

# Central Ohio Grotto Squeaks

## April 2023



## THE CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO (COG)

The Central Ohio Grotto (COG) of the National Speleological Society meets at 7:00 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of most months at the Presbyterian Church on the Square in Worthington, Ohio. Please contact a grotto officer to confirm meeting time and place or better subscribe to the COG list server at cog @ ontosystems.com by sending an email to cog @ ontosystems.com with the subject "subscribe." The meeting site will be announced there and on the Grotto Facebook page.

**Check out our Facebook group:**

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/centralohiogrotto/>

**Check out our website:**

<http://www.centralohiogrotto.com/>

**Grotto Mailing Address:**

C/O Pat Gibson, 4211 Caswell Rd  
Johnstown, OH 43031 614-496-5345  
Email: kd8ion@gmail.com

**Grotto Membership Dues:**

\$15 per individual or \$20 per family.

**The C.O.G. Squeaks**

The C.O.G. Squeaks is emailed to dues paying members and to grottoes with which the COG exchanges newsletters. Please send trip reports, caving articles, cave fiction, cave poetry, and cave photos to Mark Swelstad for publication: mswelstad@gmail.com

NSS organizations have permission to reprint material from the C.O.G. Squeaks so long as the author and Squeaks are given credit, unless otherwise stated.

**COG Executive Committee:**  
Email: exec@centralohiogrotto.com

**Chair:**

Aaron Deal  
chair@centralohiogrotto.com

**Vice Chair:**

Wendy Orlandi  
vice-chair@centralohiogrotto.com

**Treasurer:**

Suzanne Gagnon  
treasurer@centralohiogrotto.com

**Secretary:**

Bethany Widmayer  
secretary@centralohiogrotto.com

**Former Chair:**

Kim Deal  
Kim.Deal@gmail.com

**Member-At-Large:**

Andy Schofield  
scho73@gmail.com

**Member-At-Large:**

Jennifer Hawkey  
jcgalletta@gmail.com



## Upcoming COG Events:

See the Facebook events page for more information about these events or email a board member.

Note: All COG Monthly meetings (except December) are at the Worthington Presbyterian Church.

April 25	COG Monthly Meeting
May 20-21	Open House – GSP
May 23	COG Monthly Meeting
June 9-11	Grayson Gunner trip
June 26-30	<a href="#">NSS Convention</a>
July 14-16	<a href="#">Karst-O-Rama</a> – GSP
August 4-6	<a href="#">Cave Capers</a> – Indiana

### CENTRAL OHIO GROTTO 5-YEAR MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

## 75 MEMBERS ON OUR 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY IN 2027

#### Why

More members mean a larger pool of volunteers, leaders, and trip planners. Younger members mean that we can continue our grotto into the future.

#### How can you help?


If every current member brings in just 1 new member over the next 5 years, we will be close to meeting our goal.

Recommendations from active members is the best way to build a solid group of cavers. But showing up to a meeting or two isn't enough! We are looking for people committed to maintaining ACTIVE membership within the grotto.

#### Additional recruitment ideas (we NEED volunteers to make these happen!)

- Lead **trips** intentionally geared toward recruitment
- **Sponsor local events** or participate as vendors in events that get exposure
- Put together a **guest information packet**
- Teach **classes** at REI
- Hold **joint meetings** with related groups in the community
- Work with students who need **volunteer opportunities**
- Ask me about caving **stickers**

## COG Shopping List



COG is in the process of adding wetsuits to our equipment library. We are planning a wet trip in the Spring and would like everyone to prepare for it ahead of time.

#### Buying Tips:

- Buy second hand. They can be found for as little as 5 bucks.
- Buy big. You will need room to flex your cave moves.
- Buy thick, 3-5 mm will be warmer if you tend to run cold.
- Buy ANYTHING. Farmer John's, shorties, it's all good!
- Buy extra. I'd like to build a library, so donate an extra if you find a good deal!

