Spring seems to be my favorite time of the year. Wildflowers and the green tones of new leaves make you want get out and immerse yourself in the natural environment.

A great way to immerse yourself in the natural environment is to attend our Spring Conference at Pine Mountain State Resort Park, April 26-28, 2013. Go to our website for the registration form and more information. (www.ksnh.org)

Make sure you keep your email address up to date. Failed email addresses are deleted from my list. If your email changes just email us at webmaster@ksnh.org and treasurer@ksnh.org.
A Note from the President

As we near the end of winter, I think many of us should consider ourselves extremely lucky that our area did not suffer from the extreme snow storms that much of the country received. Mother Nature has definitely been showing herself in full force to our country this year. Over the past few weeks I have started noticing the first few signs of the approaching spring. The first sign occurred one evening as I left work for the drive home, and realized that the sun was just beginning to set. It has been totally dark at the same time the week before. The days were definitely getting longer and each day had to be one more day closer to spring. Today, as I backed out of the garage, a small dot of purple in the landscaping next to the driveway caught my eye. The crocuses were blooming....spring must be very near! Soon the sounds of spring peepers and wood frogs will begin to emanate from the wetlands just down the road. I am not sure about all of you, but to me, that sound.....is the true sign that spring has arrived.

This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the Kentucky Society of Natural History; a great milestone that I am very proud to be a part of. Special commemorative shirts and pins have been produced to mark this occasion and will be available for purchase at the Spring Conference. I am hoping we can have two of the best conferences ever, in celebration of this momentous year. With the coming of spring, our 2013 Spring Conference is rapidly approaching. April 26th will be here before we know it, and we will all gather at Pine Mountain State Resort Park for an incredible weekend. I want to thank all of the officers and board members that have helped get a great agenda of field trips and speakers put together. It should be a great conference!! Check the website for agenda details and registration forms.

Our Fall Conference will be held here in southern Ohio at Shawnee Lodge within the beautiful Shawnee State Forest, occasionally referred to as “The Little Smokies”. Many of our field trips will be into the numerous nature preserves of Adams County. This area, boast some of the highest biodiversity in the state of Ohio and is home to several state and private nature preserves including the famous 13,000+ acre Edge of Appalachia Preserve System. I am already in the process of meeting with several of that area’s naturalist to plan out a full agenda. Mark your calendars for October 18 – 20th, 2013.

As we celebrate this 75th Anniversary of our organization, I hope as many of you as possible will join us for our two statewide conferences. Wear your KSNH apparel proudly and get the word out to other individuals that share our love of nature, just what KSNH has to offer! Let’s make this one of the best years yet for the Kentucky Society of Natural History! I hope to see you all at Pine Mountain in April!
White-Nose Syndrome Found at Two Kentucky State Parks

FRANKFORT, Ky. – White-nose syndrome, a disease deadly to hibernating bats, has been found in caves at Carter Caves State Resort Park and Kingdom Come State Park.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) was first identified in New York in 2006 and has rapidly spread throughout the eastern United States and Canada. The disease is caused by a newly discovered fungus and has killed millions of bats since its discovery. There is no known cure for white-nose syndrome and biologists believe it is being spread by infected bats. The disease does not pose a threat to people, pets, or livestock.

Since the first documented case in Kentucky in April 2011, biologists have discovered 25 likely infected or confirmed WNS sites, spanning the state from Trigg County in the west to as far east as Carter and Letcher counties.

Bats with the disease were found recently at Carter Caves, near Olive Hill, in caves that are not open to the public. The three caves where bats with the disease were found are Bat, Saltpetre and Laurel Caves, which were closed in 2008 as part of the effort to stop the spread of the fungus causing the disease.

Carter Caves is home to about 40,000 Indiana bats, which are federally endangered. The majority of those are found within Bat Cave, which is also part of the Bat Cave State Nature Preserve.

The Kentucky State Parks require guests who take tours in two caves at Carter Caves State Resort Park to disinfect their footwear and to not wear clothing that has been worn in other caves. These steps, begun in the fall of 2011, are intended to limit the spread of the disease, which disrupts bats while they hibernate in the winter, leading to starvation or dehydration. The name comes from the appearance of white fungus that grows on the muzzle and other body parts of hibernating bats.

Carter Caves plans to continue conducting public tours of Cascade and X-Cave.

