



Field Notes



KNOX COUNTY'S WILD REPTILES (& AMPHIBIANS)!

The fertile fields, rich woodlands, and scenic waterways of Knox County not only offer a great opportunity for recreation, but also a great chance to observe a variety of wildlife. From rare birds, to even rarer amphibians, from fish to the ever present White-tailed Deer, many important plants and animals call Knox County's diverse habitats home- including many species of reptiles and amphibians. Although many people may be frightened at the sight of a slithering snake or a slimy salamander, they are all valuable parts of an intricate web that creates this wonderful and diverse natural landscape that you can explore.

AMAZING AMPHIBIANS

Included among these diverse creatures is the Wood Frog, *Lithobates sylvatica*. The earliest frog to breed in Ohio. Its low, chuckling call, similar to a quacking duck, can be heard from late February to early April if conditions are right. Wood Frogs often breed only one or two nights per year, disappearing quickly back to the forest and leaving only their large, gelatinous egg masses behind on the floors of vernal pools and shallow, fishless ponds.

Wood Frogs can be identified by their smooth, slimy tan skin, and a distinctive "bandit" or "raccoon" mask around their eyes.

Another amazing amphibian that lurks beneath large flat rocks in swift moving portions of our very own Kokosing River is one of the world's largest salamanders, the Eastern Hellbender, *Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*. Hellbenders are listed as a state endangered species due to pollution and loss of habitat and should be never be intentionally harassed. The largest Salamander in Ohio, it can reach lengths of up to 27 inches. They feed mostly on crayfish, but will also eat insects, small frogs and minnows. While Hellbenders do have lungs, much of their oxygen is absorbed through loose wrinkles along their sides. They breed in late August and September, females laying as many as 500 eggs in a nest excavated by the male, who then fertilizes the freshly laid eggs. If an Eastern Hellbender is spotted or caught while fishing, it should be released immediately, and you should report your sighting to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife.

SLITHERING SNAKES

Many species of snake call Knox County home, including the Eastern Gartersnake, *Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*, a common sight in woodpiles and yards across all of Ohio. The Gartersnake feeds mostly on invertebrates such as earthworms and grubs, but will occasionally venture into the water in search of small fish or frogs. Identified by two yellow lines along their side, the Gartersnake is a stout, quick snake that will often disappear into leaf debris or vegetation shortly after it is spotted. These snakes give live birth, and can often be seen basking on roads, bike paths and logs. They reach an average length of 22", and are completely harmless to humans. Gartersnakes are very attractive, and offer a great opportunity for photographs in the wild.

Another very misunderstood snake that makes its home in barns, woodlots, and fertile farm fields is the Eastern Milk Snake, *Lampropeltis triangulum*. Named because of a folk legend that they use to drink the milk of livestock by night, Milk Snakes are actually member of a larger group of snakes known as King Snakes. Milk Snakes and King Snakes will feed on rats, mice, eggs, and young birds, but often prefer another food source all together: other snakes.

Continued page 2

INSIDE...

On the Ground: Givens' Grove.....	page 3	Nature Photography Contest.....	page 4
Family Adventure Days.....	page 5	New Arrivals at the BFEC, Pt. 2.....	page 5

They are identified by a series of “checkerboard” splotches along their belly, and by richly colored rectangular splotches along their back that come in many colors from red-brown to a deep gray. Reaching a length of up to 36”, they are, like the Gartersnake, harmless to humans, but may “rattle”, or vibrate the very tip of their tail in order to scare predators and humans when encountered. The Eastern Milk Snake is often misidentified as a Copperhead, *Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen*, when encountered in the wild. Northern Copperheads were historically distributed throughout unglaciated Ohio as far north as Knox County, but no recent records exist, and it is very unlikely that any still inhabit the area due to habitat fragmentation and farming.

TURTLES ON LAND AND IN WATER

The Eastern Box Turtle, *Terrapene carolina carolina*, is a common sight along roadways and paths throughout Ohio and Knox County. Their high domed shell (or Carapace), large brown eyes, and slow moving demeanor make them a valuable part of Ohio’s diverse wildlife. Box Turtles often spend their days in shaded woodlands where they eat mostly inverte-

brates such as earth worms, as well as berries, fungus, and other vegetation. Although a heavy summer rain can bring Box Turtles out in large quantities, the turtle’s numbers are declining due to habitat loss and the likelihood of being struck by a car while meandering across the road. If you should encounter a Box Turtle on the road, it is very important that you (safely) move it just across the road in the direction it was heading. This is because Box Turtles have a very small *home range*, and will not be able to locate food supplies if displaced. Additionally there is a possibility that a wayward turtle could

infect another population of box turtles with a pathogen they might otherwise have been separated from.

