



RAVINIA

An Advocate for Community Resources

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Winter 2021

The Practical Passive Preening Possum

by Maureen Lorenz

When I was in college I worked at the Blandford Nature Center on the landscape crew. The director, however, recognized I had a real love for the animals that were being cared for at the Center for future release or permanently due to injury, and she allowed me to become involved. I learned a lot about raising nests of cedar waxwings, robins, flickers, even a red-tailed hawk, but my favorite little charges were a family of opossums whose mom was killed by an oncoming car.

How these five little squirmers, smaller than my pinky finger, came to be was a tale in itself. Somebody checked the dead 'possum's pouch, and rescued them. The fact that there were 5 little pink possums at a very busy time for the Center meant I was given the opportunity to raise them. However, no one knew what to do. There was no Internet, no cell phones. I once raised, with my Grandfather's oversight, a brood of moles, so I was willing to try.

After some experimenting, I wrapped each little guy in a washrag trying to simulate the pouch experience and fed them one by one with an eyedropper and a mixture of the food we fed the baby birds. It was mostly 'Similac' and I added more substance as they grew. The babies made a sweet little "choo" noise as feeding commenced. Other than that, I hardly heard a peep out of them.

I had no car, so my little charges, who had to be fed throughout the day, lived in a box lined with my wool knitting leftovers and an old tee shirt, and rode back and forth with me to work on my bike. To everyone's surprise, my dog's most of all, they grew. All five. One night they climbed out of their box and invaded my bed, which was a mattress on the floor (college student, remember). My dog, also on the bed, woke me up whimpering when he could no longer suffer their

climbing, clinging, and suckling anymore on his little body. (Opossums are not the smartest of species and my dog was very tolerant of my constant menagerie). After that, we determined the 'possums were old enough to stay at the Nature Center in a cage until release.

I continued to care for them. It was very difficult to say good-bye when the Division of Wildlife folks came to place them in their new wild homes, but I cannot say the same for the possums. They just took everything in stride. My experience with

these gentle, amazing animals left a very tender spot in my heart for opossums.

Our urban ravines are home to opossums. They are North America's only marsupial, or pouched mammal, and arrived here from South America via the Great American Interchange around 3 million years ago. Opossums range north into southern Canada and from the east coast to the



Courtesy of Pixebay

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Thank goodness for ravines! During this pandemic, ravines and other local green spaces have been a tremendous asset for local residents looking for a way to stretch their legs and recharge their batteries in light of the current situation. Just a short ravine walk among tall trees does wonders for the mind and spirit. I hope that our ravines can be available to us for many many years to come. The pandemic has slowed our progress this year in conducting research, holding public events and stewardships programs, but we continue to advocate for these unique ravine environments.

How do we protect these ravine resources for the good of our community and the wildlife that depend on them? In the long history of this organization we have employed several strategies to promote good ravine stewardship. From boots on the ground litter clean-ups, invasive plant removal and replanting projects, completion of two major slope restoration projects at Glen Echo Park, community education forums to ongoing advocacy with local and regional organizations. This year some of FOR's activities like our Annual Spring Plant Walk and our partnership with the Water Sentinel Program at Indianola K8 School were paused as we navigate our path through the pandemic, but rest assured that ravine protection and preservation is still very much on our minds.

We'd like to let our supporters know a few things your Friends of the Ravines Board Members do on behalf of ravine environments and water quality. Our Board is an all-volunteer affair with members that contribute their time and experience for the benefit of area ravines. When you support us, you also support our representation in these organizations:

One member is appointed as a Franklin County conservation group representative to the State of Ohio Natural Resource Assistance Council (NRAC). This Council, coordinated with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, oversees the Clean Ohio funding awarded to conservation projects in Franklin County. One member is currently a Supervisor on the Board of the Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District. One member appointed to the Nature Preserves Advisory Council. This program is administered by the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department. One member was invited to represent Friends of the Ravines as part of the Columbus Urban Forestry Master Plan. One member participates in the Central Ohio Watershed Council, which is a network of organizations devoted to advancing watershed protection. One member has long been involved with educational events hosted by the Columbus Natural History Society. Links to these great organizations can be found on our website at friendsoftheravines.org.