A bat with the disease also was found in January at Line Fork Cave at Kingdom Come State Park during a routine cave survey. The cave is gated and not open to tourists. This cave is in Letcher County, located inside the 225-acre Kingdom Come State Park Nature Preserve and is home to the federally protected Indiana bat.

Earlier this year, officials at Mammoth Cave National Park in south-central Kentucky announced that white-nose syndrome had been found in a cave at that park.

The spread of white-nose syndrome through Kentucky is significant because of the untold thousands of bats that hibernate in the state’s vast network of caves. Bats play a key role in the health of our ecosystems. They are the primary predators of night-flying insects, consuming forest and agricultural pests. An analysis published by Science magazine showed that pest-control services provided by insect-eating bats save the U.S. agricultural industry at least $3 billion annually.

WNS has been found in the following counties in Kentucky: Bell, Breckinridge, Carter, Christian, Edmonson, Hart, Letcher, Trigg, Warren, and Wayne.

Kentucky Department of Parks News Release

Nature Photography: Tips for Photographing Nature’s Wonders

Photographing nature takes more skill than simply pointing and shooting a camera. Understanding your subject and your equipment is crucial to taking excellent nature shots. Although nothing compares to viewing nature’s beauty in person, a skilled nature photographer can capture a glimpse of that beauty. You too can learn how to take breathtaking nature photos!

Being Prepared for Nature Photography Means More Than Bringing Your Equipment

When it comes to photographing nature, a photographer must be able to do more than just properly frame a shot. Experienced nature photographers anticipate and prepare for their best shots. A good nature photographer studies the subject to be photographed days or weeks prior to the day of the shoot. If the subject is a bird, insect or other animal, you can prepare by understanding feeding and nest-building habits, for example. If you plan to photograph flowers or other plants, you should examine the effect of daylight on your shot at various times.

To become truly skilled in photographing nature, practice with your camera until it becomes a part of you. Be familiar with the various settings and adjustments so that you can respond quickly to changes without losing opportunities for great shots.

Kentucky Rocks

A mineral is a naturally occurring solid with a definite chemical composition and crystal structure. Rocks are naturally occurring solids composed of one or more minerals. Rocks are identified by the minerals they contain and are grouped according to their origin into three major classes: sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic. Each group is subdivided on the basis of texture and mineral composition.

Most of the rocks found in Kentucky are sedimentary. Sedimentary rocks are formed from (1) the weathering and transport of pre-existing rocks and (2) the chemical precipitation of sediments. Examples of sedimentary rocks are limestones, sandstones, and shales. Igneous rocks result from the cooling of molten rock or magma to create rocks like granites, basalts, and rhyolites. Metamorphic rocks have been physically and mineralogically changed by heat and pressure to form another type of rock; for example, the sedimentary rock limestone will become the metamorphic rock marble; the sedimentary rock shale will become the metamorphic rock slate; and the igneous rock granite will become the metamorphic rock gneiss (pronounced nice). Igneous and metamorphic rocks are not common in Kentucky but have been observed in glacial drift in northern Kentucky, and have been found as constituents in sandstones in eastern Kentucky and in very deep wells drilled throughout the State.

Compiled by Dave Luzader
Pine Mountain, Kentucky’s True Mountain
Compiled by Berl Meyer

Pine Mountain, located in southeastern Kentucky, is one of the most outstanding landscape features in the Commonwealth. Unlike many peaks which carry the term “mountain,” Pine Mountain is a magnificent ridge that reaches approximately 125 miles from near Jellico, Tennessee, on the southwest to Elkhorn City, Kentucky, on the northeast, extending through an area of great geologic and historic interest.

The area of Pine Mountain has been recognized for many years for its scenic beauty. A general account of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, prepared by the Geologic Survey of the Commonwealth for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, stated that the area of the upper Cumberland River affords some of the finest scenery of the whole Appalachian chain. It is not the highest mountain in eastern Kentucky, but with its spine-like crest, majestic cliffs, wooded coves, and assemblage of diverse rock formations, it is a strikingly attractive scenic feature.

Through most of its length, Pine Mountain is, and has been, a conspicuous barrier to transportation, especially on its northwest face where many points rise 1000 to 2000 feet above the streams which parallel it. For nearly 90 miles no stream crosses the mountain, and in the entire distance of 125 miles, only about a half dozen roads afford passage from one side to the other.