#### From the Chair – Aaron Deal

I'm looking forward to learning from our newly appointed chairs as the executive committee completed appointments for all the open positions during our exec committee meeting this month. Additionally, I would like to thank all of those that joined the meeting and helped discuss the various positions and nominations. Below is a summary of all non-elected positions in the grotto:

- GSP Representative - Dan Zubal and Dana Sutherland
- Membership Chair - Suz Gagnon and Wendy Orlandi
- Vertical Chair - Andy Schofield
- Conservation Chair - Mark Swelstad
- Survey and Cartography Chair - Gary Bush
- Youth Group Liaison - Wendy Orlandi
- Equipment Manager - Wendy Orlandi
- Librarian - Jamie Thompson
- Newsletter Editor - Mark Swelstad
- Webmaster - Aaron Deal

- Trip Committee Chair - Jennie Hawkey (Mark Swelstad, Gary Bush, Wendy Orlandi, and Andy Schofield are also on the committee)

The exec committee has decided to meet monthly on the Thursday before each grotto meeting at 7pm. These meetings are held virtually on GoToMeeting and open to all active members. Meeting details are posted on Facebook and emailed to [cog@ontosystems.com](mailto:cog@ontosystems.com) about a week beforehand.

Do you like cabin getaways? Hoodies? Gift cards? Well you can win all three of these by simply volunteering. Each time you volunteer (Scout trips, work weekends, open house, etc) throughout the year you'll be entered to win a cabin getaway, GSP hoodie, and a \$20 On-Rope-1 gift card. The winner will be drawn at our annual Christmas party!



### Stuck on the Point - Ryan Braga

#### Preface:

Hi, my name is Ryan Braga and I am a soon to be new member to the Central Ohio Grotto. I have caved before at Carter and GSP. Pine Hill was my first ever cave so GSP will always hold a special place in my heart. On this note, I decided I wanted to join a new grotto, so I messaged Wendy on joining COG. She told me step one was to attend a trip and she mentioned a scout's trip that she's leading in two days so I said sign me up. Two days later I hopped in the Subaru with Wendy and

Bethany on the way down to GSP ready to cave.

#### Day 1:

We arrive to GSP late at night around 11pm with high hopes of caving the following morning with the scouts. Our trip down from Columbus consisted of moderate rain, skyline and crazy drivers. As we enter the gate, we are greeted by Josh exchanging pleasantries. The rain has come to a stop maybe 30 minutes prior however we ask Josh, will we be good to take the lower mondo? After asking this question, we are assured that it will be ideal as there is no monsoon coming. Little did we know. After this brief interaction, we are on our way to the beloved point; also known as party central. While the Subaru's headlights are all that light up the bridge that will get us to the point, we still push onwards across the dry bridge so we may finally rest easy. Once across, we rejoice that we will not have to set up tents on the wet grass in the dead of night and make way towards the mondo. Once entering the mondo we get ready to bed in haste as we had a long trip down and want to unwind. After laying in bed on my Big Agnes Air pad pondering what the coming day will have in store for us, I fall asleep.

#### Day 2:

I am suddenly awoken by a large BOOM. Once opening my eyes, I hear the heavy rain that is coming down on us and then see the room light up. Thinking someone turned on a light, I quickly realized this was lightning and that a storm is brewing. Dozing off again thinking nothing of this, I later wake up around 2 am to pee. While laying in my REI down quilt, I ponder on whether I should hold it or face the elements of heavy rain and sky illuminating lightning. I decide on the latter and head out. Once stepping outside and leaving the covered porch, I am greeted by the rain that could only be described as the rain from The Notebook. Once I finish business, I quickly retreat into the mondo and get wrapped back up in my down quilt and struggle to fall asleep with the loud sound of

rain being down on the roof. After laying in bed, I replay my day failing to come to the realization that this monsoon of rain may very well ruin our well anticipated day of caving. After a night filled with falling in and out of sleep many times throughout the night due to the thunder, we all awake around 7:30 am prepared to tackle the day. I head out first to assess the damage and see if our only passage off the point is still viable. Hastily scurrying towards the bridge between freedom and our imprisonment on the island, I quickly discover that the bridge is completely submerged below raging water. Feeling just like Chris McCandless when attempting to leave the Alaskan wilderness, worry rushes over me. Just past the bridge where the drop off occurs, there is a newly formed raging current that 8 hours before was not present. With this information in mind, we start to consider crossing the fast-moving water in hopes of saving a potentially lost day of caving.



