



When it comes to natural resources, Knox Countians are lucky.

Residents take pride in their beautiful, rolling landscape. The State Scenic Kokosing River winds through the hills with shimmering vitality. Access to enjoy the scenery by foot, boat, or bicycle is fairly available. And on an average day, you might just see a bald eagle.

Only 20% of Ohio counties have medium-to-high bald eagles populations, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), and Knox County is one of them. But they do occur throughout the state, and in increasing numbers that were hard to fathom even ten years ago.

ON THE BRINK & BACK

Most of us are familiar with the story of DDT, a farm pesticide that trickled from fields into rivers with rain runoff, and contaminated the fish that are bald eagles' favorite food.

Many birds became sterile or produced eggs with fragile shells. A low point in the population was in hit in 1963, when just over 400 pairs remained in the U.S.

DDT was banned in 1979, and although trace amounts remain, the concentration slowly subsided. Governments also stepped in to help.

The bald eagle gained protection under the federal Endangered Species

Act in 1976. In Ohio, repopulation efforts were made by placing eaglets from zoos in the nests of parents with non-viable eggs. ODNR radio-tagged birds, which provided information on movement and habitat needs.

From a 1979 low of just four bald eagle pairs in Ohio, more than fifty pairs were recorded in 1999. Ten years later, that number quadrupled to over two hundred.

With almost 10,000 pairs recorded nationwide, the bird was removed from the federal endangered species list in 2007, though it remains a "threatened" species in Ohio.

GOT WATER?

With a wingspan of seven feet, white head and tail feathers, and fierce yellow eyes, bald eagles are striking.

They are found in every state in the U.S., though they are most numerous in Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, the Upper Great Lakes, and Florida.

All of these areas have the large bodies of water, where bald eagles hunt for fish with large, outstretched talons.

Water also helps explain their presence in Knox County,

where they live along the Kokosing and Mohican Rivers, Knox Lake reservoir, and quarries. (The public docks at Knox Lake are a good viewing spot).

In Ohio, counties bordering Lake Erie have the highest bald eagles populations, especially in the marshes and forested wetlands of the lake's western border.

The presence of mature forests and large trees are another reason bald eagles are common in Knox County. A typical bald eagle nest is three to six feet in height and depth - not a job for a scrawny tree.

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Photo courtesy of Ray Heithaus

BALD EAGLES

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BALD EAGLE BRIEF

Ohio Population Low: 4 pairs (1979)

Ohio Population High: 215 pairs (2009)

National Population: 9,789 pairs

Knox County Population: 5 nesting pairs

Weight: 10 pounds (a little more than a gallon of milk)

Wing span: 7 feet

Diet: fish, but also small mammals, birds, carrion

Life Expectancy: 15-20 years

Reproductive Age: Five years. Juvenile birds lack white head and tail feathers.

Migration: Reside year-around in Ohio, though they may head south to find open water during cold weather.

Call: not as fierce as the bird looks; high and chirpy.

Largest recorded nest: Vermillion, Ohio

Weighing 2 tons and measuring 12' deep and 8.5' wide, it was used for 35 consecutive years (by different pairs) before it fell in a storm in 1925.

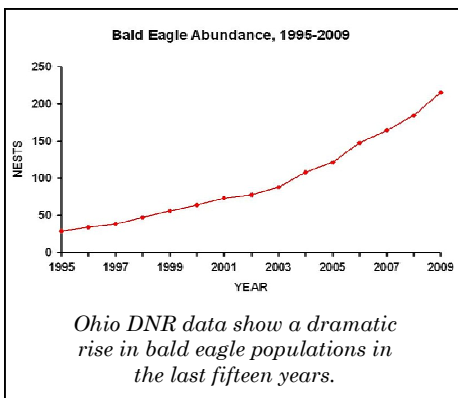


Is it an Eagle?

Bald eagles can soar *very* high in the sky, and lacking binoculars, it may be hard to tell a bald eagle from a turkey vulture. This is especially tricky with juvenile eagles, who lack white head and tail feathers.

In the winter, chances are better that that the giant brown bird you spotted was, in fact, a bald eagle, since most turkey vultures migrate and eagles generally do not.

Here's another a hint: bald eagles are slightly larger, and hold their wings flat while soaring (pictured left above), while turkey vultures hold wings in a "v" shape. Turkey vultures also have a red head, though if you're close enough to see the color, you probably won't need our hints.



It is part of our good fortune to have old, protected forests along the Kokosing River and elsewhere that offer this habitat. (We're also fortunate to have many industrious people and agencies in the community who have worked to protect habitat and public access).

