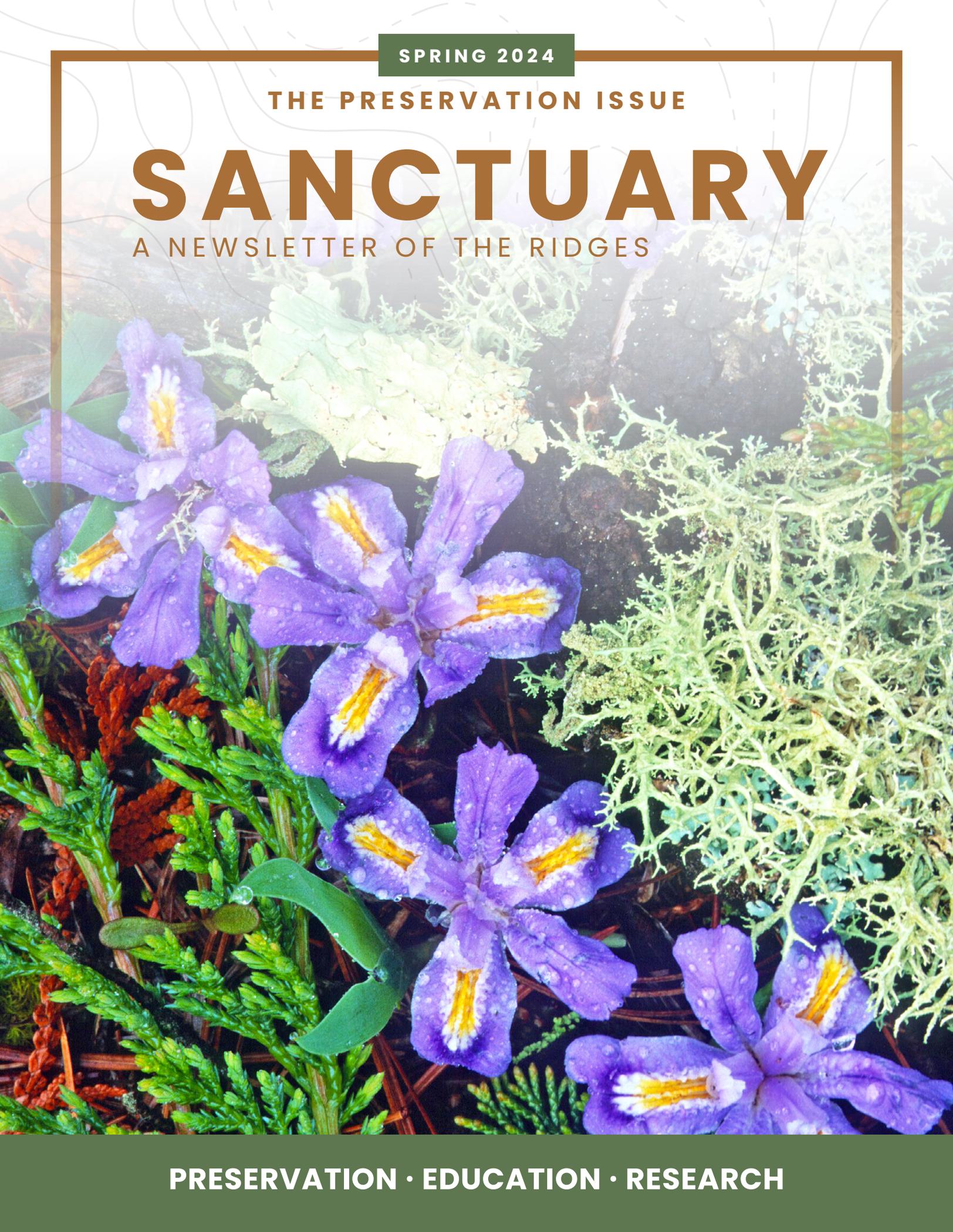


SPRING 2024

THE PRESERVATION ISSUE

SANCTUARY

A NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDGES



PRESERVATION · EDUCATION · RESEARCH



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DEAR FRIENDS,

If we ever spent a moment together exploring the Sanctuary, you would quickly learn of my mild obsession over the boreal forest. I sit in awe and gratitude every day reflecting on how lucky we are to have this spectacular forest right in our front yard. Boreal forests are recognized as a northern hemisphere forest type that thrives in cold climates with cold tolerant conifer species such as spruce, fir, cedar, pine and tamarack. The boreal forest, also known as the taiga, covers much of Alaska, Canada, Russia and Northern Europe and has been acknowledged as the largest land biome on the planet. Seeds and roots left behind in glacial drift, supported by the refrigerative effect of Lake Michigan and prevailing southern winds, have seeded a small pocket of boreal forest here in Baileys Harbor, further south than the rest.

I am often asked why I love the boreal forest so much, and to be honest, I find it hard to explain my adoration in words. More than anything it is the feeling I get when I stand still and take it all in. I decided to conduct a little experiment the other day to try and pinpoint my connection better. My experiment was simple. I planned to spend 30 minutes in a hardwood dominated forest with an abundance of maple, birch and hemlock, and 30 minutes in the boreal forest, and record my observations. I chose a sunny 40-50 degree day and started in the upland forests found at Ellison Bay Bluff County Park (one of my favorite areas in Door County). I found a quiet bench and started my observations. I repeated the same thing in The Ridges Sanctuary at a quiet location on Winter Wren trail.

I set my notebook down for a few days before rereading and reflecting on what I had written. I found the reflection exhilarating. I sat and enjoyed two areas that I am so attached to and recorded my observations through two very different lenses. In the mixed hardwood environment, I connected very technically to the forest. What exactly did I see, hear, feel and smell? In the boreal forest my observations were a bit more intangible. It was a different kind of connection. One that is rooted in a feeling – in a sense of the place. This activity showed me more deeply how I value space, and the observations that make me understand our important role in the conservation of Nature.

