



Brown Family Environmental Center

# FIELD NOTES

## Up Close With Nature

Meet Ohio's birds of prey and other native animals at the BFEC's annual Keep it Wild! Earth Day Festival on Saturday, April 10. Attendees will see and learn about birds of prey from the Ohio Bird Sanctuary, wolves from the Ohio Canid Center and bugs from The Ohio State University's United Titanium Bug Zoo.

Additionally, the festival will include children's games and activities, food trucks, live music, and environmentally focused vendors and organizations. The festival begins at noon.

For a full listing of the BFEC's spring events, see page 6.



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# From Fear to Fascination: The Joys of Working with Children

BY CLAIRE HAYNES '23, BFEC POST-BACCALAUREATE FELLOW

Colder months bring a slower pace to BFEC operations, but this past winter was filled with trips off site and into our community. Several years ago, in partnership with United Way and several local elementary schools, the BFEC started participating in after-school programs. The BFEC's post-baccalaureate fellow has routinely visited three or four schools, teaching experiential lessons in and about

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*“Kids often offer me new ways of looking at nature, and their wonder and humor is infectious.”*

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nature to select children. I have been lucky to have the time and resources to continue the tradition this year. These outreach programs are unique to the BFEC in that we develop relationships with the same students throughout the year, and it brightens my day when I see them once or twice a month. The kids often offer me new ways of looking at nature, and their wonder and humor is infectious.

I appreciate these programs for the positive impact they have on the kids. Curiosity and a drive to interact with the natural world is an innate impulse for most kids, but sometimes they are taught from an early age that things are “gross” or unsafe.

Back in September, I brought our opossum skin (dried skin with fur, feet and tail) to one of the schools for a program about animal tracks. When I unveiled the skin, I was greeted with a few shrieks and exclamations of “Ew! Gross!” During that program, they never really warmed up to the opossum skin, but we talked a great deal about opossums — where they live and what they eat. Then, in February, something surprising happened when I brought the skin back to the school. Instead of screeches and cries of disgust, almost all of the kids reached out to touch the fur, curious about the odd tail and little feet, and telling me stories about opossums they have seen playing dead (we hope) on the side of the road.

The same thing has happened with other less desirable aspects of nature, like the spiders and snake skins I've shared with them. With time and familiarity, much of their fear turned into curiosity. In one recent activity, students dissected rotting logs for plant and animal decomposers. We found spiders, mosses and mushrooms, along with many other organisms. I truly enjoyed the simple pleasure of peeling away rotting bark as the younger kids shouted every time they found a new bug. The older kids, who had just learned about decomposition in school, were equally excited and eager to share what they had learned in class. Thankfully, no one was upset about the mess!

These outreach programs have injected a lot of life and excitement into my experiences at the BFEC. Watching fear melt away and turn into fascination has been incredibly satisfying. These programs will continue through spring. As the temperature rises, I hope to take advantage of the best tool in the environmental education toolbox: going outside!

## Joy of exploration

BFEC Post-Baccalaureate Fellow Claire Haynes '23 helps kids overcome their apprehension to study the natural world. In this recent project, students dissect rotting logs to learn about decomposition.



# What is that little white bird?

BY NOELLE JORDAN, BFEC MANAGER

**I am extremely lucky** to have an office with a lot of windows. Just outside these windows is one of our bird feeding stations. I have commented to many visitors how (delightedly) distracting the view is. Birds are constantly flitting from the fringe tree to the feeders and back to the tree. Some of the birds prefer to scrounge seeds that have fallen to the ground.

A few months ago, as I was standing at my desk, something white caught my eye. I looked up to see a small white bird on the ground at the base of the feeders. As I moved to get a closer look, it flew away. In the past few months, the bird has returned several times and most recently, I was able to snap a photo through the screened window.

At first, I thought it might be a finch. Perhaps it is. But upon closer examination, the body type looks more like a house sparrow than a finch. If anyone is able to identify it, please let me know! Anyway, I got curious about this discoloration, so I did a bit of research.

