

Naturally Kentucky

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It is the mission of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission to protect Kentucky's natural heritage by: (1) identifying, acquiring and managing natural areas that represent the best known occurrences of rare native species, natural communities and significant natural features in a statewide nature preserves system; (2) working with others to protect biological diversity; and (3) educating Kentuckians as to the value and purpose of nature preserves and biodiversity.



Dr. Charles Covell Jr., Ph.D., Receives Commission's 2004 Biological Diversity Protection Award

by Ellis Laudermilk, Invertebrate Biologist

The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC) presented its 2004 Biological Diversity Protection Award to Dr. Charles Covell, Jr., at the annual meeting of The Society of Kentucky Lepidopterists held in Lexington, November 19-20. The award is given annually by the commission to recognize an individual who has made a significant contribution to the protection of Kentucky's outstanding biological diversity. Dr. Covell is a very deserving recipient having dedicated his entire career to the study and conservation of butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera).

Dr. Covell came to Kentucky in 1964 to accept a faculty position of entomologist at the University of Louisville. He immediately began to inventory the state's butterfly and moth fauna. At the time, the university's insect collection contained approximately 28,000 total specimens. During his tenure, he built the collection through inventory and other efforts, and a recent count of the collection revealed approximately 250,000 specimens, with Lepidoptera comprising about fifty percent.

His love and enthusiasm for butterflies and moths were contagious, and in 1974 he, and a small group of insect lovers in the state, formed The Society of Kentucky Lepidopterists. Dr. Covell hosted annual meetings, served as advisor to the group and organized and led survey efforts across the state. In 1975, he began an annual count of butterflies at the Horner Wildlife Sanctuary in Oldham County to monitor trends in butterfly populations. In 1984, years of work culminated with one of his crowning achievements: the publication of a Peterson Field Guide entitled *Eastern Moths*. This book is still the standard used by everyone interested in moths, both amateurs and professionals. In 1999, after 35 years of inventory in Kentucky, he published the sixth contribution to KSNPC's scientific and technical series entitled *The Butterflies and Moths (Lepidoptera) of Kentucky: An Annotated Checklist*, which documented nearly 2,400 species from the state. These two publications are only two of over 75 scientific articles authored or co-authored by Dr. Covell.

Through the years, Dr. Covell has been very active in professional organizations and societies, and has received many awards and honors, too numerous to list in this article. He has served as President of The Lepidopterists' Society and The Kentucky Academy of Science, and served on the Executive Council of the former. In 2001, he was named The Kentucky Academy of



Commissioner Gayle Horn presents Dr. Covell the award.

Science Distinguished College/University Scientist. However, Dr. Covell's work reaches well beyond academia and scientific journals. His passion for insects has driven tireless public outreach efforts, and has encouraged many young children and adults to become interested in butterflies and moths. His role as advisor to graduate students resulted in a network of professionals in the field today. He played a lead role in efforts to create a Kentucky Natural History Museum. In 2002, he provided butterfly specimens for the Commission's booth at the state fair, and gave up a Saturday afternoon to talk with fairgoers about butterflies and moths. This event coincided with the unveiling of the new nature license plate depicting a Viceroy butterfly. It has been the most popular nature plate yet, exceeding expectations.

At the end of June, 2004, Dr. Covell retired from the faculty of the Biology Department at the University of Louisville after 40 years of service to the university, its students and the community. Retirement was not prompted by a desire to rest on his considerable laurels, but by an opportunity to become the curator of macromoths at the new McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity in Gainesville, Florida. During his distinguished career, Dr. Covell became internationally known as a butterfly and moth expert. His contributions to our knowledge of Kentucky butterflies and moths are immense, and he has been the driving force behind many engaged in the study and preservation of Kentucky's native Lepidoptera. On behalf of KSNPC's commissioners and staff, we wish Charlie the very best with his new position in Florida, but we will always know him as "Mr. Kentucky Lepidopterist."