Unlike the unassuming, quirky Box Turtle, the Snapping Turtle, *Cheylydra serpentina*, is Ohio’s largest turtle. Slow moving on land, yet swift in water, the Snapping Turtle lives in almost any body of water with enough food to sustain it. Often found lumbering across roads in the late spring, Snapping Turtles can reach up to 35lbs and be as large as 18” across. Once valued for meat, “turtle-hunting” is less practiced now and these animals should be admired for their prehistoric demeanor. Stories of Snapping Turtles breaking through broomsticks are often exaggerated, although they can inflict a painful bite with their large beak and powerful jaws. Their neck can reach to the middle of their shell, so it is important to admire these animals with a camera or at a safe distance.

Regardless of the fear and stigma attached to many reptiles and some amphibians, it is important that we realize that they make up a vast web of diversity, that we too are a part of, and they should be appreciated and protected.



Many species of reptiles and amphibians are misunderstood, and in need of protection, such as the Eastern Hellbender pictured above, and the Snapping Turtle below.



On the Ground

by Facility Manager David Heithaus

As Ohio's seasonal roller-coaster begins another string of corkscrews and steeply-banked turns on its way into fall, here at the BFEC we're pumping our fists in the air and screaming maniacally of late-season productivity. The hidden camera pictures should be of good value.

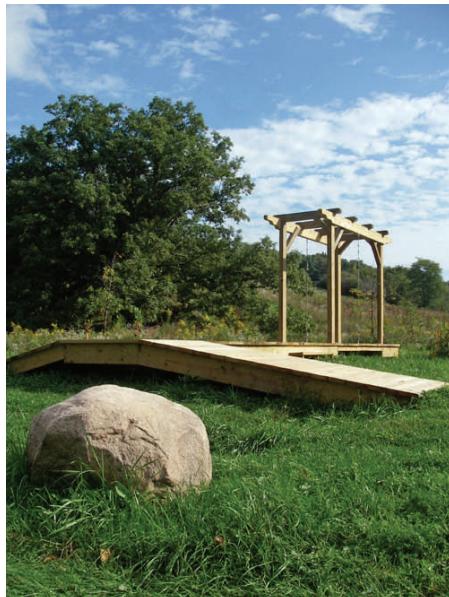
Our biggest fall news on the management front: the near-completion and October 7th dedication of the Givens' Grove restoration area. Yes, we've been blubbering about it for some time now, but the summer has been good to us and 'The Grove' has finally taken shape... at least so far as a shape that will mature over the next hundred years or so. When designing with things leafy and rooted, much of the wonder comes as the imagination is drawn towards the future. As one stands on the boardwalk beneath the big white oak, surveying the swamp whites and bald cypress scattered around in the tall grass, it's easy to become transfixed by the images conjured in mind's eye.

If you haven't visited the grove during the construction phase, you're in for a treat on your next walk from New Gambier Road or the Observatory. Of the several thousand trees planted in the ~9-acre project area, many of the oaks and sycamores are starting to stretch out above the field and a close inspection shows a good number of black walnuts and hickories fast on their heels.

A feature that will require less searching through the brush is the new boardwalk. Allowing four-season access to the Grove's higher elevations, our boardwalk extends from the original fence-line over 100 ft to the base of the big white oak. A small platform positioned near the wettest section of the bottomland encourages quiet, seated reflection on the Grove and Wolf Run Wetland which spread peacefully out towards the eastern edge of the

Bishop's Backbone forest. Should be an amazing view this fall! While you visit, keep your eyes open for the resident Red Tailed hawk as well as deer, red fox, migrating birds and perhaps even coyote. If you're lucky, you may even spot the owl that has been using the boardwalk pergola as a place for quiet digestion.