Starting with the basics, plumage coloration in birds is the result of either pigments in the feathers or structures that scatter light. There are three primary pigments: melanins, carotenoids and porphyrines. Melanins express as brown, gray or black. Carotenoids produce beautiful reds, oranges and yellows. Porphyrines give rise to pinks, reds, greens and browns. Blue and sometimes green, however, are usually the result of physical structures on the feathers that refract light. These physical structures also create iridescent colors (blue, green, pink, red) frequently found on hummingbirds.

Some coloration is amplified by the bird's diet. Pink is a great example of this. Flamingos and roseate spoonbills eat brine shrimp and blue-green algae, which are high in beta-carotene. These carotenoids are broken down and deposited in the skin and feathers of these birds, changing their plumage from gray (as juveniles) to bright pink.

Color abnormalities, or aberrations, occur when pigments are present or absent in unusual levels. There are six different types of color abnormalities, but I will focus on albinism, leucism, melanism and dilution. Albinism results from the complete lack of melanin in skin and feathers. In birds, the feathers and skin

will be completely white, and they will have tell-tale pink eyes. Leucism refers to a lack of melanin from all or part of the feathers and is the most common type of color abnormality in wild birds. Birds displaying leucism may have white spots, streaks or patches but will always have normally colored eyes and beaks. Melanism is caused by the presence of extra melanin that results in unusually dark coloration. And dilution is the overall decrease in pigments leading to a faded appearance.

Color abnormalities can result from genetic mutation, diet, age, disease, parasites or injury. According to the Cornell Ornithology Lab, color aberrations occur on a regular basis. Several bird species that commonly express leucism in the form of white patches include Canada goose, American crow, black capped chickadee, Juncos, common grackle and house sparrows.

The photo isn't great, but based on this information, which color abnormality do you think is being expressed in the white bird at the BFEC feeder?



Outside the window

**BFEC Manager Noelle Jordan snapped this photo through her office window screen of a little white bird before it flew away. Can you help identify it?**

# New Growth

BY SHANE MCGUIRE, BFEC LAND MANAGER/NATURALIST  
AND NOELLE JORDAN, BFEC MANAGER

We are excited to announce that the BFEC will be managing an additional 124 acres that was recently purchased by the Philander Chase Conservancy.

John Woollam, a graduate of Kenyon's Class of 1961, purchased the property at 17852 Yauger Road in April 2022 for the purposes of conserving the land and creating public space that would connect BFEC property to the south with Wolf Run Regional Park to the north. The conservancy then purchased the property from Woollam in December 2023 using grant funds from the Ohio Public Works Commission's Clean Ohio Fund Green Space Conservation Program.

This property, which now connects Knox County park property with the BFEC, results in a green corridor that is over 1,100 contiguous acres with more than 20 miles of hiking trails, creating even more opportunities for the public to explore and enjoy nature. The property is protected under a deed restriction that safeguards the conservation purposes of the property in perpetuity.

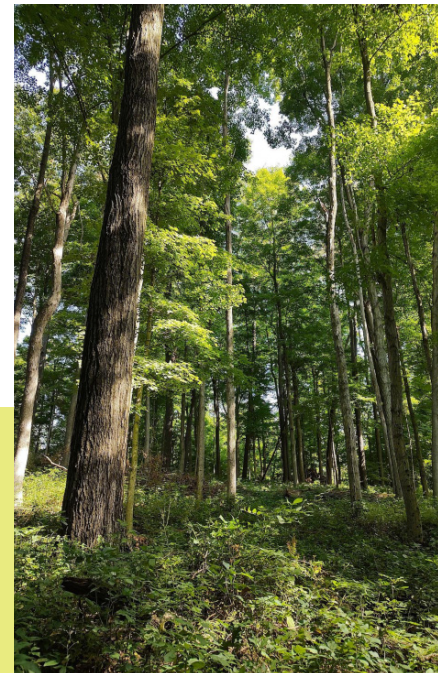
The property features beautiful woods with natural springs and 75 acres of what has been agricultural fields. This year, we will prepare the fields for an eventual prairie installation. We are

already working on invasive species removal in the wooded areas, and this fall, we will put in hiking trails and a small parking lot.