*Photo by Bethany Widmayer*

As we assess the level of the water that runs across the bridge, we set place markers to

measure the height of the water as time goes on in the form of branches and rocks.

Starting with Wendy's brand around 8am, we retreat and plan about how to go forward and meet the scouts at 10am for a day filled with caving. Once coming back no more than 30 minutes later, we realize that the stick is submerged in water and that the water continues to rise.

This brings up the idea to place a new marker, Jennie's rock. Once placed we consider putting a note in a Nalgene and floating it along the stream like pirates trapped on an island however we dispel this idea due to wanting to keep as much filtered water as we can. As we're sitting along the bank planning our next move, we see a pack of dogs approaching along the freedom side of the bridge wagging tails over joyous to see us. As the dogs sit on the other side of the bridge, they ponder how to get over to us.



*Photo by Ryan Braga*

As smiles begin to form on our faces as we notice the dogs, one decides to wade the waters across the bridge to join us on the

isolated point. As the dog begins with confidence across the flooded bridge, the dog swiftly gets knocked down and falls into the rapids. As our smiles quickly turn to shock as the dog struggles to stay afloat, they manage to float down the stream and out of the rapids to find calmer waters where they can climb out. After this near disaster, we re-evaluated our options and decided that we are not equipped to cross like we previously hoped. Within the hour, Josh approaches from the other side of the bridge and waves to us. After we discuss with Josh the dilemma that we have found ourselves in, we say goodbye to Josh as he prepares to lead the scouts for the trip since we do not have the means to make it across. After we realized our situation on how we are stuck on the point, we pulled out our camp chairs along with a lawn chair and grabbed some warm IPAs and set up near the bank watching the water recede. This process we would later find takes longer than paint to dry. After sitting for a few hours playing with knots, we decided to go for a quick hike past the party area to pass some time. After this short hike, we rarely left our stream front chairs. To pass the time, we decided to write articles and play tetris. As we sit in our chairs typing away and placing blocks strategically, we get antsy to prepare food that will eventually go bad, so Wendy decides to brave the strong current and push across the bridge with her chili ingredients around 5pm. As we see here safely make it across, we decide to push on and reach freedom and gain refuge in the kitchen. After letting the chili be prepped, we head out last minute to rendezvous with Josh and the scouts at Sinks. Once arriving to Sinks, we see Josh and scouts walking back to cars so we chat and determine Sinks is too wet after our prior rainfall so we decide to head to Across the Road to cave. After caving with these scouts and hearing funny stories from 10-year-olds, we head back to GSP and hang out under the pavilion where I later find that I got sunburnt from sitting out all day on the point. After chatting for a while, we crossed back through the water rushing over the bridge to the mondo. Once in the mondo and in my down quilt I attempt the highly regarded change

inside the sleeping bag technique and after thrashing around trying to change, I succeed. With this, I am ready to get a good night's rest after a day full of sitting around on the point but more importantly, caving.

### Day 3:

Waking up ready to conquer the day and do some caving without scouts, we pack all our things and clean out the mondo. Once we load up the cars, we bravely cross the bridge and leave nothing behind on the point besides memories of being confined. Once hanging out in the kitchen with coffee being made along with Jennie's famous cinnamon buns, we head out for a day in sinks which would include Josh, Jennie, Wendy, Bethany and myself. While having a fun time doing a trip through from the dry crawl entrance to the railroad entrance, we saw a lot of interesting stuff from teenagers with no helmets and shorts to blue diamond shaped pills that some men use...



Photo by Josh Heinbuch

While Wendy scored by finding these pills, there were also other treasures found like Jennie's new knife and Josh's bottle rocket. After finishing Sinks, we were ready for our trip back to Columbus, so we said bye to Josh and hit the road. While we considered stopping at Buc-ee's, we decided not to once we saw the long line on the exit ramp, so we rather stopped at Wendys. After scarfing down a 4 for \$4 meal, I jump back to writing this novel as we travel back to Columbus. Once arriving back to Columbus, we part ways for now until we can get underground together again.

