



# Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



MAY

## 2025 VOLUNTEER GROUPS REMOVE BARBERRY IN WHITE'S WOODS

The 2025 effort to remove Japanese barberry in White's Woods got underway with four events in April. On each of four consecutive Saturdays, nine university and community organizations united to help rid White's Woods of Japanese barberry, a non-native invasive plant that crowds out native plants. Over 100 volunteers participated in these FWW-orchestrated events.

Thousands of barberry plants, both large and small, were removed from the ground and left to decompose in more than a dozen large piles. White Township provided work gloves and reusable bags, while FWW members served as team leaders.

In addition to FWW members, participants included the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) Student Government Association, Phi Delta Theta, Alpha Sigma Tau, Phi Kappa Tau, Alpha Sigma Alpha, IUP Student Association of Nutrition and Dietetics, the Indiana Area Senior High School Key Club, and IUP Honors College students.

Pennsylvania has banned the sale of Japanese barberry because the plant is a prolific invader, taking over native ecosystems with dense, thorny thickets.

FWW plans biweekly barberry pulls through the summer. To be notified of future pulls, visit the Friends of White's Woods website ([friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events)) or send an email to: [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org). Your assistance is vital in saving the woods from this invasive species. Please participate when you can.



*Aidan Gardner, IUP graphics arts major and FWW stalwart, led the celebration.*



One of the first signs of spring is the aromatic skunk cabbage, which made its first 2025 appearance in White's Woods at the beginning of April. Skunk cabbage is typically found near streams and in wetlands.

The plant first shoots up a spike that often pokes through the snow. The spike grows in a spiral pattern, then forms a leaf called the spathe. If you look inside the spathe, you will find small flowers and detect a recognizable skunk-like odor.

Naturalist Scott Shalaway noted that "as the spathe and flowers grow, they generate enough heat to actually melt snow and ice surrounding the plant. Rapidly growing skunk cabbage flowers can maintain a "body temperature" as much as 30 degrees F higher than ambient temperatures."

After the flowers are pollinated, skunk cabbage begins to form spherical, maroon-colored fruits that are about two inches in diameter. Each head contains a single seed that returns to the soil to await next year's germination.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**May 16 and 17: May Mart**, Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., S&T Bank Arena, White Township. Members needed to staff booth in two-hour shifts. Send email to [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org) with your time availability.

**May 18: WWNC Big Tree Walk**, meet at 12th St. Entrance, 1 p.m.- 3 p.m.

**June 7: A History of White's Woods**: Walk with Dr. Kevin Patrick, author, "Near Woods: A Year in an Allegheny Forest," 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Meet at the WWNC 12th St. Entrance.

**June TBD** National Day of Action to Protect National Forests

**June 14**: Invasive Plant Pull and Medicine Making with Japanese Barberry, Dr. Dana Driscoll, 12<sup>th</sup> Street Entrance, 10 a.m.

For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)  
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## SPRING BIRD MIGRATION UNDERWAY

Migrating forest songbirds are making their way back to the White's Woods Nature Center (WWNC). On April 6<sup>th</sup>, Colin Lynch filed an [ebird](#) report confirming the first official 2025 sighting of an Eastern Towhee in our community forest.

[Ebird](#) is the online citizen-science tool for reporting bird observations.

The Eastern Towhee (see picture, right) is a strikingly-marked, large, long-tailed sparrow, with a black back, black wings, rufous-colored sides and a white chest. Often, there are white markings on the wings. The Eastern Towhee is sometimes called a "ground robin," both because it is about the size of a robin and because it spends a lot of time foraging on the ground.

Eastern Towhees can be found in thickets and are also likely to be spotted near the newly-constructed piles of barberry recently removed from the ground. A woods-walker will often hear a Towhee before they can spot one, hearing either the rustling noises they make when foraging or their distinctive "[chewink](#)" call.

The Eastern Towhee is one of a large number of striking birds that can be found in the WWNC, many striking in color, others extraordinary in song.



*Eastern Towhee*

### State of the Birds 2025

The *North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI)* has released the [State of the Birds 2025](#) report, a follow-up to their 2019 report documenting the loss of 3 billion birds in North America since 1970. In 2019, the NABCI reported that nearly 1/3 of birds had vanished.

The 2025 report indicates that bird populations have continued to decline, despite the fact that scientists know what conservation methods are needed to allow populations to recover.

Migrating eastern forest songbird populations are [down 27%](#). Duck populations, which had been stabilizing, showed a surprising drop in the 2025 report.

## CLIMATE FORESTS UPDATE

\*The ironically named "[Fix Our Forests Act](#)" (FOF Act) has been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

This bill exempts, or minimizes, the role of judicial, environmental, scientific, and public review in logging projects on federal land, undermining both the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The FOF act doesn't fix our forests, [it does the opposite](#). Climate Forests urges citizens to contact your federal representatives.

\* [Fifty-eight percent](#) of national forests were recently opened to logging by private industry.

\*Environmental groups have begun [filing lawsuits to](#) block the increased logging in national forests.

\*The science says that [logging does not reduce](#) wildfire risk. For more information see "[Fighting the Wrong Battle.](#)"

\*The USFS released an April 1<sup>st</sup> decision about the [Upper Cheat forestry project](#), reducing the acreage to be cut [from 3,458 acres to 3,343 acres](#) in response to extensive public outcry.

\* [A proposed federal revision](#) to the Endangered Species Act argues that harming habitat does not endanger vulnerable species.

### 2025 Barberry Removal

*BEFORE*



*Barberry still growing*

*AFTER*



*Barberry pulled up & piled*

**Valuable Native Plants in White's Woods:** With all of the focus on invasive plants, it may be all too easy to forget to celebrate the valuable array of native plants in White's Woods. Forest plant ecologist Dr. Marion Holmes, along with plant specialists Cindy Rogers and Dr. Dana Driscoll, have compiled lists of valuable native plants in the Nature Center that include seven at-risk species and 81 other valuable native plants. One list of native plants can be found at the FWW website under [Trail Information](#).

For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)  
We welcome feedback. Email us at:  
[info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org)

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