Have a Nature Question? Just Ask Floyd Bartley

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If his friends had it their way, Floyd Bartley, Route 4, Circleville, would not be in Pickaway County on Sunday evenings. No sir! He’d be in a certain isolation booth on the $64,000 Question TV program. This well known local naturalist has answered more nature questions for more people than there are stars in the sky.

And his Pickaway County acquaintances have certain that this amazingly informed man who styles himself as a “nature crank” could answer any question that comes his way.

His category? The whole outdoors! Bartley has collected specimens from all over the United States but Ohio is his real laboratory. He not only knows Ohio wild flowers but birds, insects, butterflies, reptiles, grasses, weeds, mosses, fish and animals of the woods.

Bartley, a slightly built, ruddy-cheeked farmer with keen blue eyes that never miss a detail has been a lover of nature ever since he was a kid. He recalls that as soon as school was out he and his sister would rush home, grab a couple of slices of jelly bread and head for the woods.

As a youngster he felt a certain frustration when he could not identify plants that he found in the woods. And he made up his mind that he was going to learn all about such things.

His father encouraged his boys in their love of nature. Bartley remembers many times when his Dad would mark a bird’s nest in the field by a stick in the ground and then caution his sons, “Plow around that stick. There’s a bird’s nest there.”

His curiosity about the plants he encountered never waned. He made up his mind to learn everything there was to learn. And he did. A self-taught botanist he has rubbed elbows with all the nationally recognized authorities in this field.

Early in his career he made friends with Ohio State University botanists who recognized him as a kindred spirit, taught him a great deal and recommended books for him to read.

He uses the terms of the trained botanist and always employs the botanical name except when garden club ladies implore him to use the common name to make things easier for them.

Each Sunday finds Bartley in his Model A Ford, purchased in 1931, rolling up some rocky abandoned wagon trail on the hill for wildlings that he knows and loves. Often he is accompanied by a group of nature loving friends. More often he tramps the hills and swamps alone. He is ever searching for the rare and unusual.

Not long ago he sent a new species of grass to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D. C. He found it in Jackson County. It was a true species that had never been classified. It is now listed in the Smithsonian as “Calmagratais Inseperata.”

When Bartley visited the Smithsonian last year, the botanists in charge gave him a royal welcome and spent half a day with him.

BARTLEY is so keen of eye that he has been nicknamed “Hawk-eye” by his associates. He can see things, very small plants, even when he’s walking at quite a clip. When Bartley hikes, his steps are such that fellow naturalists have a tough time matching his sturdy stride.

Bartley is a popular speaker on nature subjects. He surprises his listeners by telling them there are 20 varieties of golden rod and 30 species of violets in Ohio, not counting hybrids.

He also is in demand as a leader of nature hikes. People who can keep up with him find such an excursion a rare experience.

Bartley has consented to serve on the Circleville Herald Panel of Experts, so write your nature questions addressed to The Herald and he will answer them.

Organizations to which Bartley belongs reflect a keen interest in his hobby. He is a member of the Wheaton Bird Club, The Brooks Bird Club (West Virginia), The Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Ohio Academy of Science, the Ohio Archaeological Society and the Circleville Garden Club, of which he is president.

One of Bartley’s pet peeves is the spraying along the highway and railroad beds. He believes much beauty is being destroyed by this method of keeping things tidy. “Which,” he asks, “would you rather see, green living foliage or old dead stuff?”

BARTLEY’S ’31 Ford has been so satisfying that he believes the automobile manufacturers should bring out a cheap model car. He thinks it would end our economic troubles.

Bartley’s friends are all enthusiastic about his becoming a contestant on the $64,000 Question program. Bartley himself takes a dim view of the idea. But maybe we are lucky in Pickaway County to have an authority right here who willingly answers our questions free of charge.

FLOYD BARTLEY — This Pickaway County naturalist takes a jaunt in his trusty Model A Ford, vintage 1931, almost every Sunday. When he went to Fort Hill he found this hepatica plant in bloom nearby. April is a good time for wild flowers Bartley says. He also found trout lilies, trillium, violets and spice bush in bloom.

(Photograph by Beaver Studio)