-Ryan Braga  
NSS #72393

### **Kisamore pit, 4/8/23 – Jason Glancy**

Four participants Jason Glancy, Zach Glancy, Mike Shank, and Ryan Braga entered with a goal of gaining access to a hole in the top of the new 47' dome that was bolt climbed by Andy Schofield, and Zach Williams last GVKs Saturday. Zach and Mike proceeded to the fixed rope where they built a traverse across the top of dome to the small hole near the Ceiling proceeded to enlarge the hole more work needed next trip. Now that the traverse is in place access should be easier. As they worked in midair Ryan and myself pushed a body sized tube high lead that revealed nothing. As we climbed up the rope Ryan was spooked by a calf's nose in the hole in the gate, glad we shut it. We never enjoy the mud filled ascenders on a muddy rope not feeding right. All had a great time!

~Jason Glancy



### **Learn to Lead 1 and 2**

~Wendy Orlandi

Did you know that GSP's Wild Caving Outreach has contributed nearly half of the annual income for GSP? Camping fees are collected from scouts and other groups and in turn the program supplies the troop with free local cave tours. As one of the four managing grottos of GSP it is responsible of COG to provide the program coordinator, currently Josh Heinbuch, with quality guides from Central Ohio.

Lately, we've done two Learn to Lead trips with and without scouts so adult leaders can focus on not just learning a route through a cave but also how to present various obstacles and challenges for the youth to overcome, making their trip unforgettable.

On March 18th, Tera Williamson, Kim Deal and Dale Andreatta lead a scout troop through Sinks of the Roundstone while Aaron Deal accompanied Josh Heinbuch to Pine Hill on a separate scout trip. The next day the five of us returned to the same cave but without children to practice our routes.

The water flowing into the cave from Roundstone Creek mostly flowed into the primary water route. We were able to walk onto a little sand bar and get a very close look at the entrance. Some water flowed past the entrance but will slowly flow backward into the flow tube. It can be disorienting for those not familiar with how the water drains in this cave, as the water can often move in the opposite direction as first observed in the same passage.

Dale enjoyed the majesty of the gigantic main passage and Tera could often be found in front of the group using her caver sense to anticipate the through route. Kim remarked that it was an ideal cave for scouts because of its various features and lack of exposure. The canyon passage near the end of the trip was flooded so we went through the belly crawl aptly named the Pancake to leave through the railroad entrance. Eventually

Aaron Deal filled a garbage bag with trash and hauled it through the tight space and out of the cave.



*As a guide, I have a couple spots that are favorable for picture taking. I send these to the troop leaders after the trip so the kids have souvenirs without risking ruining their own cell phones. Dale, Kim, and Tera are looking fabulous! Photos by Wendy Orlandi*

The following weekend Jennie Hawkey, Bethany Widmayer and prospective COG member, Ryan Braga, joined me to lead another scout trip and route practice. Friends of COG, Rebecca Mead and A'dra Peterson tailgunned for the early Climax trip. Unfortunately, the rest of us got stranded on the point due to flooding and missed leading the other group, but were able to join an afternoon trip lead by Josh Heinbuch to Across the Road Cave. This was a treat for all of us because Across the Road isn't usually on the scout rotation as it's a bat hibernaculum during the winter months. It's also a pleasure to watch Josh lead a trip as some of his best leadership strengths lie in humor and encouragement.





*Jennie Hawkey outside of Across the Road with Scouts  
 .Courtesy of Wendy Orlandi*

The next day we went to Sinks of the Roundstone in spite of the recent rain and high water. Wet caves are my favorite but they can be dangerous. Guides must be aware of how water fills and drains the different parts of a cave in order to keep everyone safe. Sinks has some very interesting hydrology features and they are just as important to understand as the route itself.



*Here, we stop to observe the entrance to the primary water route which was completely sumped by the high water which flowed onward to the overflow flood route. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.*

[Map of Sinks of the Roundstone](#)

We practiced many of the challenges that we have scouts participate in such as the H climb, Girl Scout Dome and the Pancake. We

had a thoroughly enjoyable trip and were able to make it from entrance to entrance staying relatively dry.



*Bethany Widmayer, Jennie Hawkey and Ryan Braga pose after navigating the H climb. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.*

We all have different aptitudes for memory, map reading and spatial awareness, so some folks can learn a cave in just a couple visits, but others may need more time. While I will post more Learn to Lead events throughout the year, don't hesitate to learn from other experienced grotto members when you have the opportunity or sign up to be a tail gunner for an upcoming trip with Josh Heinbuch. Camping is free for volunteers. Trips can be found by going to [signup.com](http://signup.com), [GSP Wild Caving Outreach](http://GSP Wild Caving Outreach).