I hope you can practice this mini experiment in your own way. There is so much to appreciate in our natural world. Regardless of whether you appreciate the boreal forest, cedar swamps, oak savannahs, or a maple-oak forest, your observations and appreciation are valuable!

I encourage you to read reflections from Ridges staff on the unique features of our area and the steps we can take to preserve it. . Together, we play a crucial part in the protection of our fragile environment.

Katie Krouse
Executive Director

Cover Photo: dwarf lake iris, Douglas Sherman

KATIE'S OBSERVATIONS

WHAT DO I:	MIXED HARDWOOD	BOREAL FOREST
SEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thin trees with remnant leaves and dry edges. • Expanse of blue sky towering over the treetops. • Forest floor is covered with dry and broken, light brown leaves, that dance each time the breeze passes through. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green! I can see green as far as I can see. • Dappled sunlight sneaking through the needles and touching the forest floor. • The soft sway of trees in the breeze. • Rich, dark brown forest floor covered with rusty-colored cedar needles.
HEAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rustling leaves, rattling branches and alarmed chickadees. • The crash of waves at the bottom of the bluff. • An angry red squirrel over my shoulder clearly asking me to move on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHOOSH! As the breeze passes through the trees. • Another darn red squirrel snapping at me to move on. • At moments, I hear nothing. Everything is completely still. • Now I hear sandhill cranes in the distance; I think they are in the swale nearby.
SMELL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It oddly smells like fall. • I can smell a fireplace or wood stove out in the distance. • Every now and then I catch a whiff of the water. • Soil and decomposing wood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green! As my brother once defined it. • Things smell fresh. • The wetlands and the rich smell of the hummocks and mossy stumps.
FEEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm and connected to the rustling leaves. • I cannot hear anyone, I feel like there are people around. • The breeze. • Pressure rising and falling as the wind enters and leaves the corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel alone yet enveloped by the forest. • I feel the cool air, but I also feel warm and protected. • I feel grounded and connected. • I feel surrounded by the forest rather than feeling like it is simply in front of me. • I feel that this must be protected at all costs!



