.

Everyone is shedding, nesting, flying and calling sweet nothings to each other, or "Get off my lawn/tree/water" to hormonal rivals. The fostered re-wilding Canada Geese call to the wild ones on Cranberry Run. The goats bark and huff, bumping foreheads across the paddock. Patches, Pockets, Gerald, Mr. Fabulous, Caramel, Sydney and Chicken Ricky crow their rooster songs. Tom turkeys Edgar and Bernard strut their stuff while turkey hen Sioux does her best to avoid them.



In the midst of Spring chest-thumping and display, two individuals share a daily lesson of tolerance and respect. Tom Turkey Bruce has always been unsteady on his feet. He came here a few years ago after being dumped in a park. He was found spinning in circles, unable to walk more than a few steps due to probable fattening in close confinement. Canada Goose "K" (named for the tag around his left ankle) prefers the company of Bruce to the rest of the Canada geese. K keeps an eye on Bruce, making sure the two are never far apart. In the evening, K will match steps with Bruce as he makes his slow way into the barn. Sometimes Bruce waivers as he approached the door. As he turns away from the enclosure, K reaches out and gently prods Bruce into the building before hopping in behind him.



Thank you...

...to Debbie Leiber and Deb Weston for gathering honeysuckle trunks to be used for hiking staffs

...to David Seitz for honeysuckle and vine removal and hydrological engineering

...to Deb Weston and David Smith for monitoring bird migration in the nature preserve

...to Glandorf Elementary School for providing educational and informative materials to celebrate the April 8 Total Solar Eclipse

Monetary Donations:

Bruce Coburn, in memory of Bert Coburn
Maya Fischhoff
Paula Harper

Bring Nature Home to Your Community

Acclaimed author and native plant expert Doug Tallamy will give a presentation 'HOMEGROWN HABITAT' April 27, 2024 at Winebrenner on the University of Findlay campus, 950 N. Main Street. Admission includes a free Native Plant, Continental Breakfast, resource fair, and books sales and signing by Doug. The Quarry Farm will be part of the resource fair, with a living exhibit of "water canaries"—aquatic macroinvertebrates—that can indicate the health of our local waterways. Registration is required by April 19 (no ticket sales at the door.) **Get your tickets online at homegrownhabitat.org**

If you enjoy the pollinator gardens here, learn how to create your own at the Putnam County Master Gardeners "Spring Into Gardening" garden fair and outdoor market, also on April 27, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Putnam County Educational Service Center, 24 Putnam Parkway, Ottawa. Register by April 20. **Download the registration form at putnam.osu.edu.**