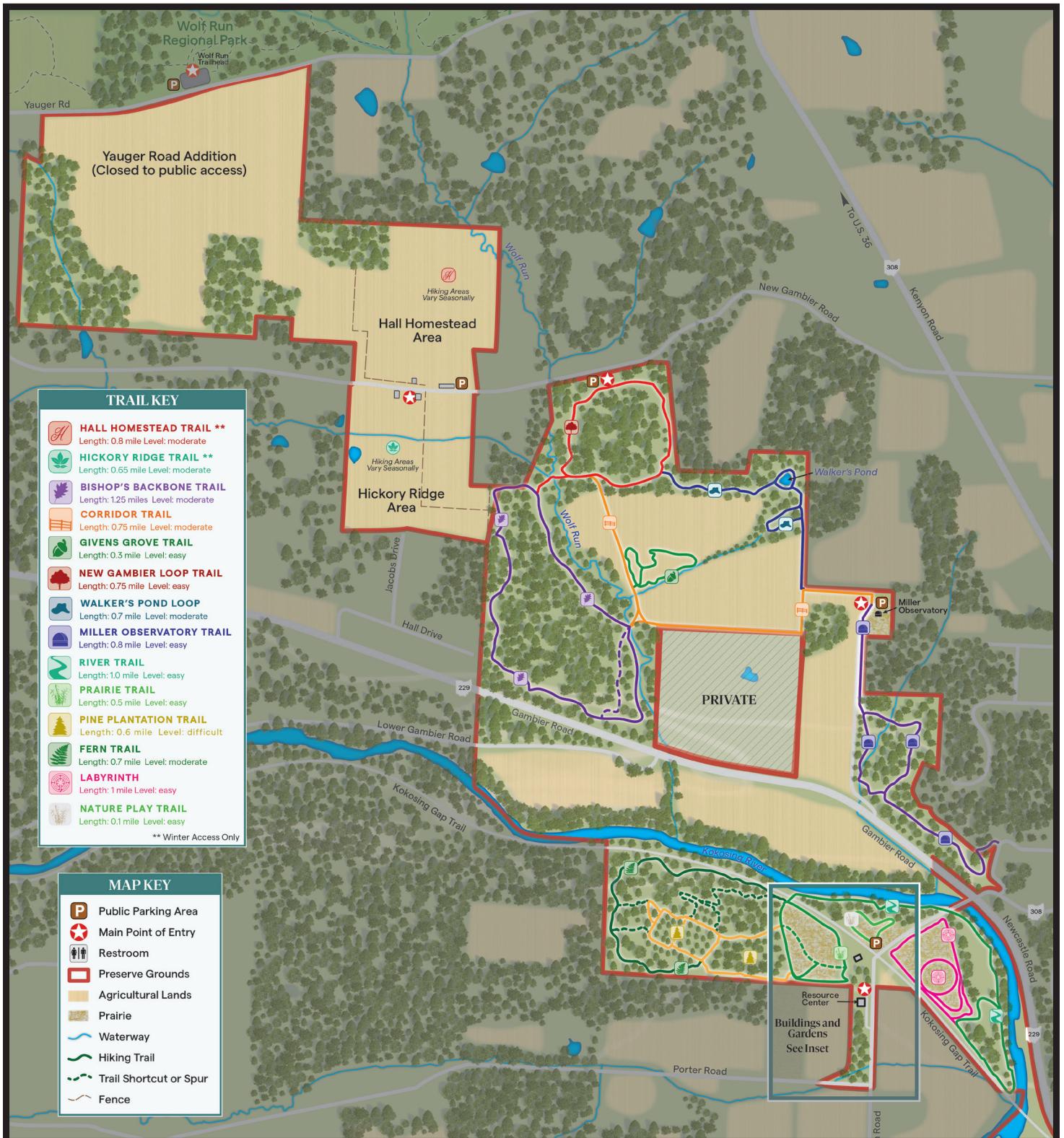
Davis Woodland Management LLC is removing the invasive plants in the woodland areas, focusing on privet, bush honeysuckle, Japanese barberry and tree of heaven. The removal of these species will encourage greater biodiversity in the forested areas.