### Upcoming COG Events



Crockett Entrance Clean Up  
April 22 10am-2pm



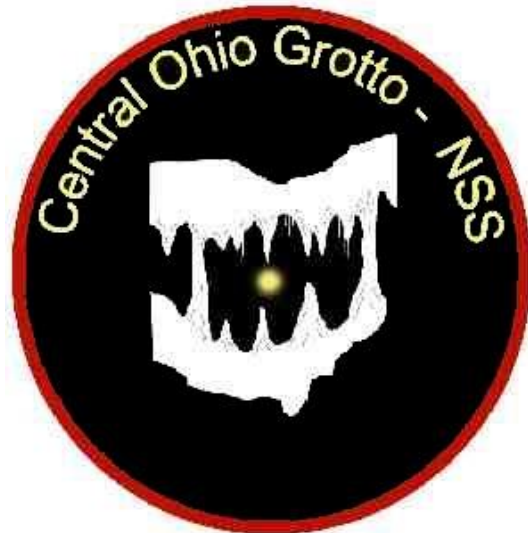
Presentation at the regular meeting, April 25 7pm. Harry Goepel and Janeen Sharpshair discuss Grayson Gunner Cave.



Everything but the Squeal – COG caving weekend with the Pittsburgh and Central Indiana Grottos. April 28-30. See Wendy Orlandi for details.



Presentation at the regular meeting, May 23 7pm. Dr. Hazel Barton, Microbiologist.



## Wildflowers of GSP Mayapples

Wendy Orlandi

Spring ephemerals are bursting forth everywhere right now. If we are friends on Facebook, you've seen many of my wildflower pics from hiking at Highbanks Metro Park in Columbus, OH, including the two following.



4.14.23 Highbanks Metro Park Delaware County, OH Even from a distance, a colony of Mayapples is easily identifiable. They spread quickly through underground rhizomes aided by a mutualistic relationship with a fungus, vesicular arbuscular mycorrhiza. While they are capable of sexual reproduction, it's not often successful. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.

Mayapples, *podophyllum peltatum*, owe their common name to the fact they are most often found to flower in the month of May, but can also flower as early as March in warmer climates. Their range is extensive and can be found as far north as Ontario and as far south as Texas. They have many nicknames such as Maypops, Mandrake and Ground Lemon. In Central Ohio, they usually begin emerging early in April. At first you see an olive drab nub rising up from the soil and then a single

straight stem with tightly wrapped leaves. At last, the leaves unfurl revealing foliage with one or two deeply cut umbrella-like leaves with 5-7 lobes.



4.14.23 Highbanks Metro Park Delaware County, OH The twin palmate leaves haven't completely opened yet, but you can see the bud nestled between them. The leaves will also turn a brighter green in the days to come. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.

It takes about 4-5 years to become a mature, fertile plant. Some plants have single lobed leaves, but only plants with two leaves will produce a single, nodding flower shielded in the axil between them. When the flower blooms, it will measure about 2 inches and have 6-9 waxy white petals and many stamens. It really is an unmistakable plant and even a novice wildflower hunter should easily be able to identify it by its unique leaves alone. The following pictures were taken a day later than the first two, but at Great Saltpetre Preserve, four hours south of Central Ohio. I find that bloom times in this part of Kentucky are usually about 2-3 weeks ahead of the Columbus area.



4.15.23 GSP Rockcastle County, KY While many of the Mayapples still had buds, I was fortunate to find a few early bloomers. Keep your eyes peeled at Open House, you should be able to still spy the flowers then. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.

Bumblebees and moths seem attracted to the pollen laden flowers and might be the primary pollinators. Although, some scientists believe stumbling upon the scentless flowers is purely accidental. In time, the flower will be replaced by a small, green fruit which will grow to about two inches and eventually turn into an edible yellow berry. About this time, the plant will senesce and reemerge the following spring.