Sandy swale, Andrew Pirrung

THE RIDGES SANCTUARY

WHAT MAKES THIS AREA UNIQUE?

If you were to ask me what makes The Ridges Sanctuary and surrounding area so unique from an ecological perspective, two words come to mind: diversity and rarity. There isn't just one factor that makes this place special. The Ridges is known for its expansive population of orchids, its unique ridge and swale topography, and a glacial relic forest – the boreal forest. Orchids are the second largest plant family and are found in habitats all over the globe. You can find examples of ridge and swale topography throughout the Great Lakes and really on any type of shoreline given the right conditions. And the boreal forest is the largest biome on Earth. To me, it is a combination of these and many other factors that make The Ridges such a unique environment.

Beyond the north shore of Baileys Harbor lies an ecological gem recognized by countless people and organizations for its unique landscape, diversity of habitats, and the suite of species that call it home. It is known for its incredible beauty that draws thousands of visitors to the Door Peninsula

each year. The combination of expansive, intact coastal wetlands and lake-moderated boreal forest, along with its distinctive topography, creates an incredibly diverse set of habitats in a relatively concentrated area. There have been more than 15 distinct plant communities documented in less than 1,700 acres of land.

This diversity of habitats leads to a spectacular amount of biological diversity on the site, so much so that it is considered one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in Wisconsin if not the entire Midwest. The landscape supports well over 450 native vascular plants, including 29 native orchids, upwards of 200 resident and migratory bird species, and spectacular levels of diversity amongst other biological groups. Recent baseline monitoring efforts demonstrate this level of local biodiversity, including surveys conducted in 2023 that documented 269 butterfly and moth species, and 52 dragonfly and damselfly species between the Baileys Harbor and Logan Creek sites over the course of just one season. More baseline surveys



cedar branch, Kimberly Mackowski



Ram's head lady's slipper, Douglas Sherman

will be critical to inform us of the species that live here, and which ones may be most susceptible to threats such as climate change.

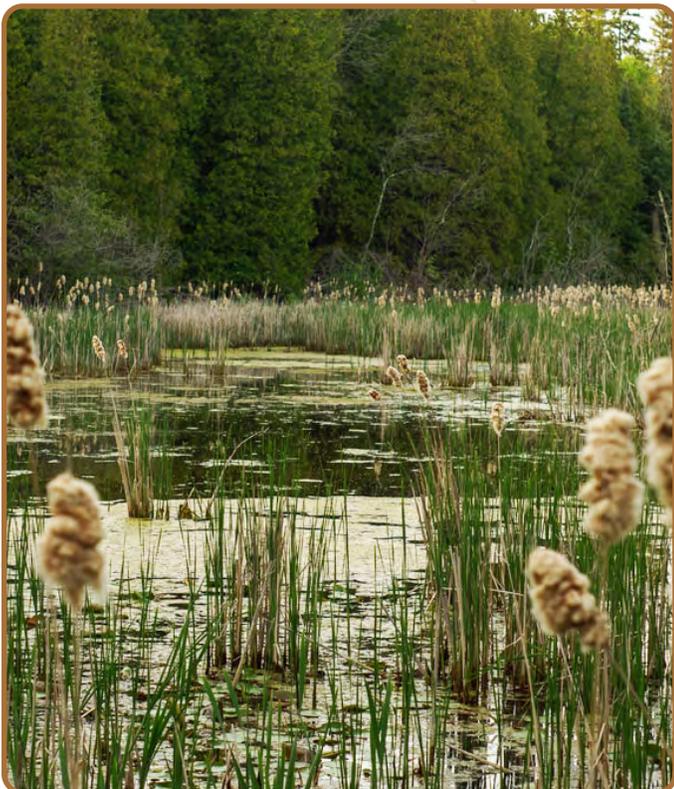
Not only is The Ridges a diverse landscape, it's an incredibly rare one. Geologic rarity here sets the stage for everything else; the iconic topography, combined with other glacial geological features. The glacial influence can be seen everywhere from the cuesta of the escarpment that makes up the Door Peninsula, to the formation of the coastal wetlands and karst bedrock-dominated uplands present on the Lake Michigan shoreline. That same glacial influence shows itself in the presence of a boreal forest; the furthest southernly-located forest of its kind in North America. This boreal relic remains due to the moderating cooling effects of Lake Michigan.