Pine Mountain has long been known by professional geologists and students of earth sciences as a unique feature in Kentucky geology. Geological literature for almost a century has attempted to describe its features and explain its origin. A selected list of scientific references which have been beneficial to the present writer, and should be equally helpful to those who wish to explore the more technical aspects of the subject, is presented at the end of this report. For those interested in any particular segment of Pine Mountain, the reader’s attention is invited to the new detailed geologic maps which have been prepared for this area. These maps depict the nature and distribution of the rock formations at the surface of the ground and the associated structural features.

In addition, all of the area under discussion is covered by a recent series of topographic maps, scale 1:24,000 with 20- or 40-foot contours, published by the United States Geological Survey. These maps show roads, streams, towns, and the location and elevation of many of the salient natural features. They are of inestimable value to anyone spending time hiking or exploring landscape features in this area. Some examples of these maps are shown elsewhere in this report.

In spite of the comparatively large amount of geologic literature written about the Pine Mountain area, it has only been in recent years that many nonprofessional people, except those who reside in the area, have realized the beauty and scenic attraction of this part of Kentucky. Today three State parks, Pine Mountain, Kingdom Come, and Breaks Interstate parks; a community park at Jenkins; and the picturesque and scenic Little Shepherd Trail are developed so that more people can enjoy this mountain region. The majority of the great rock formations are accented by the array of native plants and trees. In the springtime the mountains are decorated with blooming redbud, rhododendron, and mountain laurel; in the autumn the multicolored leaves of the hardwoods make the woodlands appear to be ablaze.

A knowledge of the geology of an area guides the geologist in his search for needed minerals; assists the engineer in his design and construction of structures to improve our environment; and aids the tourist in understanding the landscape features. The spectacle of Pine Mountain is more than a sight-seeing tour. It is an adventure into the geologic mystery of the past and the scenic beauty of the present.

GEOLOGIC SETTING

The geologic story of Pine Mountain began some 400 million years ago when the area was covered by great bodies of water. In the Pine Mountain area these seas lasted more than 75 million years. During this time various muds, sands, shell fragments, lime oozes, and plant material accumulated on the ocean bottoms and in lagoons and bays much as they do today. Mud became clay and shale. Loose sand, gravel, and silt became sandstone, conglomerate, and siltstone. Shells, shell fragments, lime oozes, and chemical lime precipitates became limestone. Plant accumulations became coal.
Rocks in Pine Mountain are layered like a cake. The lowest layer is the oldest (Devonian), whereas younger rocks (Pennsylvanian) cap the mountain ridge. Mississippian shales, siltstones, limestones, and sandstones occupy the interval between the Devonian and Pennsylvanian, but this description applies to many places in the eastern Kentucky mountain region. The thing that makes Pine Mountain different from most of the other Kentucky mountains is that it is a single, long mountain ridge resulting from geological events which have turned rock layers upward to relatively high angles, exposing rock formations which are normally 2000 feet or more below the surface of the ground.

Geologically, Pine Mountain is a long, even-topped, erosion fault scarp, the steep face of which faces the northwest. It is part of a four-sided block of the earth's crust, approximately 125 miles long and 25 miles wide, known as the Cumberland overthrust block. This block is bounded on each side by earth fractures called "faults"—Pine Mountain fault on the northwest, Hunter Valley fault on the southeast, Jacksboro fault on the southwest, and Russell Fork fault on the northeast. The Cumberland overthrust block is a trough-shaped body which mountain-building forces within the earth pushed laterally for a distance of some 6 miles from the southeast. These crustal movements are thought to have taken place near the close of Paleozoic time, some 230 million years ago.

Pine Mountain, a long monoclinal ridge, forms an upturned rim of the trough-shaped overthrust block. Its steep face to the northwest, overlooking the Cumberland Plateau, is capped by the outcrop of the resistant basal conglomeratic sandstone of the Pennsylvanian System, known as the Lee Formation.

Cumberland Mountain, which contains historically famous Cumberland Gap, is a mirror image of Pine Mountain. Cumberland Mountain presents a steep face toward Virginia and Tennessee, with rocks which form the back slope dipping toward Kentucky.

Pine Mountain is a striking contrast to the adjacent Cumberland Plateau. The linear character of its crest, the abrupt outer northwest-facing escarpment, and its gentler southeastern (back) slope with great dipping rock slabs and irregular boulders present a remarkably uniform picture throughout its entire length and set it apart from the maze of less rugged irregular hills and sinuous streams of the plateau.