Another thing that can be found on our website is the donate button. By making a donation, you will support our efforts to ensure that ravine green spaces are here through the next pandemic and beyond. These special places in our community grow more important as our regional population increases. Access to nature will continue to nurture our souls in good times and bad providing healthy recreation right in our neighborhoods. Please consider a donation to our organization either by mail or online, and join us in our quest to keep ravine green spaces available to us.

I hope to see you and your mask in a ravine sometime soon.

Here Are Ways that You Can Donate to Friends of the Ravines

- ❖ Donate online via Paypal through our website at www.FriendsoftheRavines.org. Click on the Donate button and follow the steps provided.
- ❖ Donate online through the Columbus Foundation Giving Store with a minimum gift of \$20. Search their website for Friends of the Ravines and make a donation today.
- ❖ Amazon members can register their account with FOR and Amazon will donate 0.5% of each purchase price at no cost to you. All **you** need to **do** is start your shopping at smile.amazon.com.
- ❖ Kroger-Plus customers can donate as they shop for groceries by registering their shopper loyalty card. Go to <https://www.kroger.com/topic/kroger-community-rewards-3> and search for Friends of the Ravines (organization 41888) in the list of community non-profit organizations. Enroll today to support us each time you go Krogering!
- ❖ Of course, you can still donate by writing a paper check and mailing it to our post office box, but many people find online donations convenient. Whatever method you choose, we appreciate your support.
- ❖ Have more time than money? Consider donating your time to help us with ravine litter clean ups, invasive plant removal, or writing educational articles, grants or blog posts. We're always looking for folks to help plan events like our Annual Spring Plant Walk, deliver Ravinias to local distribution points, or implement outreach campaigns. Whether you would like to volunteer regularly or just once-in-a-while, we would certainly welcome your help.

Your support helps us keep our central Ohio ravines healthy and beautiful. In central Ohio, we may not have beaches or mountains, but we do have ravines.

Rocky Mountains and along the west coast. The scientific name for opossums is *Didelphis virginiana*. Opossum is a Powhatan Indian name meaning “white animal.”



Courtesy of Sherrill Massey

Opossums are rather ghostly in appearance at night when they are most active, however, during breeding season it is not unusual to see them during the day. They are typically the size of a house cat, have pointy noses and very black eyes. Their fur is white with stiff black hairs and this can be variable. They have sharp claws and opposable fingers to help in climbing and grasping. Their ears are hairless, but what really identifies them is that hairless tail, which is actually quite amazing.

The opossum’s tail is prehensile and helps them in climbing. They can actually pull things like leaves and sticks along wrapped in that tail. They can wrap that tail around branches when climbing. Their babies like to hang on to it as they travel with mom. Because of that tail, opossums are compared to rats as a negative connotation, but most assuredly, don’t deserve this comparison.

It’s true that opossums are scavengers. They’ll eat about anything that is organic. Opossums are not averse to making a meal of carrion. They also eat snails, slugs, insect pests such as cockroaches and beetles, and will hunt mice, rats, and shrews along with the fruits of the forest, the occasional uncovered garbage can, and whatever else they come upon. The habit that really has caught the attention of scientists in New England is the fact that opossums are impeccable groomers.

Opossums eat ticks. This includes the ticks that carry Lyme Disease. These ticks that carry the Lyme Disease bacteria can be found on mice, shrews, squirrels and chipmunks, but

not so much on opossums. According to researchers, these wonderful mammals remove about 95% of ticks as they groom and can eat about 4,000 ticks a week as they meander through the forests and fields.

Enlisting the help of opossums to eat ticks takes on even more significance. According to a recent article in the Smithsonian Magazine, “disease-carrying ticks that normally prefer dogs may start to prefer the blood of humans as climate change cranks up the heat.” This research was studying the transmittance of Rocky Mountain spotted fever, most commonly found in the southeastern part of the United States. Having an opossum vacuuming up ticks can be a real benefit to human health.

It is the opossum’s habit of quiet, solitary living that led Ezra Pound to name his friend T. S. Eliot “Old Possum” as in *Old Possums Book of Practical Cats*. Opossums don’t often stay long in any one place. The opossum is quite adaptable in habitat selection and easily finds places to live wherever there is enough vegetative cover, water, and food. Their

numbers are increasing as they adapt to human disturbance and are more plentiful in the suburbs and urban settings than in the forests.



