



# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## My Painted Trillium Quest

By Tom Fishburn, June 3, 2020

I love trillium in spring as many wildflower enthusiasts do. Over the last few years I've learned of the several species found in Ohio, some more common than others. In Ohio Painted Trillium (*Trillium undulatum*) is rare. I had never seen it although I understand it is quite common just east of Ohio. So when I got a tip that a small population of Painted Trillium exists in Ashtabula County on property managed by The Nature Conservancy I got excited. Painted Trillium blooms later than the other trillium species. And when I contacted one of the managers at the Morgan Swamp Preserve I was told they were not yet in bloom.

The manager explained there were only small numbers of healthy blooming plants only five years ago. Understanding its endangered status in Ohio, The Nature Conservancy at Morgan Swamp Preserve sought to protect and has worked to restore this attractive species. A high fence was built around the struggling plants to keep deer away. In the following years the numbers of healthy and blooming plants increased. This year is the fourth year since and in mid-May when staff went to explore the site and do some maintenance work they counted some 60 healthy plants! This population exists off the public trails and requires permission and specific instructions to visit, along with cautions about hiking through the unmarked woods and swamp. (As a side note adding to this wonderful adventure I did get disoriented on the way back which cost me an extra hour of hiking time.)

I waited for a good weather day and made the trip on May 21st to Morgan Swamp about 65 miles east of home. After a 1-1/2 or so mile hike, half of which was off-trail, I arrived at the secluded location. My first surprise was how large the fenced-in area was. I was also surprised how small the flowers were. Staff had marked the plants with flags in order to provide an accurate count. I spent two hours checking the different stages of growth and poses the plants presented. Not all were yet in bloom. As the sun shifted position I admired and photographed several of them. I looked for shadows cast on leaves. Some plants had their petals fully extended while others were curled. What a thrill to see these for the first time.