So now that it's just about ready to grow, what does the future hold for Givens' Grove? From a management perspective, we would like to focus on this area as a priority for exotic inva-



The boardwalk at Given's Grove allows year-round access to the wettest section of the meadow and the exquisite views from the hillside beyond.

sive plant management. As many have perceived on the hillside leading to the pine plantation we've allowed scrub to return with the hope that the multiflora rose will shield the 3000+ oaks from deer browsing. In Givens' Grove, we'll be taking a more vigilant approach. There, we'll be favoring treatment and removal over tolerance and the long goodbye we hope the oaks to the south will provide as they grow to shade out their nursery shrubs. While the multiflora might be susceptible to

this extremely slow sucker punch, concerns are rising over invasive exotic shrubs that seem more persistent and much worse at sharing ground. At present, both buckthorn and olive are leading our thinking towards a more active role in the southern plantation. To avoid this kind of 20-20 hindsight in our newest restoration area, we will maintain the majority of the Grove during the dry season with a scheduled mowing regimen. Following one more fall-winter-spring rotation, the trees ought to be established enough to withstand a nominal amount of deer browsing and no longer require a thorny alien invader to hide behind. In sections of the project area that are already wooded, hand removal and treatment will be necessary. Working with volunteer groups and Kenyon's student conservation group, the Land Lords, we hope to keep invasive plants in check where heavier equipment is not practical or safe to use.

From a successional perspective, we look forward to seeing how the grove matures both hydrologically and ecologically. As an area that seems to be increasingly incorporated into the wetland, it will be interesting to see how water moves seasonally through the area and what types of plant/animal assemblages take up residence while the oaks and cypress make their way slowly towards the sky. By the time their canopy forms, a number of different species may come and go from the area. Once it has matured... some time from now... one could expect to see a number of fascinating creatures from the microscopic to the majestic. The oaks alone, as we have mentioned, harbor myriad life forms in their leaves and branches. Below them, new species and those only seen in other parts of the preserve will inevitably make their way into cypress pools and shaded hillside understory.

As the founding management director of the Philander Chase Corporation,

Continued on page 7



Knox County Nature Photography Contest

Submission Deadline: Monday, October 10

All community members are invited to enter this contest in celebration of our scenic Knox County.

People's choice voting and winners announced at the Oct. 15 Fall Harvest Festival. **Prizes awarded in** Children's (ages 5-15) & Adult Divisions.

Contest Rules

- Photos must be delivered by October 10 to the BFEC Resource Center at 9781 Laymon Road, Gambier. Entry forms will be available and photos may be dropped-off anytime in the building breeze-way. Participants may also request forms and mail submissions.
- A \$5 entry fee is required for each participant.
- Please restrict entries to those depicting Knox County nature. Photos may include rural landscapes as long as natural elements are focal points. Participants need not be Knox County residents.
- Photos must be matted or mounted on mat board or foam core. No framed entries will be accepted.
- There is no minimum photo size, although 8x10" is suggested. Maximum photo size is 14" in any dimension, and 16" for mats.
- No more than 3 photos per entry. No composite digital photos, please.



Adopt-a-Bench! Check the box below to have a bench placed at a BFEC trail location of your choice with a plaque honoring your special contribution.

Support the BFEC

Membership is based on the calendar year - now is the time to become a member or renew!

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 popular workshops, a hard copy of our newsletters, and 10% discount on bird seed. Please use the form below or payment envelope to send your contribution today, and thanks!

Membership level: Student ____ \$20 Individual ____ \$35 Name _____

Family ____ \$50 Friend ____ \$100 Patron ____ \$250 Address _____

Benefactor ____ \$1000 + City _____

Amount enclosed: _____ State, zip code _____

My check, payable to Kenyon College, is enclosed

Please bill my ____ Visa or ____ MasterCard

Card number _____ Exp. date _____

Yes! I've enclosed a special gift of \$250 to have a bench placed along a BFEC trail of my choice, along with a plaque recognizing my contribution.