Courtesy of Corbin Binkley

Aside from the normal host of predators a wild animal faces, cars are by far the greatest killer of opossums. Opossums are slow-moving and docile and they’ve developed few defense tactics to ward off predation choosing passivity in the face of danger. They growl and hiss and bare their set of 52 sharp,



Courtesy of North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission

pointy teeth, but are not aggressive. They are best known for playing ‘possum’. When threatened, the opossum has an involuntary reflex and goes into a catatonic state that can last for 1 to 4 hours. The lips pull back, teeth bare, tongue rolls to one side, and he even emits a foul carrion-like odor to appear as dead as possible to a predator that hopefully prefers live prey.

Despite these defense mechanisms, opossums are very short-lived with a life expectancy of 1 to 4 years. Being a species with its origins in the tropics, opossums did not evolve to bulk up with subcutaneous fat and, therefore, can fall prey to freezing temperatures. Denning in residential areas can provide warmer micro-climate advantages and shelter for opossums.

In spite of all the predators and environmental factors affecting opossums, they thrive. Their litter size is typically large and opossums can have 2 litters per year. Up to 13 joeys, as the babies are called much like kangaroos, are born in a litter. The males and females are referred to as Jacks and Jills, respectively. When the babies are born, they are the size of a honeybee and must make their way inside the mother’s fur-lined pouch where they will stay for the next 2 to 3 months nursing and growing. Eventually, the joeys will begin to venture out of the pouch, but usually hang on to mom as she scavenges rather than venture off.

There are still a few more remarkable things to mention about opossums. They are practically immune to snake venom. And although they will hiss and growl and drool, again, they are not aggressive. Still, the behavior makes people believe they are rabid. The truth is opossums are rarely affected by rabies. This resistance is thought to be due to their low body temperature (94o to 97o F), which is not an ideal environment for the virus to thrive. With all the benefits that opossums present, they are still the target of some inhumane treatment.

We need a better understanding of these meek animals and the benefits they offer in our environment. They pose no threat to people or their pets. They go about their business so quietly you don’t even know they are around. If you do encounter a ‘possum, do nothing! They’ll move on and your garden might be all the better for their stopping by. Certainly, opossums should find a warmer place in your heart, or just more tolerance, as one of Nature’s beneficial wildlife species.

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National Wildlife Federation

SUNSET WALK THROUGH RUSH CREEK RAVINE

By Christine Hayes

The mature pawpaw trees produced an astronomical amount of chartreuse/burgundy blossoms, a constellation of them, in the spring they were silhouetted against the sky as I looked up from my back porch. But the baby pawpaw fruits fell in the hundreds; delicate lime-green irregular orbs stunted in their growth. The end-of-branch pawpaws remain fat and happy, though the long-leaved arms are drooping. I prop them up with bungee cords.

Starting from my pawpaw grove, my sunset walk through Rush Creek (flows west to Rush Run) Ravine sees me hauling sticks to the Stick House, suitable for deer or other inhabitants, and viewing my oxbow stream like I'm on the banks of the Ohio River. Knee-knotty and like-human-limbed tree roots grab at my feet. Little twinkle-light fireflies everywhere. The barred owl has been keeping me company this summer. He booms up the dell.

Two young buck deer watch me as I examine a tree for flowers. A slight snort from one, as I'm sure they smell me and recognize me as their "landlady" – at times they sleep in double-bowered pine-needle softness next to my compost pile. I continue through the woods, on past the neighbors' beautiful bee balm, hellebore, daisies, and echinacea.

Onward to my two favorite early-evening shows: the swifts entering the school chimney, and the rabbit who hops his night-time rounds. Clouds are hovering overhead, one heart-shaped (valentine), and another a ringer for an anatomical heart. I'm here at the cusp of night to see the crumpled-origami folded wings of the swifts' final drop into the chimney. Young ones are swirling in circles, with the goading of the "beaters" (I imagine, the older ones) who make sure no swift is left behind. They are the last ones to enter the chimney, two lone ones when all is still.