After talking with multiple consultants, we have created a plan for transitioning the ag lands into prairie. Since the field was planted in corn last year, we will need to prep the area by planting a rye grass this spring. We will monitor the field very closely and eradicate any invasive plants that might grow. This fall, Ohio Prairie Nursery will plant the native grasses and wildflowers that will make up the prairie. Spring 2025 will be an exciting time as we watch the prairie grow. The first few years will require heavy monitoring to keep invasive species at bay.

Next spring or summer, we plan to officially open the area to the public with a ribbon cutting celebration in partnership with the Knox County Park District. For everyone's safety, we ask that you please wait patiently for our official announcement that the property is open.



**New views.** The 124-acre addition managed by the BFEC features woodlands with natural springs and 75 acres of agricultural fields that will be converted to native prairie. The map of the expanded facility (facing page) shows the Yauger Road addition at the upper left.



# Upcoming Programs and Events

## Solar Eclipse Viewing

MONDAY, APRIL 8, 1:30 – 5 P.M.

The BFEC will host guests for eclipse observation and provide eclipse glasses for safe viewing. We request that our guests wear their safety glasses at all times during the event. We will provide ongoing activities such as live streaming of the eclipse across the U.S., pre- and post-eclipse yoga sessions (sun salutations), traditional yard games, eclipse data collecting and solar/lunar crafting. Announcements at different stages of the eclipse will be made so that guests are aware of the happenings. Please bring something to sit on (blanket, towel), snacks/water and bug repellent. Baked goods will be available for purchase from the Happy Owl Mobile Bakery. *Activities will happen in and around the BFEC picnic shelter.*

## Himalayan Bowls and Chanting

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 10:30 A.M. AND 1:30 P.M.

Allan Bazzoli M.D. will offer the sounds of 18 Himalayan singing bowls combined with harmonic chants from different cultures to immerse you in a very relaxing, transcendent experience of vibration and sound. Bazzoli will chant a blend of Native American sounds, the OM chant (the universal chant), the Dragon chant and the Snow Mountain chant. Cost: \$20 adults. \$10 students. Reserve your spot: [schutte1@kenyon.edu](mailto:schutte1@kenyon.edu).

## Earth Day Festival

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, NOON – 4 P.M.

Join us for our Keep it Wild! Earth Day Festival at the BFEC. This year, we will feature wolves from the Ohio Canid Center, birds of prey from Ohio Bird Sanctuary and bugs from OSU's United Titanium Bug Zoo. This free family event will also include children's games and activities, food trucks, live music, and environmentally focused vendors and organizations.

## Wild Edibles Foraging Hike

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 1 P.M.

Common dandelions, reclusive wild leeks and stinging nettles — join Shawn Dailey P'24,25 to find and sample these edible plants and so much more. We will hike approximately 2.5 miles of hilly terrain. A wild foods tasting will follow the hike. Participants should bring a water bottle, hiking boots or other suitable footwear, appropriate outerwear for the weather, and most importantly, an adventurous spirit. No registration required. *Meet at the Miller Observatory parking lot.*

## Poetry Potluck

SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 2 – 4 P.M.

Join the Public Library of Mount Vernon and Knox County, the Kenyon Review, and the BFEC for a poetry reading and generative writing workshop with guest poet Cindy Ok. Snacks and journals provided. Free. *Meet in the Resource Center.*

## Yoga in the Garden

EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY,  
MAY 2 – SEPTEMBER 28, 12:10 – 12:55 P.M.

Use your lunch break to de-stress with an outdoor yoga class. Bring your kids, grandkids, friends and others. Free, and open to all ages. Bring your own mat or use ours. *Meet in the BFEC garden (behind the white house).*

## Family Nature Quest: Nature Play

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 10:30 A.M.

Spring has sprung! We'll kick off this spring's Family Nature Quest series by exploring the Nature Play Trail, engaging in unstructured play and reading a new picture book about our very own nature preserve. *Meet at the BFEC picnic shelter.*



**Singing bowls.** Allan Bazzoli M.D. brings his popular Himalayan Bowls and Chanting program back to the BFEC at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., Saturday, April 13.

## Guided Hike: The Hall Farm

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 11:00 A.M.