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

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

NEWS from the BROWN

FAMILY ADVENTURE DAYS



The Brown Family Environmental Center is excited to offer a selection of new activities to showcase the BFEC's commitment to community and Kenyon families on the first and third weekend every month. Our new *Family Adventure Day* series will feature a variety of activities geared towards getting families together and outside to learn about the natural wonders of Ohio and Knox County. These activities include a river exploration day focusing on the exciting inhabitants of the Kokosing, a pond exploration, mammals, and a Snake display at the Fall Harvest Festival on October 15th. During our Family Adventure days, parents and kids get a chance to explore the BFEC Resource Center, interact with live animals, ask questions and "chat with a naturalist", try their hand at a craft and even participate in a family scavenger hunt along the river-banks, trails, and ponds of the BFEC. The 'multiuse' room is also being slowly converted into a

sort of mini-nature center with interpretive displays and resources for Nature Exploration. So far, Family Adventure Days have been a huge success and can be expected to expand while offering new activities. We hope not only to provide the community a chance to experience all of the wonderful resources the BFEC has to offer, but to give the BFEC a chance to better fulfill the role of an accessible resource for nature education and outdoor recreation for adults and children alike. So stop by and discover new and exciting things, browse our extensive Nature Library, borrow a pair of binoculars and enjoy the fall migrating birds! Ask questions and explore!

BFEC WELCOMES NEW BABIES (AGAIN) & STAFF

The BFEC would like to welcome new staff member John Hickenbottom as BFEC Program Assistant. John started in mid-August, and is excited (his words) to be part of the BFEC. As a naturalist, John has worked for a variety of organizations including both State and Columbus Metro parks. He will be handling BFEC programs, activities and School Field Trips while Program Manager Heather Doherty is on maternity leave. Already, John's contributions have been extensive and appreciated. We're looking forward to basking in the glow of his successes over the coming year. That's what you get when you set the bar high, John. Speaking of setting the bar high, we are missing Heather who we picture frolicking at home with her second child, baby Eliza. Born September 7th and weighing in at a formidable 9lbs. Eliza's skill set includes being darling, sleeping well, eating and grant writing.



Stop by and say "hello" to John during the week or on the weekend during one of our new Family Adventure Days and catch Eliza (if you're lucky) at our Fall harvest festival!

Calendar of Events

All events are free, open to the public, and start from the BFEC Resource Center at 9781 Laymon Road unless stated otherwise.
For additional information, contact us at 740-427-5050, dohertyh@kenyon.edu, or visit <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>

Knox County Nature Photography Contest - Deadline: October 10.

See page 4 for contest information.

Fall Sky Astronomy - Friday, October 14, 8pm.

Bring a blanket or chair and admire the season's constellations and mythology with Kenyon Professor of Humanities. Call the BFEC in the event of inclement weather for event status.

Fall Harvest Festival - Saturday, October 15, 2-5pm.

Celebrate the season with this FREE family event. Activities include wagon rides, live music, kids harvest races, farm animals and produce, wool spinning demo, bonfire, cider press, pumpkin decorating with OSU Extension Master Gardeners, and the Knox County Nature Photography Contest Show.

The Mudman Triple – Saturday & Sunday, October 29-30.

Ohio's most unusual trail racing series will challenge you with a nighttime time trial, a 5k super steeplechase featuring "The Gauntlet", and a 10k cross-country run. And if the mud doesn't get you, the hills will! Do one, two, or all three races to earn the coveted "Mudman Triple". Registration available at www.premierraces.com.

Wooly Bear Wisdom - November 6, 2pm.

Take a hike to explore for hungry caterpillars busy searching for food and shelter before winter comes. We'll also look for unusual butterflies that continue to fly on cooler fall days.

Night Hike - Wednesday, November 16, 7pm.

Join the BFEC for a night time adventure! Listen, touch, see, and smell the nocturnal world on a hike around the BFEC. Dress for chilly weather, flashlights are strongly discouraged.

Buds & Bark Winter Tree Hike – Saturday, December 3, 2pm.

Get to know Ohio's trees during winter by their buds and bark on a brisk hike.

Christmas Bird Count - Sunday, December 18

Join the BFEC to participate in the longest running citizen science project in the world! For over 100 years the Audubon Society has been organizing the Christmas Bird Count, which now boasts 50,000 volunteers and nearly 2,000 counts every year. Count data have been instrumental in showing long term trends like the decline or recovery of bird species.

The BFEC is the host of a count covering portions of Knox County that fall within a 15 mile radius of Mt. Vernon (including Gambier, Apple Valley, and Fredericktown). Participants may count the numbers and species of birds seen at their home feeders, or count in the field along roads and trails. All participants will be invited to gather at the center for lunch. Please call to register.



Miller Observatory Open House - Last Fridays.

