



# Winter Letterbox

## Welcome to the Winter Letterbox Adventure!

The adventure begins December 19. Are you ready to explore the parks in the winter?

Similar to our traditional Summer Letterbox Adventure, the clues guide you on a winter exploration of 8 different parks, but instead of a letterbox, you'll find a round sign with a single word.

The booklet is filled with clues that will help you find the Letterbox signs hidden in the parks and help you learn about how animals survive the winter.

Visit each park before **March 1** and follow the clues to find the letterbox sign in that park. **Write the word on each sign on the corresponding park page.**

### Claim Your Prize

Once you have discovered all 8 words, put them in the correct order and visit our Letterbox Adventure page on our website. Click the link and fill out the form with the correct phrase to receive the code to the lockbox at Gallant Farm. **Prizes will be available after Jan. 5. Prizes are limited and available on a first-come, first served basis until March 7.**

Winter Letterbox 2020-2021 ends February 28, so get out to the parks and start letterboxing!

Be sure to bring a writing tool along to record the Letterbox clue word.

## Park Rules and Information

Park rules are posted at [preservationparks.com](http://preservationparks.com), but here are some basic ones to follow:

- Stay on the trails unless a clue tells you to leave the trail.
- Take only pictures; leave only footprints.
- Leave natural features like pinecones, acorns, rocks, etc. in the parks.
- Dogs are allowed in all parks with the following exceptions: dogs are not allowed at Gallant Farm or Deer Haven Park. Dogs are only allowed on the gravel trail at Shale Hollow. Pets must be on a leash and you must clean up after them.
- Parks are open 8 a.m.- 7 p.m. every day, except Gallant Farm. Gallant Farm is OPEN ONLY Thursday through Sunday 12 p.m.- 5 p.m. during winter months, so please plan your visit accordingly. This information applies ONLY to Gallant Farm.
- Be sure to look for and take a picture of the kiosk map or look the maps up on your phone under [preservationparks.com/parks](http://preservationparks.com/parks).

### Safety (and Comfort) Tips:

- You might encounter wet, snowy, icy or muddy trails at times; wear appropriate foot gear. A park or trail might be closed temporarily for inclement weather, construction or other reasons; please check our Facebook page or website pop-up for updates.
- COVID-19 Precautions: Follow Delaware County Health District guidelines, stay six feet from others and masks must be worn inside restrooms.
- Be sure to dress for the weather, including dressing in layers, warm socks, gloves, hats, etc.
- Carry a cell phone with you.

To reach a park officer, call: 614-989-1972.

For questions about the Letterbox Adventure, call 740-524-8600, ext. 103

# BLUES CREEK PARK

9627 Fontanelle Road, Ostrander

**Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure.**  
**Stroller-friendly**

## Clue 1

Head from the parking lot onto the connector trail. Pass the shelters and the playground and veer to your right toward the pond.

This pond is available for catch and release fishing without a license. Even though it might not seem like it now, there are a lot of fish within the icy water. Fish are ectothermic (cold-blooded animals). This means their body temperature is dependent on the temperature of their environment. For the most part, the winter cold doesn't hurt the fish, just makes them slow down. Even if the body of water freezes, it typically is just the surface, trapping the amount of oxygen required to survive under the ice.

## Clue 2

Continue down the path along the pond and turn right onto the trail.

As you walk down the path, you will notice a mix of different plants. Small trees intertwined with grasses and wildflowers, along with shrubs all sharing the space. This is a successional habitat- changing plant community types over time. In this case, open space is eventually becoming a mature forest. This transitional habitat is important to wildlife. It's a great place to raise young, with the diverse food options provided by the different plants.

## Clue 3

The path will somewhat fork, stay to the left.

On your right hand side, you will see a wetland. Read the sign and look for the green nest box. This is for wood ducks. According to ODNR, these ducks are the second most numerous breeding duck in the state of Ohio, second only to the mallard. However, most people don't see this species very often. The reason for this is their secretive and shy behavior. The wood duck migrates south for the winter.