Sonja Fields Receives 2004 Volunteer Steward Award

by Joyce Bender, Stewardship Branch Manager

Greenup County resident Sonja Fields has been volunteering for the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission at Jesse Stuart State Nature Preserve (SNP) in Greenup County since 1994. Sonja called asking if she could donate paint and supplies and her time to help fix up Op's Cabin. This small ridge top cottage is said to be where Jesse Stuart would go for inspiration to do his writing. The building was in bad shape from weather and vandals and needed a facelift. While working with her on this first project, staff were impressed with her generosity and good cheer. She was asked to become a preserve monitor after this initial meeting.

During her tenure as preserve monitor at Jesse Stuart, she has done it all: trail inspection and maintenance, signs and building maintenance, litter clean up, boundary patrol and providing information to preserve visitors. Preserve monitors are the right arms of the commission's stewardship staff and Sonja is one of our best. She has always been there to let us know about storm damage blocking trails, illegal use of all-terrain vehicles, vandalism and dumping. We usually hear about dumping on the preserve after she has cleaned it up.

Sonja has saved staff many hours of work and driving time by assessing situations and advising on the immediacy of need. The preserve is three hours from Frankfort and her proximity enables us to evaluate the true level of urgency when a neighbor calls with an "emergency." One example of how Sonja helped with this type of situation occurred when we received a frantic call from a neighbor that a large oak tree on the preserve was leaning over a propane tank on her property. It was impossible for our staff to determine if the tree would fall on the propane tank in a few minutes or a few months. We



Sonja Fields

called Sonja to see if she might be available to assess the situation for us. She had just had her foot broken by a horse the day before and it had not yet been set by a doctor. Sonja disregarded her throbbing foot and went to the site to evaluate it for us.

Sonja is an exceptional individual; her selflessness and generosity shows in all aspects of her life. When asked what she hoped to gain from her volunteer experience, she said "The good feeling of knowing that I'm helping preserve something beautiful for future generations to enjoy." The world needs more people who are willing to help out just for the good feelings that are engendered in doing something positive for the future.

The Commission was privileged at its December meeting to present Sonja Fields with the 2004 Volunteer Steward Award. The award is a framed reprint of a James Archambeault photo of Bad Branch Falls.

Yet another rare plant discovered at Crooked Creek State Nature Preserve!

By Martina Hines and Marc Evans

Commission ecologists this fall found *Prenanthes racemosa* during surveys of the preserve in Lewis County. Unlike many other rare plants, this one is neither small, nor beautiful. It is a tall, and rather ugly plant that can reach a height of 6 feet. This giant perennial, while not the showiest of all plants, does have rather delicate and pretty lavender colored flowers. The species is known under several common names such as glaucous snake-root, rattlesnake root, smooth white lettuce, racemose rattlesnake root, and purple rattlesnake root, most suggesting its possible use as a treatment for snake bites. However, we have not been able to find any supporting evidence for this claim.

Before it was found at Crooked Creek, the species had been reported only once from Pendleton County where it was collected in 1931 by E.E. Barton. When we discovered it in Lewis County in September, the plants were in full bloom and hard to overlook, but the population was very small. Only eight plants were found growing along a small drain in an otherwise dry limestone glade. Its typical habitat is described as wet prairie and stream borders. While the species is rare in Kentucky and a few other states, it is considered common in some areas, particularly in the northern United States and Canada.

Kentucky is at the southern edge of the species' reported range, which stretches from British Columbia to New Brunswick in Canada, south into New England, and through the Midwest and west to Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. There are eight species of *Prenanthes* known to occur in Kentucky, four of which are considered rare in the State.

Crooked Creek State Nature Preserve is a unique and interesting place. At least 10 other rare plants and two rare animals are currently known from the Preserve. In addition, the Preserve protects rare limestone/shale glades and barrens. Because of the high concentration of rare species and communities we wouldn't be surprised if further surveys yield additional rarities!