**CAUTION! EVEN THOUGH THE BERRY IS EDIBLE, EVERY OTHER PART OF THE PLANT IS POISONOUS, POTENTIALLY FATAL, INCLUDING THE SEEDS INSIDE THE BERRY.**

The Mayapple, a member of the barberry family, is powerful medicine. Native Americans used different parts of the plant medicinally, but they also employed it to commit suicide and off their enemies, so take caution. Some of the traditional uses were an insecticide, an emetic, a cathartic, a laxative and a de-wormer among others. More modern uses include a topical application for treating genital warts, although the CDC recommends other, safer treatment as it has been responsible for accidental death in young children. Its most notable modern use is treating a host of different cancers. Two cancer fighting drugs, etoposide and teniposide are sourced from the mayapple. Etoposide treats testicular and small-cell lung cancer and teniposide is used for brain tumors and infancy leukemia.



4.15.23 GSP Rockcastle County, KY The leaves shield the solitary flower and fruit from above. Courtesy Wendy Orlandi.

Despite the danger of poisoning from every part of this plant except the berry, many woodland creatures have it on their seasonal menu. Mammalian herbivores like deer and rabbit avoid it, but it's popular with racoons, opossums and box turtles. The latter is most likely the primary seed disperser. It has also been sought after by people living in Appalachia for centuries; first, Native Americans, then settlers and many mountain folk living today. The "Hoosier Poet" James Whitcomb Riley had this to say about the mayapple in the classic 1890 Rhymes of Childhood.

*And will any poet sing  
Of a lush, richer thing  
Then a ripe May-apple, rolled  
Like a pulpy, lump of gold  
Under thumb and finger tips,  
And poured molten through the lips.*

My grandparents made homemade Mayapple jelly in the hills of Centre County, PA. My grandfather only cautioned not to eat too much of it or you'll end up with the "skitters!" If

you'd like to try them out, here's a great resource for foraging the ripe berries and preparing them for safe consumption. [Wild foods](#) Feel free to send me pictures or ideas for upcoming issues. 412 965 7870.

### Elliot Goes Caving – Aaron Deal

Kim, Elliott, and I joined Matt Mezydlo at the Hamilton Valley Cave Research Foundation facility near Mammoth Cave where Matt planned to take Zach and Hannah (OSU grad students) on their first wild cave trip in Roppel. I planned to join them for the Roppel trip, but before we went to Roppel we decided to take Elliott to Atwell Cave. Atwell is a short piece of trunk passage located on property, which was the perfect opportunity for Elliott.



*The Deals – courtesy the Deals*

After the hike to the cave, Elliott anxiously waited as everyone including him got their gear on to enter the cave. Kim had gotten him some knee and elbow pads and he was using his bike helmet with a duct taped on light to guide the way. Elliott started down the path but was quickly pulled back by Mom and Dad for a quick photoshoot with the eager

explorer. The cave entrance was down a small slope that was slick due to the rain the night before.



*Courtesy the Deals*

Elliott wasn't nervous at all and was quickly in the cave walking around exploring the various areas. Quickly Kim and I were trying to explain 3 points of contact at all times, which was hard to comprehend for the 3-year-old kid that loves to "hop". During his exploration if he encountered a spot he wasn't sure about he'd look and say "ah ha" then continue on. At one point he looked back at Kim and asked, "Can you move that rock?"



*Courtesy the Deals*

Elliott made me happy by trying out several adult squeezes that he pretty much walked through, but it was still awesome to see him give everything a try. Although he wasn't the biggest fan of getting his hands dirty, which made it difficult to navigate at times.

He even got to see a bat that was hanging on the wall near the entrance! Also near the entrance was a small, very square side passage that had been dug out in hopes of connecting to more cave. I started towards the passage to take a look and quickly realized there were a ton of crickets in the passage (floor, walls, and ceiling!). Started to back out, but Elliott was coming so I kept down the passage to see if Elliott would join. Sure enough he came in (after a short discussion I think) all the way to the end with me, which kind of surprised me due to crickets jumping everywhere.



*Courtesy the Deals*

The trip was fairly short, but was a good opportunity to see how Elliott would react. I definitely think he'll be in a cave again and probably could go for a while longer next time.