Although the area of Pine and Cumberland Mountains is considered as part of the Cumberland Plateau, the narrow-crested linear ridges are more typical of the Appalachian Valley-and-Ridge type features.

The crest of Pine Mountain rises gradually from the southwest toward the northeast, with elevations ranging from less than 2200 feet in western Bell County to more than 3200 feet in southern Letcher County.

Probably the highest elevation on Pine Mountain is 3273 feet above sea level, a point approximately 4 1/4 miles (airline) east of Whitesburg. From here eastward, peaks along the crest reach elevations between 3000 and 3100 feet.

Throughout its entire length Pine Mountain is cut by notches or gaps, 200 to 700 feet below nearby peaks, which are probably related to ancient, but now obsolete, drainage systems. Notable among these are Bear Wallow Gap (2040 feet), Salt Trace Gap (2180 feet), Shell Gap (2620 feet), Hurricane Gap (2240 feet), Scuttlehole Gap (2580 feet), and Skegg Gap (2510 feet).

Cumberland River breaches Pine Mountain at Pineville. This is the only instance of a present-day stream cutting through the mountain in Kentucky. Russell Fork crosses Pine Mountain in Virginia at the Kentucky State line, creating the gorge commonly known as "Breaks of the Sandy." At the opposite end of the mountain near Jellico, Tennessee, Clear Fork has cut a deep rocky valley through the mountain; it is referred to locally as "The Gorge" or "The Narrows."

The principal communities are located in the valleys well below the mountain crest. Pineville is at an elevation of about 1015 feet; Harlan (of Justified fame), 1190 feet; Cumberland, 1440 feet; Whitesburg, 1160 feet; Jenkins, 1520 feet; and Elkhorn City, 820 feet.
The sandstones which cap Pine Mountain consist primarily of clean quartz sand. Locally, concentrations of quartz pebbles are present. The sandstone varies in color from off-white, gray, and tan to reddish and brown, with the tan and browns predominating. The color is due primarily to iron oxide staining. Precipitous sandstone cliffs abound on the north face of Pine Mountain, some of them with sheer faces of 200 feet. The unusual combination of the harshness and beauty of these rocks never ceases to fascinate the visitor. Occasionally one will observe a pit where soft, poorly cemented sandstone was once dug for mortar sand or similar construction use. Elsewhere there are hard ledges producing jutting rock masses or an occasional waterfall.

Approximately halfway (or a little more) up the north face of Pine Mountain one may encounter a thick limestone formation. Referred to by geologists as the Newman Limestone, it is the thickest and most extensive limestone unit exposed in this part of Kentucky. Thicknesses of 300 feet are common. It is Late Mississippian in age and thought to be generally correlative with the cave-bearing limestones of Carter, Rockcastle, Pulaski, and other eastern Kentucky counties as well as those of the Mammoth Cave area of south-central Kentucky. A number of caves have been reported to be present in the Newman Limestone along Pine Mountain but none are commercialized. Springs may also be present. This limestone is the principal source of rock in this area for roadstone and concrete aggregate. Commercial limestone quarries are present in Harlan, Letcher, and Pike Counties. The oldest rocks exposed within the Eastern Kentucky coal field are found at the foot of Pine Mountain.

**SUGGESTED REFERENCES**


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Kentucky Wetland Restoration Attracts Endangered Cranes

Posted by Ray Toor, NRCS Kentucky, on February 1, 2013 at 3:45 PM

Scott County Indiana Muscatatuck River Bottoms, March 5-2007. Photo credit Mark Trabue.

A wetland restoration project completed by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Kentucky has attracted the fancy of a pair of endangered whooping cranes.

In early November, a pair of whooping cranes were discovered on a property in western Kentucky that was recently restored with NRCS’ help. The restoration to bottomland hardwood wetlands included tree planting and the creation of shallow water areas for migratory wildlife on nearly 900 acres of former cropland that was put into a conservation easement.

The cranes have been residing on the conservation easement since December 2012, roosting and feeding in the shallow water areas. This is a significant sighting because by the 20th century, the majestic bird was nearly wiped out.

Before human interference, there were, it is believed, 15,000–20,000 whooping cranes in the U.S. But in the 1800s, the whooping crane population was drastically reduced by habitat loss and hunting, and by 1860 the birds were thought to number only about 1,400. In 1941, there were only 15 whoopers left in the entire country.

Whooping cranes are still critically endangered, but with continued wetland restoration efforts, there is hope for their future.