Paula Turner, Kenyon Professor of Physics, hosts an open house on last Fridays of the month. The open house will start at 9pm in October and 8pm in November (and through winter months). Please note that there will be **no open house in December**. Please dress warmly. The open house will be cancelled in cloudy weather. Contact Paula with questions at turnerp@kenyon.edu. Directions: From Mt. Vernon, follow S.R. 229/Gambier St. east 4 miles. About $\frac{1}{4}$ mile before reaching the S.R. 308 / Laymon Road junction, turn left at observatory sign onto access drive.

Thank You to...

Our Members July - September 2011

BENEFATOR

Charles & Phoebe Davidson

FRIEND

Geoffrey & Lori Brown
Eben Crawford
Byron Thomas & Rebecca Reimbold

FAMILY

Brian Miller
Laura Whalen

INDIVIDUAL

Margaret M. Raasch

Our Volunteers

In the office, classroom, gardens and on the trails: Jane Cosby, Doug McClarnen, Stephen Raithel, Kenyon Pre-Orientation service volunteers.

Summer Camp Counselors: Liz Doernhoefer, Sarah Fowler, Colter Hoar, Willa Kerkhoff, Kate Klessner, Joey Montoya, & Jenni Rogan.

Our Donors

Field trip Scholarship Fund Donors

Katie Patt & Tyler Meier
Joanne & James Gibson

Doug Givens oversaw the preservation of over 4000 acres of land in the vicinity of the Kenyon College. Thanks to his work, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and members of the board of the Philander Chase Corporation, generations of visitors to the BFEC will be able to observe the untrammeled ecological comings and goings on one small gem of that massive contribution.

Speaking of untrammelled, the BFEC has been upgraded in a big orange way with the addition of a Kubota RTV 900X to the motor pool. What is an RTV X-hundred, you ask? Well, *ahem*, an RTV 900X is what happens when you fuse utility, performance and versatility and weld that mash of mechanical magnificence to ATV tires with a blend of molten magma and awesome. Throw in a hydraulic bed lift, winch, work lights, two cup-holders and a headrest and then drive it around with buttery-responsive hydrostatic power steering... That's an RTV 900X.

In all seriousness though, our ability to move around the preserve and carry out management tasks will be greatly



The RTV-900X, making life in the dirt shinier... and sexier.

improved with this utility vehicle. Narrow and agile, it can go where trucks cannot and carry almost as much in terms of tools and materials.

It can be configured to play the role of mower, snow plow or troop (volunteer) carrier; a statement our beloved Ford would have trouble making with a straight face. Additionally the 3-cylinder diesel engine allows for much greater fuel economy and the possibility of alternative fuel investigations down the line. Simply put: it will go more places, faster with less impact on resources and the environment. We are truly grateful for this bit of all-terrain good fortune. Off to rub it down again with armorall and a diaper... but before I sign off to do so...

Stop. Drop the newsletter and go outside, please. If you don't look at it, you can't like it and if you don't like it, it might not be there some distant tomorrow. The crisp fall air beckons! Go! Shew! Enjoy it while you can. Huddle in with the (winter) newsletter next time, when we'll feature more from John and an rollout of the latest results of the interpretive plan. Until then, enjoy the uncharacteristically muddy ground.

Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College

9781 Laymon Road, Gambier, Ohio 43022 ~ (740) 427-5050 ~ <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>



Our Mission

The BFEC at Kenyon College exists to engage Central Ohioans of all ages with nature, and to support the goals of Kenyon College by conserving the natural diversity of the Kokosing River valley and providing opportunities for education and research.

Co - Executive Directors

E. Raymond Heithaus, *Jordan Professor of Environmental Studies & Biology*
Siobhan Fennessy, *Associate Professor of Biology*

Facility Manager

David Heithaus

Program Manager

Heather Doherty

Facility & Program Assistant

Jill Kerkhoff

Upcoming Events

Monday	Oct. 10th	Photo Contest Deadline
Friday	Oct. 14th	Fall Sky Astronomy
Saturday	Oct. 15th	Fall Harvest Festival & Photo Show
Saturday	Nov. 6th	Wooly Bear Wisdom
Sunday	Dec. 18	Christmas Bird Count

Details inside & at <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>

Fall Harvest Festival

Saturday, October 15, 2-5pm

wagon rides ~ live music ~ bonfire
pumpkin decorating ~ cider press
kids games ~ photo contest
& "people's choice" voting
FREE!



CONTAINS DATED MATERIAL
DATE MAILED: October, 2011

P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022
Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College