However, they arrive in late February - early March, when it can still be pretty cold out, but water is typically not frozen solid.

## Clue 4

Stay on the trail and enter the mature forest. Turn right when given the opportunity. Then turn left instead of going straight.

Large trees stand tall here, as well as many fallen trees along the path. However, a dead tree is still incredibly useful, just in different ways. As the log sits on the forest floor, it decomposes, providing nutrients to both the soil and invertebrates. These slugs, worms, grubs, and other insects then become food for other animals, a yummy buffet! Even in the winter, the log is still important. It provides shelter for these animals or their eggs, so the cycle can continue when the warmer weather returns.

## Clue 5

On your right, there will be a bench.

Behind the bench, there is a massive tree with bark that looks like it is peeling off. This is a shagbark hickory. The nuts are an important food source for a lot of wildlife and the bark itself becomes shelter for animals like tree-frogs and bats. The sign with the Letterbox word is next to this tree.

BLUES CREEK LETTERBOX WORD HERE

# CHAR-MAR RIDGE PARK

7740 Lewis Center Road, Westerville

Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure.  
Hilly graveled trail with stairs.

## Clue 1

Take the Glacier Ridge Trail into the woods. Cross the bridge near the natural play area. Scan the trees above you and notice holes in tree trunks, or clumps of leaves, twigs, and moss wedged in the branches.



Photo by Toshia Ridings

Hand-me downs, please. Squirrels do not hibernate, but they do spend much of the winter snuggled in tree cavities often carved by woodpeckers who have graciously left these hand-me-down holes. If tree cavities are scarce, squirrels will build cozy nests of twigs, leaves, and moss in tall trees.

## Clue 2

Walk to the top of the hill until the trail comes to a T, then turn right heading toward the wildlife viewing blind. Activity: Huddle up for a family hug. Can you feel the warmth of shared body heat?

### The Joy of Snuggling

It is common for several squirrels to share a den in winter. This allows more squirrels to take shelter and keep each other warm.

## Clue 3

When you arrive at the wildlife blind, climb the stairs and enjoy a few pleasant minutes watching animals on the pond and bird feeders. Savor the moment blocked from sight and chilly wind.



Photo by Shari Henry

Cash please, saving for later.

Through the warm season squirrels are busy storing stashes of food for colder times, a behavior called caching. Squirrels bury food in many shallow holes. They don't remember all their hiding spots, and in time, some of the forgotten seeds left behind will germinate and grow into shrubs and trees. A bank of future cash.

## Clue 4

Walk back down the stairs and look for the green property marker post on the opposite side of the trail from the blind. The Letterbox word is posted near that property marker. If you want to continue all around the loop trail, the distance is about 1 mile.

CHAR-MAR RIDGE LETTERBOX WORD HERE

# DEER HAVEN PARK

4183 Liberty Road, Delaware

**Dogs are NOT allowed on this adventure.**  
**Stroller-friendly.**

## Clue 1

Start at the Tree Swallow Trail heading into the woods past the Visitor Center.

Unfortunately this facility is currently closed due to COVID. However, you can typically meet our program ambassadors. We have several different animals, employed for educational purposes, including 10 turtles. The majority of the turtles we have on staff were rescued after being illegally taken from the wild for the purpose of becoming pets. Even good intentions of trying to help turtles by taking them home turn into big problems. Long life spans, expensive upkeep, and the overall size of the turtle make these reptiles difficult to properly care for. More importantly, once the turtle is removed from their habitat, they can no longer contribute to their population, which, in Ohio, is already on the decline. Do your part and keep wild turtles where they belong - in the wild!

## Clue 2

As you enter into the woods, keep on the gravel path. Follow the bend in the trail and look at the plants that surround you.

All the trees and leaf litter make this the perfect habitat for Ohio's one true terrestrial turtle. This land-dwelling turtle has claws and perfect forest floor camouflage. Eating things like worms, grubs, carrion, mushrooms, berries, and leafy greens, the woodland box turtle is an omnivore. Named for their amazing hinged shell that they can move, this turtle can go into their shell completely and close it up tight. During the winter, they dig underground and stay there until spring.

