

The Zoo – Dave DeCalesta – 6/2014

The intent of the *Critter Corner* during its 10+ year span has been to bring the wildlife and wildlife habitat of the Keuka Lake watershed into the reader's living room, as it were. But as educators are wont to say, learning that involves hearing, seeing, and doing is much more effective than simply reading about something. Which basically has been the operating mode of *Critter Corner*. I write, you read. So, to get visual, audible, and tangible learning experiences with wildlife and habitat typical of Keuka Lake, it's time to take a trip to the zoo. The one next door, which is open 365/24/7.

The Outlet Trail - is a great place to start. It's about a 12 mile graveled trail along the Keuka Lake outlet. Located in a deep gully, it has retained much of the original tree, shrub and wildflower species. Take binoculars, and if you walk it before 11am, walk slowly and listen to the tremendous variety of birds that will be singing April-July. You'll pass by a number of linear and shallow ponds on the side of the trail opposite the stream and you'll see painted and spotted turtles sunning on logs on the water's surface. Get there in April-May and you'll hear and see toads and frogs singing to attract mates. The variety of wildflowers in spring is stunning.

Eggleston Gully - And other broad streams emptying into Keuka Lake are great places to walk up slowly, turning over flat stones to find a great variety of salamanders. You don't need to walk far. If there's 6-12 inches of water in the stream, by lifting up large flat rocks in the stream bottom you may find hellbenders and mud puppies - large, flat salamanders exceeding 8 inches in length. Plenty of birds here too in the hemlocks lining the streams.

Sapsucker Woods - Venture a bit farther out, to Ithaca, and visit Sapsucker Woods, an ornithological learning center dedicated to educating folks about birds. It has self-guided tours through a variety of habitats, as well as a great learning museum. For information, go to the Sapsucker Woods website: <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid==1576>

Montezuma Swamp - Farther to the north, just south of, and paralleling the Thru-way is a large swamp with a variety of waterfowl and other water loving birds, including ospreys and bald eagles which nest there. It's a US Fish and Wildlife Refuge, with self-guided tours, among other attractions. The website is: <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/montezuma/>. Early spring and late fall are a great times to visit to see all the migrating waterfowl, which use the swamp as a stop-over on their way to and from breeding grounds in Canada.

Finger Lakes Museum - Is a work in progress. Located at the State Park near Branchport on the west arm of Keuka Lake, it should offer a good look at wildlife, including fish, representative of Keuka and other Finger Lakes when completed. To find out what's available now, click on the website: <http://fingerlakesmuseum.org/>

Become a Master Naturalist - Cornell University offers a Master Naturalist program wherein enrollees learn about natural resources, including wildlife and wildlife habitat, to the point where they offer tours and other learning experiences. To learn about the program, click on: <http://dnr.cornell.edu/cerp/naturalist/>

Wherever you do go in search of wildlife, make sure you take along a pair of binoculars and the Peterson Guide series on birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles which are available at local bookstores, including Longs.

