

# Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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## Monitoring Rare Plants

By Joann Fricke

It has been my honor and privilege to monitor rare plants for the Plants of Concern (POC) initiative. POC originated at the Chicago Botanic Garden and has been in northeast Illinois since 2001. Illinois Botanizer, Chris Benda, has been coordinating the project in southernmost Illinois since 2021.

In the last two years, 63 subpopulations of 16 different species have been monitored in Monroe and Randolph Counties alone. These include the state threatened *Buchnera americana* (Bluehearts), *Hexalectris spicata* (Crested Coralroot Orchid) and *Matelea decipiens* (Climbing Milkweed).



Chris Benda and his wife, Susan Barry, with some of the 220 flags noting Bluehearts found at a private land and water reserve in June.

Going from knowing nothing about native plants 15 years ago to assisting with the monitoring of rare plants is an indescribable feeling. One subpopulation of Bluehearts on a private land and water reserve increased from less than 100 in 2021 to 220 in 2022! And two new subpopulations were discovered nearby. Counting stems is no easy task. A flag is put in the ground for each stem found. (See photo at left.) When you are satisfied that you have found them all at that location, pull up the flags and count them. It was a good thing that Chris brought a lot of flags for the Bluehearts! GPS information is noted as well as soil conditions and surrounding native species. There is even an app so all the monitoring information can be entered in the field. Once statistics are entered, a report is generated.

Several years ago, a single Climbing Milkweed was found at one of Clifftop's properties. In 2021, 7 plants were counted. The area was burned in March of 2022 and in June 2022, the population had exploded to 65 plants! Only one inch seed pods had ever been found and attempts to propagate had been unsuccessful. This year the seed pods are 3 inches long and are quite numerous. (See photo at right.)

Also discovered for the first time this year at a Clifftop property was Crested Coralroot Orchid. While it was known to inhabit a nearby land and water reserve, this orchid had never been seen at Clifftop's property. See next page for more photos of these rare plants.







*Hexaletric spicata* Crested Coralroot Orchid



*Matelea decipiens* Climbing Milkweed



*Buchnera americana* Bluehearts

## Guestviews...

### Thanks Nature

Text and photos by Susan Barry

I live in the woods. When the weather allows, the sliding doors on the back of my house are open and I'm serenaded by cicadas, katydids, birds, frogs, and toads. It makes me immensely happy. Understanding the richness of nature and the pleasure it gives me to experience and appreciate it has been enhanced so much by my husband Chris Benda, the Illinois Botanizer. I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and experienced nature as the mowed areas of forest preserves and the beach. We didn't hike or camp as a family, and I didn't go to any camps growing up.



It's been thrilling to accompany Chris on so many hikes, exploring different habitats, searching for rare plants, learning the scientific names of plants, and understanding how all of it and we live together. I have lived in southern Illinois for 22 years and before I moved here I had no idea the natural beauty and diversity this area holds. I love exploring different areas every time of the year because each time offers something different.

Hiking in the winter means seeing the topography clearly, perhaps snow draped over branches, hopefully frozen waterfalls, like the ones shown at left, and even botanizing! The spring means a new cycle of wildflowers begins, like the Hoary Puccoons shown at right, which brings with it Chris's infectious enthusiasm. Rainy days bring out the colors of the flowers, full creeks, and herps to catch sight of. Summer here



can be brutal, but the feeling of being out in nature, and the excitement of seeing something new or just something beautiful makes it all worth it. Fall, of course, brings the change to the trees and more wildflowers. Every month there's something new to see as well as my favorite things to revisit.

I also love to travel to experience the habitats where I don't live. Every November, Chris and I go on a trip we call Thanks Nature, where we plan the trip around all the natural sites of an area we haven't explored. Seeing National Parks, hiking the high points in each state, canoeing, snorkeling, cross-country skiing, the possibilities are endless!



Susan's deck in fall.

Nature feeds me, and in return, I love to spend time aiding it, removing invasive species, and helping monitor rare plants. It is so satisfying to free native plants from invasive vines strangling them and to see the health and biodiversity increase as a result. The more I can help nature, the more nature can help everyone else!

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## Charitable Giving and Taxes

For those of you who are approaching the age where you will have to start withdrawing funds from a traditional Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or you are the owner of an inherited account\*, we offer the following information, taken from the Internal Revenue Service website:



"If you have a required minimum distribution (RMD) on your own account or an inherited account (traditional IRA) and you do not need the funds, donating to charity is a great option. Normally, your required withdrawal will be included in your taxable income and cannot be rolled into other tax-deferred accounts. However, donating your RMD is a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) and will not be taxed up to \$100,000. Tax benefits aside, earmarking this income for charity is a great way to begin or expand your giving portfolio to support the causes you care about."

\*Generally, a designated beneficiary is required to liquidate the account by the end of the 10th year following the year of death of the IRA owner (this is known as the 10-year rule). There are exceptions for certain eligible designated beneficiaries, defined by the IRS. Please consult with your financial advisor regarding the liquidation of an inherited IRA. Clifftop NFP is a qualified charitable recipient.

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Moving?

Please be sure to notify us of your new address. Send updates to [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) or call 618-935-2542



## Upcoming events...



**August 20 and September 17, 9:00 a.m. Field trip: Summer Prairie Walks, led by Clifftop Board member and SWIC Biology Instructor, Laura Schaefer, at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults.** Join Laura for a 1 mile walking tour of the prairie. The walk will take place along the ADA accessible trail. Laura will help participants identify the native prairie plants along the trail, teach about plant adaptations and prairie ecology. Meet at the pavilion. Dress for the weather and bring a drink to help stay cool. As an added perk, participants in the September 17 walk will be allowed to collect native seeds to take home!

**September 10, 1:00 p.m. – Seminar: Cicadas of Illinois: New Discoveries and Our Local Soundscapes, Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois Avenue, Waterloo.** Join Katie Dana, Entomology Scientific Specialist from the Illinois Natural History Survey, on an audio tour of the many cicada species found in Illinois and learn about their unique life histories. In 2019, their lab discovered two species of cicadas that were previously not known to be present in Illinois on the clifftops of Monroe County. Please watch our Facebook page and website for registration information.



## Highlights from Laura's Native Garden Tour...



About 30 people were in attendance on a hot Saturday morning, but found the tour extremely informative. Thankfully, Laura had taken the time to label the plants and other points of interest, although some of the labels had been chewed on overnight!