Lots of near-misses, quick pull-ups when a swift-body appears right in the trajectory to the chimney. Utter silence as all are in, the chitterings snuffed until tomorrow. I admire the puffed, flushed cheeks of the darkening clouds, as I pick lemon verbena in the schoolyard, and return to the pawpaw grove, bunny watching me.

A quick report off the house gutter as a black walnut whangs downward. Not just pawpaws are falling. Hickory nuts, pine cones, lichen-covered branches, beechnuts, and yes, early yellowed leaves blow down to the ground. I'm savoring every moment of summer before it's also gone with the wind.

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Friends of the Ravines, PO Box 82021, Columbus, Ohio 43202
friendsoftheravines@gmail.com

Bill Moose Run/Wyandot Nation Park

Help Save A Last, Pristine, Urban Ravine

By Scott Williams and Stan Bialczak

Who was Bill Moose? (1837 - 1937)

Bill Moose was Ohio's last living Wyandot Native American. This tale begins when Bill had just lost his home — his cave had collapsed. It was set into the cliffs of Adena Brook that run along *hilly* Cooke Road between Indianola Avenue and High Street in Columbus, Ohio. The citizens of the neighborhood known as Clintonville came to his aid and built Bill Moose a *real shack* to live in.

However, Bill Moose must have grumbled. After all, as everyone knew, he preferred sleeping outdoors and living off the land. But where did they build this shack? Through word-of-mouth history we know it was near the junction of Morse Road, Indianola Avenue, and the railroad tracks. As a result, in 1996, thanks to the Sharon Heights Community Association, the shack's nearby stream flowing to the Olentangy River was officially named Bill Moose Run. So in 2016, the Friends of Bill Moose and the Clintonville Historical Society erected an historical marker for him where Adena Brook disappears under High Street.

Bill Moose's parents lived in north-western Ohio with much of the Wyandot tribe, where he was born. When six years old, his family was one of just a few able to avoid being removed to Kansas in 1843. Later, as a young boy, his parents made a pilgrimage to Chief Leatherlips' grave in Dublin. They stayed in the area and Bill Moose adopted Columbus as his home.

Various accounts include him helping settlers clear farmland and teaching them how to make arrows. Eventually in the 1870s, the Columbus-based Sells Brothers Circus hired him. According to at least one account, he played an Indian rider in their Wild West Act. He even worked for the world-famous Buffalo Bill's Wild West circus. His travels with the circuses took him across the United States, Canada, and even to Australia!

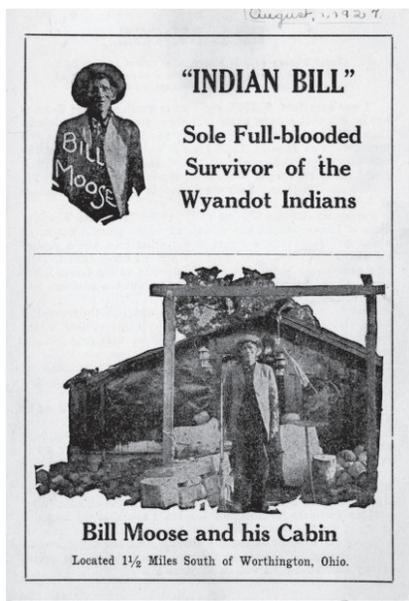
His circus career over, Bill Moose apparently adopted a cave along Adena Brook as his home. From his new shack near Morse and Indianola, we are told, he thought nothing of walking to the Scioto River to fish. To the north of his cabin was a wooded ravine area (Bill Moose Run) where he must have hunted and trapped. Worthington and Clintonville youngsters loved to visit "Indian Bill" at his

cabin. Imagine the stories they heard from Wyandot folklore to learning about nature, fishing, hunting, and his circus-days adventures.