Although these birds are tall, they only weigh about 15 pounds. They primarily eat crustaceans, small fish, insects, amphibians and reptiles. They will also eat grains, marsh plants and acorns. The primary habitats of whooping cranes are wetlands, marshes, mudflats, wet prairies and fields.

A team of NRCS, FWS and Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources biologists confirmed the identification of the birds after interviewing the landowner and visiting the conservation easement. The landowner of the conservation easement is happy with the restoration efforts, and the fact that “big, white, pretty birds” have decided to stop in and visit on their migration route.

Whooping cranes are still critically endangered, but with continued wetland restoration efforts, there is hope for their future.
NOTES FROM THE NATURE NUT
By: W.H. (Wally) Roberts – Spring 2013
“PILEATED WOODPECKERS”

Ten years will have passed on June 1, 2013, since Karen and I moved to Hawthorne Pointe (HP). As most of you know, our main reason for moving to HP was the fact that a dedicated nature preserve was part of our homeowners association property. Although our nature preserve is only about 15 acres, we are surrounded by wooded, hilly tracts on three sides, and a wetland woods on the other.

Karen and I have observed and recorded 128 different bird species from our condo during the past ten years. One of the first species we heard and saw was the pileated woodpecker (Dryocopus pileatus).

When we set up our bird feeding station, we purposely included special suet cake feeders that are designed for the large pileated woodpeckers. These feeders have an extra long tail perch so the pileated woodpeckers can brace themselves...similar to pecking on a tree.

It took a few months for the pileateds to come to our feeding station, but not one of the birds ever fed even though they flitted close around our feeders. We continued to see and hear the birds for the past nine plus years.

For the first time, about the second week in February, 2013, a brave female showed up and fed for the first time on suet cakes in the large woodpecker feeders. Three days later, she brought her mate with her and both birds have been feeding almost daily about twenty-five feet from our patio.

Pileated woodpeckers are our largest woodpeckers and are almost the size of a crow. The pileated woodpecker is the real life model for Walter Lantz’ “Woody Woodpecker” of cartoon fame. These large and loud birds are especially impressive with beautiful large red crests, jungle-like calls, and loud drumming that sounds like a wooden mallet beating on a tree. Pileateds do not have the undulating flight pattern of other woodpeckers, but fly more like a crow with steady wing beats.

The pileated woodpecker’s range is large, and they prefer deep mature woods, but can often be found in the ecotone regions between woods and creeks and woods and roads. Their favorite food seems to be carpenter ants, and they are often found feeding near the lower parts of the forest such as on rotten dead stumps of fallen trees. They usually start nesting around the beginning of March and usually only have one brood per year. They tend to use the same nest for several years, and you can always tell the holes made in trees by pileated woodpeckers because they are oval in shape.

Often times, it has been a pleasure to show this impressive bird to non-naturalist types who were very skeptical when I talked about this beautiful and impressive bird. Both sexes are about the same size and color with the males having a red mustache below the bill while the female does not.

I urge you to take some extra time this spring and more closely observe these truly beautiful birds. If possible, find their nesting sites, then sit and observe them with your binoculars.

The spring birding season is rapidly approaching, but it will be short in duration. I urge you to take to the field as often as possible and enjoy the beauty of nature...“the greatest show on earth.”
Common Dittany or Stonemint: *Cunila organoides* (L.) Britt.

Common Dittany, or Stonemint, is a perennial member of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*). First described and published by Carl Linnaeus, it was reclassified into today's valid botanical systematic by Nathaniel Lord Britton in 1894. Common Dittany grows 8-16 inches tall in dry, rocky, sandy, mesic, open woods, clearings, slopes and prairies in noncalcareous (calcium carbonate-limestone) areas. It does not tolerate shade. Found mainly in the eastern United States, it is infrequent in most of Kentucky except for the Bluegrass and limestone regions. It is listed as extinct in New York. As a mint family plant, Dittany has a square stem, nearly sessile/opposite leaves and an aromatic scent when the foliage is crushed. Dittany's scent has also been described as a pleasant or a pungent diesel oil/gas smell. The tubular pinkish to purple flowers, about 3/8-1/2” long, have 2 protruding stamens and occur in terminal cymes. Dittany blooms from July into November. The wiry/multi-branched stem appears semi-woody at the base and will last well into the winter season. Seeds (nutlets) are up to 1.3 mm long at maturity and are smooth.