## Clue 3

Continue down the trail and veer toward the left.

On your right hand side, down the stairs, there is a creek. The water collected by this creek will eventually make it to the Olentangy River. The river is home to some really cool turtles, including the Eastern spiny soft-shelled turtle. They are extremely good swimmers that have adapted to life on the move. Most people have never seen these turtles since they spend the majority of their life under water.

Like flat pancakes, the shell is leathery, and underneath is fleshy, making them vulnerable. However, their very long neck, fast reflexes, and powerful bite makes up for the lack of a hard, protective shell. Burying into the sand and mud of the river bottom, this turtle tucks itself in during the cold months, requiring almost no oxygen in their dormant state.

## Clue 4

As you walk into the prairie habitat, the tall dead grasses and wildflowers are out in full sun. These open places with no shade or water don't make the best home for our turtles here in Ohio. The only time you will see a turtle in areas like this is if they are traveling through - going from one place to another or looking for a spot to lay eggs. You might think this would be a good spot for a tortoise to live. Hot in the summer, like a desert, however, we don't have any native tortoises in Ohio. All tortoises are turtles, but not all turtles are tortoises, and tortoises couldn't survive our winters.

## Clue 5

Loop back toward the visitor center by keeping to the left. Walk over the boardwalk.

When it is warm outside, you can see lots of painted turtles- some as small as a half-dollar! But where are those turtles now? They are still here, just going through brumation in the water. In this dormant state, their metabolism decreases tremendously, and they don't need to eat. However, their eggs, are almost ready to hatch. That's right! Painted turtles hatch from their egg in winter and stay underground until warmer weather. Potentially freezing, they can thaw out without any harm. Head to the second boardwalk and look in the water for your Letterbox word.

DEER HAVEN LETTERBOX WORD HERE

# EMILY TRAPHAGEN PARK

5094 Seldom Seen Road, Powell

Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure  
Stroller-friendly.

## Clue 1

Walk past the kiosk and restrooms towards the Whitetail Loop Trail.



Duet of the owls - Winter is an active time to listen for great horned owls who stay and guard their territory instead of migrating to warmer climates. When a pair of great horned owls hoot together in a duet, the female usually calls first and the male replies at a lower pitch.

## Clue 2

At the first intersection, continue heading straight.

A partner for life - When a male is interested in a female, he will flare his white feathers or bib and bow. If she bows and hoots back, they will become a pair. After this, it is believed that great horned owls will remain together for years or even the rest of their lives.

## Clue 3

Turn left onto the Overlook Trail and follow the trail to the pond.

Time is a blessing - The oldest wild great horned owl on record was at least 28 years old when it was found in Ohio in 2005. A resident great horned owl at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center lived to be at least 37 years old.

**Clue 4** Scan the pond in search of wildlife.



Parental Protection - great horned owls nest as early as January. Mother owls, with extra feathers on their feet, work to generate heat and incubate their eggs at 98°F. Two or three featherless owlets hatch in late February, relying on their parents for warmth and food until the end of summer.

## Clue 5

Search for the Letterbox word in this scenic area overlooking the pond.

Being able to not only survive the cold of winter, but also raise young in frigid temperatures, requires a lot of energy. Owls get this energy by eating- just about any other animal they can hunt. Small rodents, rabbits, squirrels, other owls, wild turkeys, and even skunks are all on the menu.

EMILY TRAPHAGEN LETTERBOX WORD HERE



# GALLANT FARM

2150 Buttermilk Hill Road, Delaware

Dogs are NOT allowed on this adventure.

Stroller friendly

Farm hours are Thursday - Sunday, 12 - 5 p.m.

## Clue 1

Once you reach Gallant Farm, follow the trail from the parking area toward the large white barn.



Unlike animals in the wild, domestic animals are dependent on humans to help them get through the long winter. Animals that live on a farm are called livestock. Here at Gallant Farm we have sheep and chickens. The barn makes a dry, cozy home for the sheep in winter.