This rare combination of climate and landscape in this coastal location has combined to also support many rare species of great conservation interest. The Ridges Sanctuary is home to several species

that are state or federally listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Several of the most iconic species of The Ridges are quite rare, including the Hine's emerald dragonfly, dwarf lake iris, and Ram's head lady slipper orchid. All of these species have small ranges, a very specific set of habitat requirements, and face a multitude of threats.

Above all else, the uniqueness of this place is more than any collection of words that could be described on this page. It's a feeling that overcomes visitors to this place time and time again. It is neither describable nor the same for every person. If seeing is believing, I believe this place to be one of the most spectacular ecological areas I have ever come to know. I get to see it on people's faces every day; it says that this place is truly special and deserving of the name of Sanctuary.

Sam Hoffman
Land Manager



Ridge's swale, Kimberly Mackowski



yellow lady's slipper, Douglas Sherman

RARE SPECIES OF THE SANCTUARY

We are hopeful that by now you have caught on to the vast uniqueness of our special area. The forest, topography and microclimate have created an ecosystem that supports more plants, insects, animals and most notably - rare species than any other area in Wisconsin - if not within the entire Midwest. We encourage you to come and experience it for yourself. While this is not a comprehensive list, here are some of the endangered, threatened or species of special concern you may encounter during your next visit to The Ridges.



dwarf lake iris, TRS



dune thistle, Tony Kiszonas

PLANTS

With over 500 vascular and non-vascular plant species, The Ridges Sanctuary has a well-deserved reputation of incredible plant diversity. This diversity includes at least 16 recently documented species listed as either Special Concern, Threatened, or Endangered by the Wisconsin Natural Heritage working list. Some of these plants are quite abundant at The Ridges while some exist as single populations.

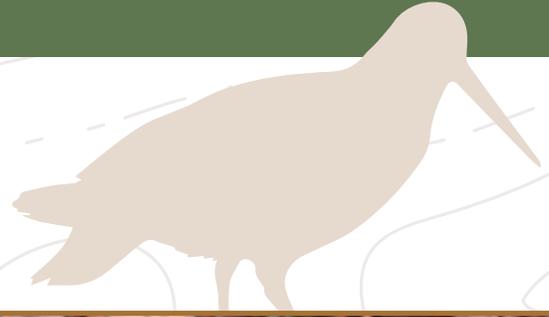
The **dwarf lake iris** (*Iris lacustris*), is designated as threatened on both State and Federal listings. Visitors start to understand why they are listed when the range of this plant is explained. This stunning little iris is only found growing on the northern shoreline areas of Lakes Michigan and Huron, with the southernmost documented population found in Brown County, Wisconsin. As ubiquitous as this plant is at The Ridges, its range is quite limited and is under extensive stress from habitat loss. Because the dwarf lake iris is a relative beginner in the evolutionary game and clones extensively, lack of genetic diversity may play a significant role in survivorship going forward.

Guests of the Sanctuary often look puzzled when informed that we have a type of thistle that is also listed as threatened at the state and federal level. This usually occurs when we are removing their

invasive thistle cousins. Along with the dwarf lake iris, the **dune or Pitcher's thistle** (*Cirsium pitcheri*), was federally listed in 1988. This thistle's range is similar to the dwarf lake iris but is documented a bit farther south into Illinois and northwest near Lake Superior. Because it only grows on sand dune environments near Lakes Superior, Huron, and Michigan, this plant is at the mercy of fluctuating lake levels, development, and beachcombers. The species is not helped by a life cycle that limits reproductive recruitment. A dune thistle will grow for usually five to eight years, flower once, and die. This life cycle limits reproduction in the best of situations but opens the possibility of plant mortality before reproduction age. The Ridges' population suffered from high water levels in Lake Michigan five years ago when many plants were lost.