National Farmland Preservation Leaders Convene in the Commonwealth

by Ron Scott, Land Protection Specialist

Lexington played host in November to the 2004 meeting of the American Farmland Trust – a national nonprofit umbrella organization for farmland preservation groups across the country. The three-day conference, *Farming on the Edge – Meeting the Challenge*, brought farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, land preservation advocates, and natural resources conservation leaders from across the country together to network and discuss ways to promote a secure and sustainable future for agriculture and agricultural landscapes in America. AFT was founded in 1980 to protect the nation's farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses. They work to achieve this goal in three ways: (1) working with farmers and ranchers to save the best land; (2) helping communities and states plan their growth with agriculture in mind; and (3) advancing farm practices that keep the land healthy.

Although the focus of the conference was on preserving farmland, as opposed to the Commission's focus on ecologically significant natural areas, oftentimes the two objectives overlap. In addition, many of the same tools and techniques used to preserve farmland, such as conservation easements, are used by the Commission to permanently protect natural areas. Accordingly, I made time to attend one day of the conference to hear presentations by nationally renowned experts from the fields of agricultural policy, forestry, sustainable development and land preservation. In addition a banquet was held at Keeneland to honor those Kentucky landowners who had sold or donated conservation easements to various private land trusts, local government, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Program, and in the case of five of those landowners – the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission.

In addition to choosing the Commonwealth as the site of its 2004 annual conference, AFT has made a number of other valuable contributions to helping promote and protect the state's working lands. For example, the organization has recently published the [Kentucky Landowner's Guide to Conservation and Profitability](#). The publication "provides an overview of the alternatives available to landowners who want to pursue conservation options, financial incentives and technical assistance to protect their land and improve its productivity." For more information on American Farmland Trust, visit the website at www.farmland.org.

New Lands Added to the State Nature Preserve System

by David Skinner, Lane Linnenkohl, and Kyle Napier

Four new areas and an addition to an existing site were dedicated into the State Nature Preserve system at the commission's meeting on Dec. 8 .

The Stone Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and State Natural Area in Harlan County consists of 1,025 acres of rugged land. It ranges in elevation from 1,600 feet along the base of the mountain to nearly 3,000 feet along the crest. Several state endangered plants have been found at this site. Most notable are the Fraser's sedge (*Cymophyllus fraseri*), crinkled hair grass (*Deschampsia flexosa*) and Southern bog club-moss (*Lycopodiella adpressa*). This property was purchased by Harlan County in 2000 with funds from the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund. The County recently transferred ownership to the Commission and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR). This is our first cooperative project with KDFWR to protect and manage property.

Two new sites have been protected in Livingston County. Officially they will be known as Livingston County WMA and State Natural Area - Newman's Bluff and Livingston County WMA and State Natural Area - Bissell Bluff. The Livingston County Fiscal Court received a Heritage Land Conservation Fund grant to acquire these 700 acres of land. KDFWR and

Livingston County Fiscal Court are also management partners at these sites. The Newman's Bluff tract protects a population of Price's potato-bean (*Apios priceana*), which is on the federal list of endangered species. The Bissell Bluff tract protects a mature forest and a bottomland forest along the Cumberland River.

The Short's Goldenrod State Nature Preserve was created in Fleming and Robertson counties. The site is 129 acres and it protects several occurrences of Short's goldenrod (*Solidago shortii*). This is one of the rarest plants on Earth. It only occurs around the Blue Licks vicinity in Kentucky and in one small area in southern Indiana. A part of Blue Licks State Park has been a nature preserve since 1981. The Commission is glad to now have two preserves to protect this imperiled species.

In Lewis County 48 acres were added to Crooked Creek Barrens State Nature Preserve. This tract connects two formerly disjunct tracts and protects additional populations of slender blazing star (*Liatris cylindracea*) and grassland and glade habitats. This acquisition brings the preserve to 399 acres.