According to John Minard, who voluntarily monitors our bald eagle population and reports numbers to ODNR, we currently have four or five nesting pairs in the county and many juveniles.

With a four-fold population increase in the last ten years, have eagles regained their historic population levels, or even surpassed them?

That question is hard to answer due to lack of historical data. It has been estimated, though, that there were millions of bald eagles in North America before European settlement, and they were "common" in Ohio when settlers arrived (according to www.ohiohistorycentral.org).

Their numbers declined as forests were cut down, though populations

were stable when the DDT hit the scene with catastrophic effects.

Regardless of whether they have regained historic numbers, two other human influences may be contributing to their current population boom.

The first is the spread of quarries and reservoirs. Much more open water habitat exists in Ohio now and through much of the U.S. than ever before. Two of the Knox County eagle nests are located near man-made bodies of water - Knox Lake and a private quarry next to the Kokosing River.

Another more recent phenomena is the enormous population of deer in Ohio. Populations have exploded in Ohio, which now offers great habitat for deer and lacks major historical predators (like wolves). While eagles

On the Ground

by Facility Manager David Heithaus

Ah, the winter newsletter or, as I like to call it, the year's most informative kindling-in-waiting.

There's a question at the BFEC even more common than wintery mix around the turn of the semester: "*you guys slow down over there this time of year?*" The answer is generally mumbled after some shuffling and has been occasionally referred to as "defensive".

Well, not this year! This year we're trumpeting a decisive "*No, Sir (or Madam) we're PLANNING!*" Thus far, blank staring has been the nominal conclusion to the conversation. That's not enough to shake our resolve though, because this winter we're locking ourselves in the Resource Center and we're not coming out until we've planned ourselves blue in the face.

We're planning so hard that even the A-Team would be shamed by our flaming, concussive spring eruption onto the natural history scene. I'm telling you, Mr. T himself, driving a pimped out panel van with a bulldozer blade welded to the front of it, has nothing on what our plans will yield come spring.

What exactly *are* we planning? You'll just have to wait and see... (but here's a clue: more to see and learn at the BFEC without getting your shoes sopping muddy). So what's the deal then? If not to delight with details of the mind-shattering dream-storming we're engaged in? Well... let's stick to the season.

Here we are in 2011. No world peace, no cheap interplanetary travel, no hoverboards, no sweeping global agreements on really anything beyond the McRib being delicious. What *do* we have then?

Well the McRib has come and gone so

I suppose we're left with... *potential*. For many, the first step towards realizing that potential on a personal level comes in the form of a *resolution*. Of the New Year's variety this time of year.



Queen Anne's lace tightly clutches its seeds in a shape sometimes referred to as a "bird's nest." There's plenty to see outside in winter when you give yourself the time to quietly observe.

Unfortunately, these poor decrees and prohibitions are often abandoned after only a few weeks... or days. Doomed from the start one might say, many common resolutions aim to control some petty behavioral manifestation of a mortal sin.

What they fail to consider is that the list of mortal sins reads much like a to-do list for evolutionary success (see: lust, greed, gluttony, pride, wrath... envy, touch of sloth). For most species anyway.

So how about settling for a simple reset this year? One thing you'll do. Once. No proclamations, no long-term commitments, no fighting your inner cavewoman- none of those things that set up *potential* like an unreliable bear trap in a rock tumbler.

Here's the idea: give yourself about an hour. One hour. You'll have about 8,765 others this year so one probably won't go all that missed- especially if it's well spent... which is kind of the point I'm making.

Okay. Pack up your hour and head outside (you knew this was coming). Find a place that's near enough that you won't spend all 60 minutes getting there but not so near that you can still hear the TV.

Ideally, this place will be somewhere the works of man are out of both eye and earshot. If that's not practical with your allotted hour... just do your best. You're going to need at least 15 minutes once you reach your destination.

You're there. No sirens; no screaming kids. Now close your eyes and take a deep breath. Note the place around you mingling with that air you're borrowing. Open your eyes. Stand or sit down and quietly observe for 15 minutes.

That's it.

Leave your thoughts in the back of your head and simply, quietly watch what's happening around you when you're not trying to influence it (physicists, please keep any speeches treating on quantum particles, wave function collapses or the impossibility of truly unobtrusive observation to yourselves).

If you've lived in a rural area with white tailed deer for any period of time, chances are you know a bow hunter. There are two things that experience has taught me about these men and women: bow hunters love to talk bow hunting and bow hunters are happier and more relaxed during bow season.

The thing that always strikes me about the former is how many of

... Eagles, continued from page 2

don't hunt deer, they do eat dead animals, or carrion, hit by cars or bullets. This food source is especially important in the winter time when fishing grounds freeze.