These plants are just two of the many listed plants at The Ridges Sanctuary. Some are found growing in the boardwalk and trail areas for all to see while others are tucked deep in the swales. We are fortunate that there are many superb plant taxonomists helping us keep track of our plant community and a sanctuary to help protect them.

Tony Kiszonas
Research Director



northern flying squirrel, Larry Master



american woodcock, Joe Girgente

WILDLIFE

The special boreal habitat of The Ridges Sanctuary provides refuge for the variety of wildlife who rely on it for food and shelter. At The Ridges, there are several species that deserve special attention and consideration:

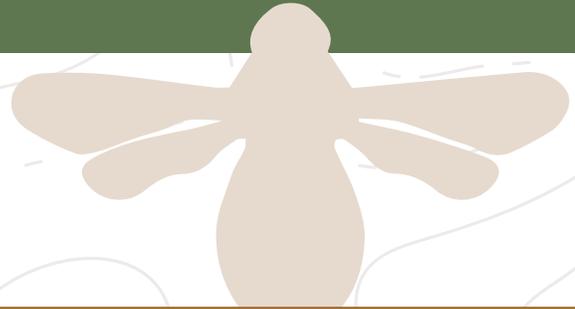
The **northern flying squirrel** is a species of special concern in Wisconsin. Threats include habitat loss and fragmentation, climate change, and competition with the southern flying squirrel. The southern flying squirrel is more of a habitat generalist and is expanding its range northwards for the same reasons that the northern flying squirrel is losing ground. Northern flying squirrels require wet, coniferous forest with standing dead trees, lots of decaying coarse woody debris, a diverse understory, and fungus abundance, which is exactly what The Ridges protects. Nests are often built in witch's brooms, a tree deformity in black spruce caused by dwarf mistletoe, which is common in the Sanctuary. Because they spread the spores of subterranean fungi through their feces, and orchids have a symbiotic relationship with fungi, it is possible that this species benefits orchids.

The Ridges Sanctuary is embedded within an area designated by Ramsar as a Wetland of International Importance as well as an Audubon Important Bird

Area. Our wetlands and associated forested and open upland habitats serve as crucial stopover and breeding habitats for numerous migratory birds. **American woodcock, least flycatcher, golden-winged warbler, Brewer's blackbird, rusty blackbird, and Connecticut warbler** are among the state species of special concern that you might encounter during your own journey here. The latter two especially are in steep decline due in part to threats to their boreal forest haunts further north. Protecting our disjunct patch of boreal forest can only be of benefit to them.

Although the Central Flyway population of **sandhill cranes** appears to be stable, this majestic species is still vulnerable to changes in agricultural practices, pesticides, powerline collisions, and loss of wetland habitat. Population monitoring is still warranted, which is why The Ridges participates in the annual Midwest Crane Count, held in April each year.

Dan Scheiman
Visitor Engagement Specialist



Hine's emerald dragonfly, Paul Burton



yellow banded bumble bee, Libby Humphries

INSECTS

Insects are crucial organisms in the stability of global food webs and the estimated \$577 billion in ecosystem services they provide each year. Despite comprising at least 80% of all animal species, surveys have only been conducted on just 1% of them. Thus, they are frequently underrepresented on the Endangered Species List. Despite this, we can rest a bit easier knowing that The Ridges is a safe place for some of those that are considered threatened or endangered.

Frequently referred to as “the gem of the Sanctuary,” the **Hine's emerald dragonfly** (*Somatochlora hineana*) certainly shows why it adorns this nickname with its brilliant green eyes.