## Clue 2

Look up at the peak of the east end of the big white barn (the side of the barn facing the parking lot).



Notice the small point of the roof that sticks out. Look closely and you'll see there is a door beneath it. This detail is called a hay hood, a crow's beak or even a turkey neck. This part of the roof protects a rail that runs the length of the barn. On the rail is a big metal claw called a hay hook or hay cradle. This is how hay is carried into

the hayloft in summer. Then on snowy winter days the farmer can throw piles of sweet, green hay down from the hayloft for the sheep to eat.

## Clue 3

Walk from the barn toward the farmhouse.

On your left you will see another white building. It is much smaller than the barn. This is the corncrib. This structure holds ears of corn that can be used to feed all the animals on the farm in winter. Chickens love to eat dried corn. Our flock of chickens live in the coop behind the farmhouse.

## Clue 4

Walk toward the house and around to the right until you see the chicken yard.

Chickens are important to a small farm. Not only do the humans help the chickens survive the winter by feeding them and making sure they have fresh water, but the eggs that the chickens provide help the farm family survive as well. The chickens are protected by the winter cold and from predators in their snug coop.

## Clue 5

Look for the small white building with a small moon on the door.

This is the farm outhouse. Before homes had indoor plumbing, this would have been where the family went to the bathroom. Can you imagine going outside in the cold of winter every time you had to go? Our outhouse holds your hidden Letterbox word.

GALLANT FARM LETTERBOX WORD HERE

# GALLANT WOODS PARK

2151 Buttermilk Hill Road, Delaware

**Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure**  
**Stroller friendly**

## Clue 1

To embark on this Letterbox Adventure, go through the smaller shelter. This is the Gateway Trailhead.

Follow the trail until you see the signpost for Gallant Farm. Look for an antler of a white-tailed deer tied to the post. Every year, male deer shed their antlers in the winter. There are a lot of deer in the state of Ohio, yet we don't see antlers littering the forest floor. Why?

## Clue 2

Take the trail to the left of the signpost.

Besides white-tailed deer, when we think of mammals in the woods, we often think of chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons and fox. However, there are many smaller critters who call the woods their home and scamper around, in and on the ground beneath the trees. These are mice, moles, voles and shrews. Antlers are a good source of calcium, phosphorus, mineral salts and even protein, helping them to survive the winter.

## Clue 3

When you come to the bench, take a seat and look straight ahead. This is the trail to follow.

Mice, moles, voles, and shrews find shelter in burrows, where it is warm and dry. Staying safe from the elements is important when trying to survive the winter. A burrow is also a place where they can store food like seeds and acorns, or tunnel from to hunt for worms and grubs.

## Clue 4

Now, walk toward the large tree at the bend of the trail. Look around the base of the white oak tree with moss-covered bark. Nestled in the leaf litter you should find another deer antler - this time with evidence of chew marks from these tiny mammals. Not only do these critters use the resources around them, but also extra fat and fur on their bodies help them during the cold months.

## Clue 5

Once you have located the antler, continue following the trail forward.

When you come to the sign of two hikers, you'll find the hidden Letterbox word! You'll also find a chart to learn even more about the small animals that call this area home.

GALLANT WOODS LETTERBOX WORD HERE

# HOGBACK RIDGE PARK

2656 Hogback Road, Sunbury

Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure.  
Not handicap accessible or stroller friendly due to stairs.

## Clue 1

Enter the Woodland Ridge Trail from the Nature Center deck.



Grateful for a warm coat? Deer fur has a special adaptation which helps them survive winter. Each hair on a deer's winter coat is hollow and traps air inside which is kept warm with body heat. The warm coat helps deer stay cozy. Look for deer tracks in the snow or frozen mud.

## Clue 2

Continue down the trail and turn left down the steps. Cross the ravine/creek and go up the other side. As you cross the creek, look and see if there is any water moving. Deer need to have a water source nearby for drinking. Deer are also really good swimmers.

## Clue 3

Follow the trail up the hill until you reach an intersection.