Join our staff for a guided hike of the north end of the Hall Farm. We will give guests a glimpse of the newest area that the BFEC is managing and offer information about our plans for this area. *Meet at the Hall Farm parking area on New Gambier Road.*

## Family Nature Quest: Life in the Leaf Litter

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 10:30 A.M.

Get your hands dirty, and explore the world of decomposers with us. We'll look under logs and search under leaves to investigate the lives of the critters and plants that facilitate the regeneration of our beautiful forests. *Meet at the BFEC picnic shelter.*

## Family Nature Quest: Build Your Own Terrarium

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 10:30 A.M.

Ecosystems come in all shapes and sizes. Did you know that plants in a jar can sustain themselves alone for years, maybe even indefinitely? In this program, families will make their own

mason jar terrariums while learning all about self-sufficient ecosystems and the water and nutrient cycles. *Meet at the picnic shelter.*

## Family Nature Quest: Creatures of the Kokosing

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 10:30 A.M.

From fish the size of your head to larvae smaller than your fingernail, the peaceful Kokosing River is home to more creatures than we can imagine. In this program, we'll take out our seine nets and snorkels to do some exploring. We will be in and out of the water, so please dress to get wet! Shoes are required. *Meet in the canoe access parking lot on the corner of Laymon Road and Route 229.*

## Guided Hike: The Kokosing River Trail

SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 11:00 A.M.

Join our staff for a guided hike along the Kokosing River Trail. We will look at the various characteristics of the Kokosing that make it one of Ohio's Scenic Rivers. *Meet at the BFEC picnic shelter.*

# Donors and Volunteers

WINTER 2024

Kenyon provides financial support to the BFEC, but the center has been able to grow largely through the generosity of our donors and volunteers. We are indebted to the following individuals, groups and businesses for recent donations of time, materials and funding. If you would like to make a gift or volunteer for a project, please call the BFEC at 740-427-5050.

### BENEFACTOR

Kathleen A. Dean-Ridenour  
Margo deCamp and Joe Marietta  
Peter G. Glassman, in memory of Jonathan E. Hartmann  
Buffy and Bob Hallinan  
Ray and Pat Heithaus  
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### STUDENT

Suzanne Crowe  
Linda Hahn  
Anna Lee and John Lillig  
William S. Lipscomb II  
Sarah Spiegler  
Zachary Weber

### VOLUNTEERS

This past quarter, our dedicated volunteers removed invasive species and worked on bluebird house maintenance projects. Thank you so much! (Unless otherwise indicated, volunteers are Kenyon students):

Jim Featherstone, *community member*  
Julius Gabelberger  
Josh Greville

# Brown Family Environmental Center

## Kenyon

kenyon.edu/bfec | 740-427-5050



BROWN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER | 9781 LAYMON ROAD | GAMBIER, OH 43022-9623

### OUR MISSION

The Brown Family Environmental Center exists to support the academic goals of Kenyon College, to provide opportunities for education and research, to engage Central Ohioans of all ages with nature, and to conserve the natural diversity of the Kokosing River valley.

### OUR STAFF

Claire Haynes '23, *Post-Baccalaureate Fellow*

Bonnie Schutte, *Administrative Assistant*

Shane McGuire, *Land Manager Naturalist*

Noelle Jordan, *Manager*

# Help Us Grow

TO MAKE A GIFT, PLEASE FILL OUT THE INFORMATION BELOW, DETACH THE SHEET AND SEE MAILING INSTRUCTIONS.

There are many reasons to give, including the satisfaction of knowing you're a part of critical environmental education and conservation programs. Receive preferred access to workshops, a hard copy of our newsletters, and a discount on bird seed. **Use the form below to send your contribution today.**

name (first, middle, last)

address

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Your donation is tax deductible as allowed by law. The Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

#### Membership level:

- Student \$20    Individual \$35    Family \$50  
 Friend \$100    Patron \$250    Benefactor \$1000+

#### Amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

- My check, payable to Kenyon College, is enclosed  
 Please bill my \_\_\_ Visa or \_\_\_ Mastercard  
Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:** BFEC, P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022