While eating carrion may not fit an idealized image of our national symbol, it certainly indicates something that we do admire: resourcefulness.

The next time you're at the BFEC, keep an eye on the Kokosing River as it runs through the preserve. Sighting a bald eagle soaring above the river may be more common than it used to be, but it still feels lucky.

...Ground, continued from page 3

their stories involve flora and fauna that aren't deer and how few of their stories actually wind up with an arrow in something.

Sure, they say there's a visceral excitement to watching and waiting for that perfect shot on some record-busting buck but the vast majority of the time bow hunters spend hunting is spent watching things other than deer. And they have to be still and quiet while they're doing it.

The peace and quiet of sitting alone in the forest combined with the fascinating experience of watching wildlife doing what wildlife does when it doesn't know it's being watched is rewarding, relaxing and addictive.

So much so that I've known hunters to sit in their tree stands for hours without even bringing a bow.

So go out and sit down for awhile. Heck- get a tree stand of your own and hang out with a pair of binoculars. You might find the experience of being the unseen top of the food chain rewarding- even if you end the day with a granola bar.

Want to add to your outdoor adventure? Here's an extra suggestion: Learn in great detail about one plant or animal that you might encounter in your area- make observing it a theme for an excursion. Try not to pick anything overly nocturnal or deadly.



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 your membership for 2011!

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
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 _____
- 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.

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

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



NEWS from the BROWN

FEBRUARY PHENOM



Though it sounds unappealing, skunk cabbage is a fascinating plant. For some it is a cause for joy, being the very first plant of the year to bloom, quite miraculously, in late February. Looking very little like a typical flower, it emerges from forested wetlands cloaked by a wine-colored, pointed hood (called a “spathe”). The frozen ground is of no concern to skunk cabbage, which is one of a very few plants that can produce its own heat, raising the temperature around it by 36 degrees. This trick takes a terrific amount of energy, and lasts for only two weeks while the plant is in bloom. It may have originated to disperse the bloom’s aroma and attract pollinating insects like flies and bees. (The smell is noticeable but not overwhelming). After blooming, a rosette of leaves slowly unwraps (similarly to a garden hosta) and can reach 3’-4’, carpeting the wetland floor. The foliage dies back by late summer, leaving little evidence of the February Phenom. ***Experience skunk cabbage in action on February 26th!*** See our calendar on page 6.

FEED THE BIRDS, ONE “WEED” AT A TIME

On grey winter afternoons, seeing a bird visit your backyard feeder can be uplifting. Something outside *lives!* And incredibly, *survives* the cold! We enjoy feeding the birds at the BFEC, and encourage you to take a winter outing to observe them here or purchase our birdseed to fill your own feeders. But without us (since we do occasionally go on vacation), what do the birds eat? Most of our winter birds are seed eaters, which they find from many plants that are often considered weeds. Goldenrod is a good example. Brilliant yellow and humming with bees and butterflies in August, its seeds provide bird nutrition in winter. (Look for tiny bird tracks in the snow around the plant, like those pictured here.) Interestingly, many of the native plants that attract butterflies in the summer also offer winter bird food, including asters, coreopsis, black-eyed susan, iron weed, purple coneflower, and joy pye weed. Add these plants to your garden from some year-around multi-tasking and lively wildlife watching.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT TOPS 13,000



With the help of 53 volunteers, the BFEC took part in the 108th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 19th. Volunteer took to the streets, trails, and living room windows to count birds through much of central Knox County. The results: 13,560 birds representing 76 species! If this sounds like a lot of birds - it is; the number is well over the 10,000 birds seen during last year’s count. The most often seen bird was the Canada Goose, with over 5,000 individuals. Some birds can be fickle, showing up on count day in some years and not others, especially if Knox County is on the edge of their winter range. Two birds in this group that were spotted this year were the hermit thrush and the snow bunting (pictured left). While seeing unusual birds is fun, the CBC is also very important in taking the pulse of common birds, and its 100 years of data have been instrumental and pointing out declining or recovering species. Thank you to our many volunteers who make it possible!

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>

Winter Sunset + Moon Rise Hike – Tuesday, January 18th, 5:30pm

Take a brisk 1.5 mile hike on steep terrain and be rewarded (should the skies cooperate) with a fantastic view of the full moon rising over the Kokosing River valley. Please wear sturdy hiking shoes and dress for cold temperatures.