Natural areas continue to be adversely affected and destroyed by development and intense land use. Land protection efforts by the Commission and other conservation agencies and organizations are critical to ensuring that our state's natural heritage will remain a part of our future landscape.

Land Protection Report

by Ron Scott, Land Protection Specialist

I returned to the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission in October following a seven-month hiatus working for The Council of State Governments (CSG) in Lexington. Although I enjoyed my brief tenure at CSG as an environmental policy analyst, I really missed land protection work, especially working with the dedicated staff at the Commission and conservation-minded landowners throughout the Commonwealth. That having been said, I will now turn to what is happening here at the Commission regarding our land protection efforts.

First, thanks to the hard work of a number of Commission staff, we dedicated five additions to the State Nature Preserves System at the Dec. 8, 2004 Commission meeting in Frankfort. These newly dedicated properties included a valuable addition at Crooked Creek Barrens SNP linking two previously unconnected portions of the preserve in Lewis County, along with Short's Goldenrod SNP – a new preserve in Fleming and Robertson counties.

The three other properties dedicated – Stone Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and State Natural Area (SNA) in Harlan County, Livingston County WMA/SNA – Newman's Bluff and Livingston County WMA/SNA - Bissell Bluff – marked a milestone for the Commission. Each property will be co-managed with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. In the case of Stone Mountain WMA/SNA, the property is jointly owned by both agencies. The Livingston County WMA/SNA's are owned by Livingston County, and will be jointly managed by both agencies in cooperation with the county Fiscal Court. All have received the full legal protections afforded dedicated State Nature Preserves, although since regulated hunting and fishing are allowed, they are referred to as State Natural Areas to avoid any confusion with a dedicated State Nature Preserve where those activities are generally prohibited. Dave Skinner's article in this issue contains additional information about each of these special places.

We are continuing our land protection work on a number of fronts, including acquisition of several additions to Blanton Forest SNP in Harlan County, preservation of unique high-quality wetlands in Woodford and Hickman counties, and adding approximately 200 acres to the Bad Branch SNP in Letcher County. We have also recently received a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to assist in our efforts to protect habitat for Braun's rockcress (*Arabis perstellata*) – a federally endangered plant – here in Franklin County. In coming issues of the newsletter, we will update you on these and other efforts to protect some of Kentucky's most important natural areas.

Director's Notes

by Don Dott, Executive Director

2005 looks to be a good year! We have regained three staff positions at the Commission that had been vacant for about a year due to recent budget cuts and hiring freezes. Three positions may not sound like a lot, but when the total agency staff is 22, it makes quite a difference. We will be restoring a stewardship position, an ecologist position and an administrative position. In the past several months we have also been able to hire two interim (seasonal) positions for the stewardship branch, which has been a great help.

We dedicated four new preserves at the December Commission meeting and a small addition at Crooked Creek SNP that strategically connects two large disjunct tracts. We are very excited to have entered into a new partnership with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, which will help with the task of managing these new preserves. Three of the new preserves will be under joint management with KDFWR. Two of these are in Livingston County and involve a third partner – Livingston County itself, which received a Heritage Land Conservation Fund grant to acquire over 700 acres of natural areas. If you are familiar with the area, the sites are Bissell Bluff and Newman's Bluff and will soon be open to the public.

We were very impressed with the two wonderful recipients of our annual awards. Dr. Charles Covell received the KSNPC Biological Diversity Protection Award for his life's work with butterflies and moths. The Volunteer Steward Award was much more than "earned" by Sonja Fields for her many years of work at Jesse Stuart SNP. Such individuals provide us inspiration. It's been quite a busy year with many accomplishments and new finds in the field. With the additional staff I am looking forward to even more in 2005.

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Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

Quarterly Public Meeting

March 2, 2005

The meeting will be held at KSNPC's Office in Frankfort

801 Schenkel Lane

Time to be determined

How to contact the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission:

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