The Hine's emerald dragonfly has been on the Endangered Species List since 1995 due to habitat fragmentation and small populations separated by hundreds of miles, if not thousands. These concerns still hold true; its current range within the U.S. includes six populations from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to Southeastern Missouri. Alas, one of those six populations is alive and well in the Sanctuary. The cool, slow-moving waters of creeks and streams such as Hidden Brook provide the optimal habitat for dragonfly nymphs to swim about for their 2-4 years as aquatic larvae. When these shallow water bodies inevitably dry

up during the summer, an abundance of crayfish burrows in the swales provide shelter—but not without the risk of becoming dinner for a hungry crustacean. If they survive the perilous journey to adulthood, Hine's emerald dragonflies can be seen flying about in mid-to-late June, chomping about on gnats and mosquitoes and getting ready to lay eggs. So perhaps these insects are a gem for more than just their appearance.

Bumble bees are a familiar fuzzy face in the Sanctuary, but this species is decreasing in abundance across Wisconsin and the greater Midwest. The **yellow banded bumble bee** (*Bombus terricola*) can be distinguished from other bumble bee species by its round face and coloration: a yellow thorax on the front 1/3 and an abdomen that goes black, yellow, black.

Since the early 1900s, the range of the yellow banded bumble bee has contracted by approximately 1,519,854 square miles throughout the Northern United States and Southern Canada. The population was previously more widely found across North America. The species is suspected to have been extirpated from the Pacific Northwest, Southern Appalachians, and Southeastern Plains, with populations continuing to decline across the Midwest. For these reasons, the yellow banded is



Lake Huron locust, Chris Evans

both a state and federal special concern species, as well as a candidate for the Endangered Species List.

While you may not find this insect bounding along with its powerful hind legs in the ridges and swales of the Sanctuary, the **Lake Huron locust** (*Trimerotropis huroniana*) makes itself right at home in the dune habitat we protect and manage in front of the Range Light Corridor and along Moonlight Bay.

The Lake Huron locust is a member of the Wisconsin Endangered Species List due to its extremely limited range and critical habitat; the species' only known population in the state is along the easternmost shores of Door County. Although the Lake Huron locust has historically had a restricted range, increased development of dunes and aggressive invasive plant species on the Great Lakes have caused further detriment to this grasshopper.

For a Lake Huron locust to thrive, it needs sparsely vegetated, undisturbed Great Lakes sand dunes. Ideally, dunes would have a healthy mix of grasses and perennials for food sources, such as *Calamovilfa longifolia* (dune grass), *Ammophila breviligulata* (beachgrass), *Artemisia campestris* (wormwood) and *Cirsium pitcheri* (Pitcher's



Hummingbird clearwing, Libby Humphries

thistle—a state and federally threatened species). Invasives such as phragmites and spotted knapweed—though dune-inhabiting species—are not readily consumed by Lake Huron locusts. These two plants also outcompete native grasses, modifying dune structure from soil chemistry to biota.

While sightings of this insect and pristine dune habitats are becoming increasingly rare, we are hopeful that our efforts in visitor management, dune thistle monitoring, and vegetation management will lead to a hopping lakeshore.

Libby Humphries

WisCorps Environmental Educator

THE BEES OF THE RIDGES SANCTUARY

A hike around Hidden Brook boardwalk and our rustic trails will provide insight into what The Ridges is doing to protect pollinators, and how you can apply those conservation principles in your own backyard. For more information, go to RidgesSanctuary.org.

DESIGNATIONS

Chances are if you're reading this newsletter, you recognize and appreciate the incredible treasure that is The Ridges Sanctuary. What you might not know, however, is that it boasts an impressive list of designations awarded by distinguished institutions.

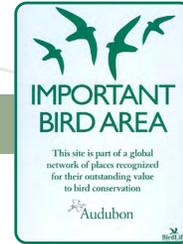
The unique ridge and swale complex of The Ridges Sanctuary is home to an ecologically diverse wetland system that supports an impressive list of rare plants and migratory birds. The Ridges holds two very important designations that recognize the critical role of its wetlands.