Photo by Cheshire  
County Conservation  
District

Snacks to share - Trees offer a mast of sacred food which deer rely on through winter. Mast is the botanical name for the nuts, seeds, buds, or fruit of trees and shrubs that are eaten by wildlife. Deer will stand on their hind legs to access winter apples, grateful for the needed calories. Acorns, rich in carbohydrates and fats, fall off oak trees in autumn and are still on the ground in winter. Deer will find them, and maybe you can too.



Photo by Chris Sharp

## Clue 4

Take the left side of the Pine Grove Trail and cross the driveway to follow the path. Remember to be safe and look both ways before crossing the roadway. Notice the deciduous trees begin to mix with pine trees.

## Clue 5

When you come to the bench, pause for a quiet minute to scan the deep ravine below. Do you see or hear animals?

## Clue 6

Continue along the trail and look for the Letterbox word posted just before you cross a small foot bridge.

Pine tree kindness - Deer like to rest and eat in stands of pine trees that maintain their needles in winter and allow snow to build up, thus providing some wind resistance and cover.

HOGBACK RIDGE LETTERBOX WORD HERE



# SHALE HOLLOW PARK

6320 Artesian Run, Lewis Center

**Leashed dogs are allowed on this adventure.**  
**Hilly graveled path.**

## Clue 1

Head toward the gravel parking lot and hop onto the Great Horned Owl Loop Trail. Turn right at the corner granite boulder instead of heading up the hill.

As you walk the trail through the woods, notice the trees that surround you. These deciduous plants have several tricks to survive the winter. In preparation for winter, they drop their leaves, entering into a dormant state. This means they can reserve their energy and focus on surviving the cold months ahead. Some trees produce more sap. When this sugar dissolves in the water, it lowers the water's freezing point acting like anti-freeze which prevents the water within their cell interiors from becoming frozen. Lastly, the bark on the outside of the tree, helps protect and insulate- almost like your jacket helps keep you warm. How many different kinds of bark can you see?

## Clue 2

As you enter into the prairie you will notice dead looking grasses and wildflowers as well as a blank open sky.



This habitat looks as though winter has erased all life. However, as you walk down the trail, look closely and you will see birds. Birds of prey, like red-tailed hawks are still active during this cold season. Soaring high, using their keen eyesight, they prey on mostly mammals. Small songbirds, like sparrows, can be seen pulling seeds from flower heads. Wild turkey moving from tree lot to tree lot picking up acorns, is a

possible sight. Some birds remain in Ohio during the winter because they can find food. Plus, their feathers help them regulate their body temperature.

## Clue 3

Continue down the path, as you enter into a patch of woods.

Here there are a lot of different of evergreens. These coniferous trees don't lose their needles like deciduous trees lose their leaves.

That's because needles are covered with a protective waxy substance called cutin. This prevents the small amount of water within the needle from freezing, which would kill the tree. Since the tree can keep its needles year-round, and needles can be constantly replaced, it continues to photosynthesize throughout the entire winter. Can you identify the different conifers along the path? Use the app iNaturalist to help you!

## Clue 4

As you enter into another open prairie space, notice a plant that has a somewhat fluffy top on it. This plant is goldenrod, and it dominates this area.

Goldenrod is a great fall blooming plant. Despite popular belief, the beautiful yellow flowers are not responsible for allergies. This plant's pollen doesn't travel in the air, instead by insects. Even now, there are signs of insects, you just have to look close enough. Goldenrod is used to house immature flies and wasps. The mother injects her egg(s) in the stem causing the stem to blow-up, making a bubble-like formation called a gall. Inside, the larva will remain until fully developed and then dig its way out in the spring. How many galls can you find?

## Clue 5

Enter back into the woods. Walk until you see some split rail fencing and turn right onto the path.

You will see a rock with a quote and a beautiful view of the creek winding through the forest. Can you see any active animals? Is the water frozen or is it flowing fast? Really take in the surroundings and listen to the forest. The Letterbox word will be in this area.

SHALE HOLLOW LETTERBOX WORD HERE