Where the Snow Birds Live:

Neotropical Migrants of Costa Rica

Thursday, February 3rd, 7:00pm

Enjoy the tropics vicariously with a slideshow about the wintering grounds of some of Ohio's song birds. Kenyon Jordan Professor of Environmental Science & Biology and BFEC Co-director Ray Heithaus will share some of his beautiful photography and research experience in Costa Rica, including how conservation efforts there and in the states are affecting these long-distance migrants. *Pictured here: Blue-winged Warblers nest at the BFEC but winter in Costa Rica.*

Skunked Times Two - Saturday, Feb. 26th, 11am. New Gambier trailhead

Late February is a busy time for two Ohio natives: skunks, well known for their fearsome musky spray, and the lesser known skunk cabbage. Both defy common sense by emerging while the rest of the world is still frozen to start a new year of odoriferous love. Take a hike to learn why and look for evidence of both (though we won't get too close!). **Directions** to BFEC New Gambier trailhead: From BFEC, turn left onto Laymon Rd. Cross 229 and proceed up steep hill. Turn left onto Route 308 / Chase Ave. After about 1 mile, turn left onto New Gambier Rd. Parking lot is on left.

9th Annual Bluebird Workshop - Sunday, March 6th, 1:00pm

Once imperiled, bluebirds are now gracing our meadows in greater numbers. Learn about these brilliant birds and build your own bluebird nesting box with Dale Glass, Knox County coordinator of the Ohio Bluebird Society, and Mel Bolt. Workshop fee is \$10. Space is limited, R.S.V.P. required at 740-427-5052.

Owls of Ohio – Wednesday, March 23rd, 7:30pm

Join our night adventure to seek and call for two species of owls that can be seen and heard in the Kokosing valley. Former Metro Park Chief Naturalist Gary Moore will begin with images, legends and lore of the surprising variety of owls that inhabit Ohio. Then we'll hit the nocturnal trail for a short hike with stops to use recorded calls and entice owls to call or come our way.

Earth Day Festival & Earth Day Challenge Marathon

Sunday, April 17, 11am-3pm, Kenyon Athletic Center. The Festival is a FREE family event that focuses on keeping ourselves and our world healthy - two goals that go hand-in-hand! Features will include exhibitors and vendors of green and healthy products and resources, farmers market and petting zoo, door prizes, music, and hands-on activities for people of all ages. The marathon will start and conclude at the same location - help cheer on runners as they finish! **Marathon registration** available at <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>.

Miller Observatory Open House - last Fridays

Kenyon's Miller Observatory hosts an open house on last Fridays of the month with Paula Turner, Kenyon College Associate Professor of Physics. The open house will start at 8pm in January and February, and 9pm in March (and through warmer months). Please dress warmly, and note that 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 approximately four miles. About ¼ mile before reaching the S.R. 308 / Laymon Road junction, look for the observatory sign and turn left onto an asphalt access road. Follow the road to the top of the hill and park in front of observatory.

Thank You to...

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Norman & Glenda Kravetz
David Newell

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Apple Valley Garden Club in honor of Guy Denny
Jane Cosby
Judith Fisher in memory of Laurence Rhoads
James Tornes

*Is your name
missing from this list?*

Now is the time to become a member or renew your membership for 2011! Membership to the BFEC is good for one calendar year. See page 4 for more information.

Our Donors

Donors honoring the wedding of Charles Davidson & Phoebe Brokaw

Our Volunteers

In the office, classroom, gardens and on the trails: Jane Cosby, Tim Shutt, Kenyon Land Lords, Kenyon "Day of Service" volunteers, Circle K, and Archons.

Field Trip Volunteers: thank you to nearly 50 volunteers who helped make field trips for elementary students last fall possible!

Mudman Triple: Kenyon Wellness, Kathy & Chris Gillen, Pat Heithaus

Harvest Festival: MVHS Environmental Club (Nick Baker, Moriah Cormiere, Renee DuMont, Danielle Godby, Alexis Grose, Darrin Kinsman, Sierra Powell, Zach Statler, Taylor Strack, & Cana Yost), Kerkhoff Family, Master Gardeners, and Circle K.

Halloween Legends Lantern Tour: many volunteers and actors of the Mount Vernon Players; Amy Goepfinger, Susanna Byrd, Andrew Gibson, Kelly Heilman, Leland Hold-

comb, Kate Klessner, Nick Laudeman, and Ben & Kay Locke.

Christmas Bird Count: Thank you to the 53 individuals who participated this year! We are blessed to have too many to thank here.

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

January 18	Winter Sunset + Moon Rise Hike
February 3	Where the Snow Birds Live: Neotropical Migrants of Costa Rica
February 26	Skunked Times Two
March 6	9th Annual Bluebird Workshop
March 23	Owls of Ohio
April 17	Earth Day Festival & Earth Day Challenge Marathon

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

DATE MAILED: January, 2011
CONTAINS DATED MATERIAL

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at Kenyon College
P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022