The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands designated the Door Peninsula Coastal Wetlands as a **Wetland of International Importance** in 2014. This coveted designation acknowledges wetlands across the globe as being of significant value locally, and cumulative for humanity. The Door Peninsula Coastal Wetland covers over 11,000 acres. Partners of this Ramsar Site include the County of Door, Door County Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, University of Wisconsin – Green Bay, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, The Ridges Sanctuary and private landowners. There are currently 41 Ramsar Sites in the United States protecting over 4.6 million acres of wetland. Other Ramsar Sites in Wisconsin include the Horicon Marsh and Lower Wisconsin Riverway.



The Wisconsin Wetlands Association developed a list of **100 Wetland Gems®** that recognizes wetlands for their high-quality habitat and biodiversity. The Ridges Sanctuary is recognized within the Moonlight Bay Wetland Corridor along with the Ephraim Swamp, Toft Point, Mud Lake Wildlife Area, among other important Door County wetlands. The corridor was identified for the many rare plants found here as well as the diversity of migratory birds recorded in the corridor, including osprey, green heron, marsh and sedge wren, blue-headed vireo, and least 17 species of warblers.



Speaking of birds, the robust list of migratory birds frequenting The Ridges has facilitated two bird-related designations that we are very proud of: **Bird City Wisconsin** and the National Audubon Society **Important Bird Area**. Bird City Wisconsin was created by a coalition of conservation and bird-focused organizations to promote the enhancement of bird habitat and to educate the public about the value of healthy ecosystems for birds. Their trademark logo can be seen on signs as you enter in 80 different communities in Wisconsin. In partnership with The Ridges, the Town of Baileys Harbor earned the Bird City Wisconsin designation in 2002. Sue Foote-Martin, recent inductee to the WI Conservation Hall of Fame and long-time Ridges member, helped establish the Bird City Wisconsin program, that now has international appeal.

Additionally, the National Audubon Society spearheads an ambitious effort to identify and protect the most critical landscape for birds, known as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). To date, over 2,750 IBAs have been designated covering more than 417 million acres in the United States.

These designations are a reflection of the rich diversity of The Ridges Sanctuary. They garner public and private support and serve as a joint commitment to its long term preservation.

Andy Gill
Assistant Director

RANGE LIGHT TOURS are open to the public, May–October, 10 am–3 pm, Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and 11 am–2 pm on Wednesdays. Tours are free for members and \$5 for non-members (included in day pass).

NATURALIST-LED EARLY BIRD HIKES are offered on Saturdays in May and June. The hikes are a way to learn and identify the morning birds at the Sanctuary and surrounding Baileys Harbor habitats. For more information, go to RidgesSanctuary.org.

STEWARDSHIP

HOW TO BE A GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD

As we consider our roles as individuals and community members, there is a special sense of place that The Ridges Sanctuary and the wider Door County landscape carries. Visitors come from across the country and the world to experience its beauty. It is our responsibility to continue to provide education on why we preserve sensitive habitats and how we promote exploring these natural spaces. Through environmental education and community collaboration, our goal is to foster environmental stewardship: an appreciation of and connection with the natural world that inspires the conservation of Nature.

As conservation efforts on the peninsula continue to grow, practicing environmental stewardship is crucial to the work being done for future generations to experience and appreciate. Carrying practices of environmental stewardship holds true when interacting with natural spaces outside the peninsula. Anyone can practice environmental stewardship where they are by exploring responsibly and through actions we can take to protect and care for the places we love.

We need to do our part in understanding threats, opportunities and challenges in our communities. Although being a steward may seem daunting, you can start with small practices to incorporate into your daily life.

Jackie Rath
Program Coordinator

STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES

DEVELOP A SENSE OF PLACE Pay attention to your natural surroundings. Spend time outside to get to know the natural patterns of an area and start noting cyclical patterns or fascinations in your outings.

GO ON A NATURALIST-GUIDED HIKE Get outside and learn about the plants, animals, and ecosystems around you from members in our community. Develop a knowledge of local ecology or gain insight from the perspectives of those who have explored these spaces and know the innerworkings of sensitive habitats. Our naturalist-guided hikes are the best way to experience the magic of The Ridges and to share the ongoing environmental stewardship at the Sanctuary.