Dittany (*Cunila organoides*) gets its genus name – *Cunila* – from Latin meaning thyme; Latin *konos* meaning cone in reference to Dittany’s flower shapes; or from Greek *konilee* meaning marjoram as dittany is similar. The species name, *organoides*, is from Latin which means resembling oregano.

Dittany (dittanies is the plural term) has many common names. Dittany is derived from several sources: *dytane, detane* or *dytan* (M.E.); *dictane* (O.F); *dictum* (Latin); or *di’ktamon* (Greek). These sources of the word dittany may be akin to dikte – a mountain in Crete where a similar mint herb (*Orignum dictamnus*) abounded. Dittany is an English girl’s name meaning “of Britain”. Another common name is stonemint as dittany prefers dry, sandy, rocky hillsides. The name Mountain Dittany is also used in several localities due to its frequent hilly mountain habitat. Also known as Maryland Dittany, particularly in the northeast United States, as Maryland was one of the first sites that dittany was discovered and described. Because of its similarity to oregano, dittany is also referred to as wild oregano. A relatively uncommon name is Sweet Horsemint, as equines are supposedly fond of dittany. One of the most unusual names for dittany is gas plant or burning bush due to its diesel oil scent which has been reported to be flammable.

Medical/folklore usages for dittany are numerous. The Cherokee and Iroquois used a tea made from its twigs/leaves as a remedy for headaches, fever, colds, stomach ailments, analgesia, snake bites, “women’s” problems, and as a stimulant. Cherokees also used a concoction to treat scalp complaints and chewed the root for bleeding or sore gums. Inhaled steam from burning dittany was used to clear sinuses and relieve headaches. An essential oil found in dittany (cunila oil) is used as an aromatic to induce menstruation and sweating. “Oil of dittany”, another dittany essential oil, was used as an antiseptic and an insect repellant – especially horseflies. Eugenol, a potent anti-aggregant (blood thinner) found in dittany, may possibly benefit patients with certain blood, stroke, and cardiovascular disorders. Other compounds as thymol and carvacrol in dittany are known muscle relaxers and have been used in massages and warm baths to relax strained muscles or other musculoskeletal disorders. Modern herbalists use dittany for rashes, measles, decreased urine flow, flatulence, spasms, and as a carminative.

Dittany is the herb of Venus in astrology and in folklore its juice may repel “venomous beasts”. For you Muggles – Harry Potter fans – the dittany mentioned in this epic work is not our dittany. Two European plants are also known as dittany: *Dictamnus alba* (white or false dittany) of the Rue or citrus family and *Origannus dictamnus* (Crete dittany) in the mint family. As the latter has a more significant history of being used medicinally, this is the dittany J. K. Rowling probably had in mind when writing her renowned Harry Potter saga. The dittany in Harry Potter is used extensively for treating wounds, especially those caused by “splinching”.

Lastly a rare natural occurring phenomenon of dittany is the forming frost crystals, ice flowers, ice ribbons, and/or frost flowers along the base of the stem in winter. It is theorized that the square stem struc-
ture facilitates capillary water movement up from the soil. Water is pushed through the stem to the exterior through small openings allowing the ice/frost flowers to form. Water in the stem becomes “super cooled” – temperature of slow-moving capillary water to below freezing but ice has not begun to form. If and/or when an ice crystal forms on the exterior stem possibly from frost, the super cooled water penetrates the stem – forms as ice on the ice crystals externally. As more water leaves the capillaries/conductive tissue of the stem to the exterior, the ice flowers continue to grow. Once super cooled water turns to ice the plant stem will rupture and larger formations may form from exterior moisture. Dittany (Cunila origanoides) is one of the 5 widely recognized plants to form ice flowers - White Crownbeard (Verbesina virginica), yellow wingstem (V. alternifolia), and long branch and hoary frostweeds (Helianthemum canadense and H. bicknellii) are the others. Thirty-four other plants have also been cited as forming ice flowers but this phenomenon is far less documented and observed than that of dittany. It is dittany’s ability to form ice flowers that gives it yet another common name – the ice mint or ice plant!

On a winter hike be sure to look for dittany and signs of ice flowers. If one hikes the south trails leading to the Summit at Iroquois Park there is a chance of observing these ice flowers as dittany is quite common on these south-facing rocky slopes. This summer take time to crush some of this mint’s leaves and smell the aromatic odor – can you smell diesel oil?

Chris Bidwell
President of the Falls of the Ohio Chapter - KSNH

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