### **Roppel, Wild and Wet – Aaron Deal**

After the morning trip to Atwell, Matt, Zach, Hannah, and I finished packing for the longer trip into Roppel piling into Matt's car. Heading towards Roppel we encountered a downed tree that was there the night before, so we had to turn around and take the longer way to the Daleo entrance preserve. Reaching the parking lot we were greeted by some "new" porta potty that looked like they'd been pulled out of a dumpster. The custom wrench door handle was a nice touch, and overall they were actually pretty clean.

Walking to the entrance, you could hear the water flowing into the cave, which I think was a first for me. Heading into the cave we stopped at the registry room to sign in and check out the recent trips. Continuing on we climbed down to Kangaroo Trail "hopping" over the canyon below as we followed the trail. We stayed high to end up above Pirate's Pot with the waterfall roaring today. The next destination was Easy Way Room, which wasn't much farther and a good spot to stop for a drink and snack.

From Easy Way Room we headed toward Halloween Junction that has many passageways leading off in different directions. We explored a couple areas around the Halloween Junction before heading back to Easy Way Room. Back in Easy Way Room we gave Zach and Hannah the classic test of "Do you remember this room?" and "Where did we come from initially?". They did a decent job of remembering, but we continued on in the opposite direction to complete our loop.

The loop completed once we reached the bottom of Pirates Pot to see the water we'd heard earlier in the day. We did a lights out, which was quite relaxing with the ~20ft waterfall rushing next to you. Zach was convinced he could still see his hand. From here we repeated our steps back to the junction with the shark tooth in the ceiling. There were two options to get back to the registry room with one being Kangaroo Trail back to the climb up or a short gun barrel passage to sand dome with a climb up to an army crawl. I showed Zach the gun barrel passage, which he was a little unsure of due to the size. However Hannah popped up in the passage, and decided to give it a go. Therefore Hannah and I took the sand dome route while Zach and Matt took Kangaroo Trail.

Once everyone made it back to the registry room, we headed out of the cave for about a 6hr trip. Hopefully we hooked Zach and Hannah and will see them again!

## Birds of GSP – Wood Warblers

~ Mark Swelstad

Wood warblers are considered by many birdwatchers to be the gems of the avian realm. Most are very small, less than 5 or 6 inches, and most are very colorful. During the spring migration, birders travel from all over the world to the eastern United States to see these colorful migrants, as they flit around their various habitats in search of a meal. Fortunately for us, GSP has many warblers that regularly pass-through during migration, and a handful even nest here! I'd like to highlight 3 warblers that are all residents of GSP that I have personally seen there and if you are so inclined you can look for them as well. Note that most birds are very active while seeking out nesting territory, and of course during migration, once they start mating and producing a brood, they tend to settle down, so the best time to see them is in late April through May. All 3 species will begin their long journey back south sometime in late August, continuing through the fall. The spring migration takes place in about 3-4 weeks; the fall migration takes place over a few months.

**Louisiana Waterthrush** – not one of the colorful birds but still a pretty cool bird to look at, the Louisiana Waterthrush tends to prefer small streams, and is often seen working its way along the banks of Crooked Creek in search of insects and occasionally small fish or amphibians. Many times I have seen them while sitting on the bridge. They are somewhat skittish so they may not hang out for long if there is a lot of movement nearby. Another good spot to look for these would be back around the whirl hole.



Source: <https://ebird.org/species/louwat>

Note the spotted breast, colorful legs (they look pink but if they get muddy they won't), and pronounced eye stripe. Their song is a lazy, downward trill. Click on the link below the image if you want to hear the song.

**Kentucky Warbler** – Of course I have to include this one, although I don't see it a lot at GSP; not because they aren't there but because they're hard to see. They are shy and tend to prefer forest rather than our open campground environment. This would be one you would hear or see doing some ridgewalking.



Source: <https://ebird.org/species/kenwar>

I would imagine you would find them back around the homestead or up along the Sara Corrie trail. They tend to forage for insects and larvae along the ground. This is definitely one bird you would have a hard time seeing once they nest so your window of opportunity

is pretty narrow! Females and juveniles have less pronounced black in the head and face. The song is a cheerful 'I'm pretty, pretty, pretty' and is likely how you'll find this bird.