CARE FOR DOOR COUNTY LEAVE NO TRACE INITIATIVE Principles provide a framework of minimum impact practices for spending time in Door County's outdoors and beyond. Head to doorcounty.com to read about the Care for Door County Leave No Trace 7 Principles. Each principle covers a specific target area and provides detailed information for minimizing impact to the peninsula's unique landscape, water resources, and outdoor experiences. These frameworks are actions to start implementing in your daily life to care for the land you love.

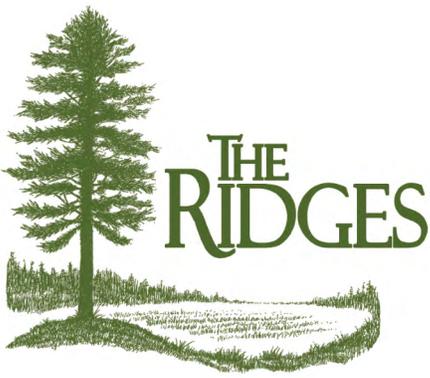
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT Being part of a community of people dedicated to the preservation, education, and research of this unique place is highly rewarding. Learn about local community action and initiatives, show support and get involved. Shop locally, protect, and care for local spaces, and volunteer! It is important to be mindful of the impact from individual actions, and community collaboration is a great way to share resources and ask questions or simply a place to get started. One of many great examples of community collaboration and partnership

action is The Door County Big Plant powered by the Climate Change Coalition of Door County. Hundreds of Door County individuals, families, businesses, churches, and non-profit ecological partners rally together to plant thousands of trees every year. To learn more, head to climatechangedoorcounty.com and explore and learn about the partners at play in The Door County Big Plant.

CITIZEN SCIENCE As stewards of The Ridges Sanctuary, understanding the critical habitats found within the Sanctuary is vital to establishing proper management, protection of rare and endangered species, and understanding the impacts climate change will have on the boreal forest. There are many opportunities for volunteers of all ages and abilities to get involved at The Ridges Sanctuary, one of them being citizen science. Citizen science is the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists. The Ridges currently hosts or facilitates several citizen science programs that utilize volunteers to collect important data for a variety of uses.

SUPPORT AND DONATE There are countless not-for-profit organizations that work to protect and maintain our natural treasures for generations to come. Please consider contributing to organizations and partners so that they can continue to do the work of environmental stewardship.

SHARE what you care about: Encourage others to get outside with you or volunteer to get more people involved. Share your fascinations and curiosities when out in nature. You never know who you might inspire! We can achieve much more as a collective when passionate individuals work towards a common goal.



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www.ridgessanctuary.org
or call: (920) 839-2802

MAKE AN IMPACT

DONATE

The Ridges Sanctuary relies on the generosity of our supporters to protect our lands, advance research initiatives, expand adult and youth education, and to build capacity to support the growth of the organization. Ways to donate include Undesignated contributions to offset operational expenses; Designated contributions for specific initiatives; and Endowment funds to ensure contributions are available in perpetuity. In addition, Planned Giving can be one of the best ways for an individual or family to leave their legacy. Please consider making a tax-deductible gift today.

VOLUNTEER

Each year, over 200 dedicated individuals volunteer to create a meaningful experience for everyone who visits The Sanctuary. From volunteering for our Front Desk Team, Wednesday Crew, and as a Hike Leader, to serving as a lighthouse docent, helping with citizen science programs and gardening projects, there are numerous opportunities to contribute. No prior experience is needed in any category. Visit our website or call to find out how you can be a part of the team.

JOIN

Whether you become a member to hike the trails, volunteer, or serve in a leadership role, you play an important part in ensuring that the future of the Sanctuary is bright, protected, and preserved for future generations. Membership includes free, year-round admission to all Ridges trails, program guides and newsletters, discounts on Nature Store items, and member rates for our programs and events.

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