A well-loved, popular figure

Bill sold postcards to visitors at his cabin and at OSU football games. On football Saturdays, he would arrive wearing a massive war bonnet, perhaps given to him by western Native Americans during his circus days. He always got a choice seat! Thus, by the 1920s, Bill Moose had become *a-local-legend-in-his-time*. He died in 1937 only two months shy of 100 years of age. Some accounts of his funeral overlooking the Scioto River claim 20,000 people attended, while others claim only 2,000. Regardless of the number, it was a grand turnout that led to a near riot! Thankfully, we have a first-hand account of his funeral by the late Citizen Journal reporter, Ben Hayes:

At Bill Moose's funeral Columbus leaders gave their own, heart-felt version of an Indian burial ceremony. And as the first shovels of dirt were tossed, they landed on Ben Hayes who had been pushed into the grave by the surging crowd seeking to hear Bill's final benediction. Now that's covering a story for you! You can still visit Bill Moose's grave site, on the east bank of the Scioto, at Wyandot Park located at the corner of Riverside Drive and Lane Road.



Hand-dated August 1, 1927, one of Bill's souvenir postcards

Wyandots' spiritual connection to nature

Interviewed by The Worthington News in 1927, Bill Moose said, "I attribute my long life to living close to nature, and observe the custom of my tribe in sleeping out of doors during the summer, and one night of each month throughout the winter with only one blanket for cover." Another quote of real interest is, "Our tribe were of a religious nature, and had their worship trees, under the branches of which they worshipped God..." Across the planet, tribal cultures have specialties which other tribes rely upon in times of need. In this interview, Bill Moose went on to explain that among Native American tribes in eastern North America, the Wyandot tribe was known for specializing in religious knowledge. So, would Bill Moose's spirit still be lurking around "his" namesake creek?



After all, Central Ohio’s other famous Wyandot, Chief Leatherlips, is renowned for haunting a local golf course. The Wyandots executed Leatherlips in what is now Dublin, Ohio in 1810. They publicly accused him of witchcraft to “justify” his death sentence with Christian settlers. However, the real reason was that Leatherlips had led a minority faction of Native American leaders who signed the 1795 Treaty of Greenville and sold “God’s land” to white settlers. Thanks to Jack Nicklaus’ Memorial (Day) Golf Tournament that began in 1976, at Dublin’s Muirfield Village, Leatherlips’ memory returned to our Central Ohio folklore. It was soon being rumored that Leatherlips’ spirit was angry at Jack for desecrating his Dublin grave site. In response, Leatherlips rained down upon Jack’s international golf event each May. Becoming as famous for the rain-outs as for professional golf, Jack was forced to move his Memorial Tournament to mid-July.

Preserving the land preserves history

To recognize the spiritual connection with nature that Bill Moose and the Wyandots practiced, it seems appropriate for our current generation to preserve this old growth forest named Bill Moose just north of his old shack. To that end, Friends of the Ravines supports preserving this nearly 40 acres of unused land, owned by the State of Ohio, to honor the last Ohio Wyandot and his tribe who lived, hunted, trapped, and fished on this land almost one hundred years ago.

Anyone who supports the preservation and conservation of the forested area named Bill Moose Run can e-mail Indian Hollow resident Stan Bialczak at friendsofbillmoosemetropark@gmail.com.

Credits & Further References

- A big thanks goes to Richard Barrett, Columbus historian, and Senior Times columnist for “A Postcard from Columbus” for the postcard image of Bill Moose in front of his shack!
- Ben Hayes’ reprinted column on Bill Moose’s funeral can be found in The Ben Hayes Scrapbook, compiled by Jay Hoster and Christine Hayes, published by Ravine Books in 1991.
- The OSU Press published in 2018, under their Trillium Books label, “the first real history of the Wyandot people who rose to become one of the most influential tribes in North America.” Authored by Lloyd E. Divine Jr. (darahok), the book’s title is On the Back of a Turtle.
- Native American Nomenclature: The Wyandot tribe is now located in Oklahoma and officially call themselves The Wyandotte Nation. Hence, there are two spellings, in wide use, for the tribe. Bill Moose’ native name was Kihue, and Chief Leatherlips had three different native names according to Wikipedia, one being SHATEYAHRONYA.



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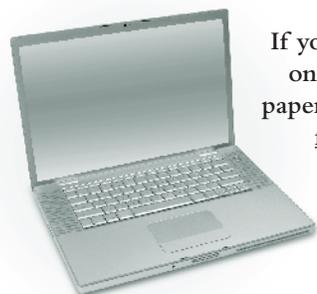
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