**Yellow-throated Warbler** – this one is all over GSP, particularly along Crooked Creek. Formerly known as the Sycamore Warbler (many birders still call it that), it is one of our earliest warblers to return in the spring and is easily found along the creek in those big sycamore trees all up and down the valley. It's easy to see why they called it what they did; its bright yellow throat are hard to miss. The song is a downward trill that sometimes ends in a short jumble of notes. I have been sitting on the bridge to the point and watched these birds move from tree to tree over the creek.



Source: <https://ebird.org/species/yetwar>

There are many other warblers that visit GSP; these are just a few. Others I see regularly include Northern Parula, Blue Winged Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Black and White Warbler, and Black Throated Green Warbler. All told I believe there are about 36 warbler species that you could potentially see at or near GSP. They're really fun to look for and I hope you get to see some this year! Open House weekend will be a great time to look for many of these. Good luck!

## Crockett Entrance Cleanup

Bethany Widmayer

April 22, 2023

The land near the Crockett entrance of Sloans Valley Cave Preserve is considerably cleaner this Earth Day thanks to Wendy Orlandi, Kelly McNamara, A'dra Peterson, Brylee Wyatt, and me. For about two hours, we picked up everything from plastic bottles and aluminum cans to car tires and beheaded porcelain figurines. Mike Harrington from the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy surprised us with lunch afterwards. We happily filled up on grilled hotdogs and hamburgers, chips, baked beans, and more. Shortly after lunch, Mick Harrington led us on trip in Sloans, starting at the Crockett entrance. Good company, beautiful formations, and simply being in a cave made the spurts of crawling seem like small potatoes! After around two hours, we exited the cave at Scowling Tom's, our cave craving fully satisfied.



Wendy Orlandi cleaning up – photo by Bethany Widmayer





Photo by Bethany Widmayer



Photo courtesy Bethany Widmayer



Photo courtesy Bethany Widmayer



Photo courtesy Bethany Widmayer



Photo courtesy Bethany Widmayer



**Greetings from the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy  
Support the Karst you Love!  
Renew Your Membership Today**

It's going to be a busy year in the Karst region of Kentucky. The five cave properties conserved by RKC are continuing to improve and provide access for you and future generations to enjoy.

The Sloans Valley Cave Preserve is having a work party day on April 22nd starting at 10 am. So much work has been done here, people will wonder why it was ever called the "Garbage Pit" entrance! But a spring cleanup is necessary. There is already a safety fence and parking area, and plans for a kiosk are taking shape. See pictures below of the beautiful entrance and our new SVCP logo.

The Skylight Dome Preserve finally got its driveway road improvements, making it much more accessible for technical caving groups.

The Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve has a busy schedule hosting school and scout troops to introduce young folks to caving. The new on-site GSP caretaker Josh Heinbuch has moved in to what was previously Bill Carr's house, which is now owned by GSP as a permanent building improvement to the GSP property. The GSP Open House is scheduled for May 20-21, 2023, and Karst-O-Rama for July 14-16.

The Misty Cave hibernaculum survey this winter found no White Nose Syndrome. Welcome news!

A spring above the Cornhole Cave has been very active, and is eroding the cave entrance. Future attention will be needed here to assess the situation.

Please renew your membership for 2023 and stay involved. **If you are reading this, your annual membership is expired or expiring this month, on March 31st.**

**Membership Options:**

- Annual @ \$15
- Sustaining (see below)
- Life (one time @ \$300)

The Sustaining membership is a simple way to support Rockcastle Karst Conservancy. A small monthly amount (\$5, \$10, or more) charged to your credit card keeps RKC moving forward in its efforts to protect significant cave and karst resources. See [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) to set up your Sustaining Member Option and you won't have to remember next year to renew.

Renew your annual membership today at [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) or mail a check payable to:

Rockcastle Karst Conservancy  
% Werner Jud, Treasurer  
1044 Vacationland Drive  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45231

Are you interested in a more long term approach to permanently fund the RKC mission? The RKC Legacy Endowment Fund has been established in conjunction with the Blue Grass Community Foundation to do just that. More details are on the [www.rkci.org](http://www.rkci.org) website.

Please help keep RKC growing. Cavers are losing access every day to the caves we love. The future of karst lands, its wise stewardship and ownership, are directly influenced by your renewal and donations.

Thank You for all you do,  
The Board and Members of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy



A preserve of the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy