



Brown Family Environmental Center

FIELD NOTES



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Bald Eagles at the BFEC

BY JADA SWEARINGEN '24, BFEC POST-BACCALAUREATE FELLOW

One morning during my sophomore year at Kenyon, I was running along the Kokosing Gap Trail (the bike path that crosses BFEC property) by the Kokosing River when the extraordinary happened. My vision was focused dead center on the smooth path ahead, but on a whim, I briefly scanned my surroundings. It was then, out of my peripheral vision, I saw a flash of white. I stopped immediately just in time to see a bald eagle dive into the Kokosing, catch a fish in its talons, then fly off to disappear gracefully into the trees. If I had to guess, this all took place in just a few seconds.

When I reflect back upon what I saw, I feel guilty. During my run, the blurred colors of nature shifted past my eyes as I barely heeded their beauty. It's all the same, and I've already seen this before. But in mere seconds, I observed a spectacle that

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enthralled my senses in a way that I will never forget. If I hadn't taken my eyes away from the path, I would have missed it, still thinking, "It's all the same, and I've seen all of this before."

Fast forward to June of this year. As the new post-baccalaureate fellow at the BFEC, I read "A Sense of Wonder" by Rachel Carson. This short book reinforced the vital lesson I learned when I was a sophomore: to keep my curiosity toward nature alive and never take nature for granted. I can visit the same park or observe the same plant many times over, but I may find new and interesting things each time, if I pay attention.

As my senior year at Kenyon came to a close, I met up with my friend Jeremy, who often takes long hikes out in nature and could watch flowing streams of water for hours in fascination. We walked a few miles along the Kokosing Gap Trail and stopped at an area with several tall sycamore trees in the distance. I would have kept walking, for at the time, my observation skills were rather dull. But then Jeremy told me to look closely at the dotted blobs that were scattered throughout the trees. After we peered for some time in silence, a bald eagle made its way toward us while flying in loops and giving a high-pitched shriek.

Unlike me during my first Kenyon encounter with a bald eagle, Jeremy was able to record the special event. I still look back on it from time to time and have shown my friends and family so they can share in my experience of awe and fascination. Once again, it felt as though Mother Nature was rewarding us for taking time to stop and appreciate her wonders.

The bald eagle has been the national bird of the United States since 1782 due to its majestic and bold appearance. And this bird has a fascinating story of resilience. After World War II, DDT was hailed as a revolutionary insecticide and was used on a massive scale. Almost too late, we discovered that DDT causes significant impairment to bald eagle reproduction. When ingested, the insecticide causes the thinning of offspring eggshells. In 1963, bald eagle populations had plummeted 99% compared to two centuries earlier.

Another book by Rachel Carson, "Silent Spring," brought dramatic changes for bald eagle conservation. Carson's efforts almost single-handedly forced DDT to be banned in 1972 after this book raised awareness on DDT's lethality toward wildlife and human health. Despite initially receiving much pushback, Carson refused to be silenced. It very well may be that her passionate stubbornness was the kindling that allowed bald eagles to endure.

Bald eagles are incredibly intelligent birds, and I find their cartwheel displays fascinating. These displays can occur between rivals who interlock their talons to defend a territory, but they can also occur during a pair bonding experience. Two eagles will clasp their talons together during a trust fall and then break just before hitting the ground. This confirms their nesting mate. It sounds gallantly poetic, but it's quite dangerous. Eagles can be severely injured or die if their partner fails to unclasp their talons at the right time. Once they have confirmed their mate, which is often for life, the parents of offspring will equally split their responsibilities of hunting for food and guarding the nest.

During your visits to the BFEC (or any green space), I hope you will take Rachel Carson's advice and never take nature for granted. Thrilling experiences, like my bald eagle encounters, await all of us. If we open our eyes and fully lend our ears to the natural world, we may experience a deep sense of gratitude, belonging and revitalization.

Photo: James Hurt



Guarding the nest
Bald eagles often mate for life, with mates equally splitting parental responsibilities.

"Bald eagles are incredibly intelligent birds, and I find their cartwheel displays fascinating. ... It sounds gallantly poetic, but it's quite dangerous."

A Few Trees at the BFEC

BY NOELLE JORDAN, DIRECTOR OF THE BFEC AND KENYON FARM

Claire Haynes '23, our 2023-24 post-baccalaureate fellow, left us on May 31 by design. The fellowship position is a 12-month appointment for a Kenyon graduate. After spending the summer with her family, Claire, as a recipient of the prestigious Fulbright Fellowship, will spend a year (maybe two) teaching in Taiwan.

Claire worked until the bitter end on May 31 on her major project for the year, an online identification guide for a few of the

trees planted near the BFEC garden area. Her work will eventually be available to visitors as we mark our trees with QR codes that will link to information about each tree.

Read on for a sampling of Claire's work identifying two trees found at the BFEC — the red mulberry and the river birch.

RED MULBERRY (*MORUS RUBRA*)

A red mulberry tree grows near the replicate ponds, and more red mulberries can be found along edges and fencerows throughout the BFEC. In the wild, the red mulberry tends to be an understory tree. These trees are usually dioecious, which means that male and female flowers grow on separate trees. This is why some trees don't bear fruit.

Red mulberries are valuable in the United States, mainly because they are easily damaged during shipping. However, they freeze well. Mulberry fruit can be a nuisance in cities, where it litters sidewalks and produces a pungent smell, but there is no better way to attract birds.

Unripe red mulberry fruit should not be eaten. Along with the bark and raw shoots, it contains hallucinogens that can result in agitation and extreme digestive issues.

In the 18th century, after noting the prevalence of red mulberry in eastern forests, American colonists wanted to establish a silk trade in North America. White mulberry was imported to the United States after the discovery that silkworms exclusively feed on its leaves, and not the red mulberry. Hopes for a silkworm industry failed in the 1840s with high labor costs and

failure of mulberry plantations. However, white mulberry stayed, and has become an invasive species. The white mulberry has pushed red mulberry out and, when in close proximity, often hybridizes with red mulberry.

Though difficult to distinguish from the white mulberry, the easiest way is through the leaves. White mulberry leaves are often smaller, and they are smooth and somewhat glossy rather than rough on top. The non-native white mulberry also tends to be smaller in size, and the bark along the roots and the inner bark of the main stem are typically bright orange.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

RIVER BIRCH (*BETULA NIGRA*)

The easiest river birch to locate at the BFEC is in our Wildlife Garden, on the north edge.

This tree prefers river floodplains and stream banks and is considered the only semi-aquatic birch species. While the river birch prefers wet soils, it will also grow on higher ground and is frequently planted outside of its preferred location due to its ornamental value. In its preferred soil, river birch is fast-growing, averaging one and a half to three feet of growth per year. Due to its strong root system and ability to tolerate highly acidic soil, the river birch has been used to restore old strip-mining sites.

The bottomland habitat of the river birch is ideal for wildlife, providing food and cover for many species, including nesting sites for the waterfowl. Several bird species, such as ruffed grouse and wild turkey, eat river birch seeds. Hummingbirds consume its sap, and white-tailed deer graze its saplings and low-hanging branches.

The river birch hosts larvae of many butterfly and moth species, including the mourning cloak butterfly, birch dagger moth and red-fringed emerald moth.

Essential oils derived from the leaves, inner bark, and buds of river birch have antibacterial, insecticidal, and nematocidal properties. The sap of the river birch can be boiled down into a sweetener that is thicker than maple syrup.

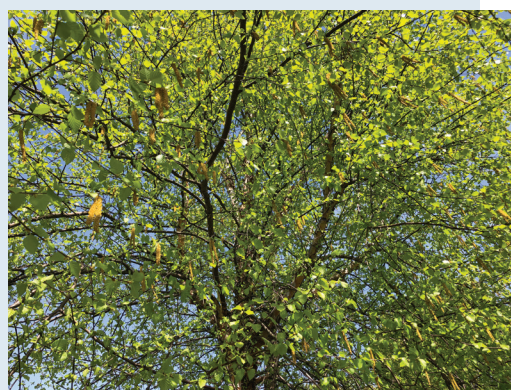


Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Recent Happenings at BFEC

BY NOELLE JORDAN, DIRECTOR OF THE BFEC AND KENYON FARM

I'm fully back! Now that my stint as interim director for Kenyon's Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) is over, I'm fully focused on the BFEC once again, and I will also provide oversight for the 10-acre Kenyon Farm. As interim director of OCP, I led a small but mighty team that connects Kenyon to the wider Knox County community through community-engaged learning classes, internship opportunities, volunteerism, the Rural Life Initiative and student/faculty research that directly benefits organizations in Knox County. I've passed the baton to Julie Brodie, who took the helm in July.

Here's what's been happening recently at the BFEC.

- Bobcats have been sighted at the Hall Farm area of BFEC, or perhaps the same bobcat has been sighted twice. No photographs have been captured, but we hope to have proof soon enough.
- We have been working closely with the Philander Chase Conservancy as we start to take on the management of a new 125-acre parcel that we unimaginatively refer to as the Yauger Road property. About 80 acres of that parcel were in agriculture, and we are in the process of converting it into prairie. It has been seeded with cereal rye for the summer, but the seeds of prairie grasses and wildflowers will be scattered late this fall. We are in the process of de-
- signing the trail system, which will be opened to the public in summer 2025.
- Construction of a roundabout at the intersection that leads to the BFEC has created an interesting challenge for Shane McGuire and our summer crew. Getting to northern portions of the BFEC property requires long detours. It's eating up a bit of their time, but they are managing. Hopefully, construction will be complete by December.
- Bonnie Schutte, our administrative assistant, has created some engaging, self-guided activities for children and families to learn about birds, prairie plants, and more

this summer. Stop in the Resource Center from 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday to pick up instructions and have a fun morning exploring.

- This is the second summer for our gardener, Terri Hieronimus. She has been working hard to incorporate more native plants in our Wildlife Garden. Native plant nurseries, like Natives in Harmony, have been a tremendous help!
- Jada Swearingen '24 has replaced Claire Haynes '23 as our post-baccalaureate fellow. Jada started on June 3 and has already created and led several family programs this summer.



Native Gardens
More native plants are growing in the Wildlife Garden thanks to an ongoing effort spearheaded by Terri Hieronimus, the BFEC gardener.



Where Are They Now?

BY NOELLE JORDAN, DIRECTOR OF THE BFEC AND KENYON FARM

Summer is when we say “goodbye” and “hello” at the BFEC, as one post-baccalaureate fellow leaves and another begins. As Jada Swearingen '24 settles in as our new PBF (as we affectionately call them), I have been reminiscing about the six former PDFs who we have sent out into the world. I reached out to them to see what they have been up to. In the next few newsletter editions, I will be recounting their accomplishments since leaving the BFEC.

The post-baccalaureate fellowship position was created in 2018 with a generous donation from the Brown family. It is designed to hire a Kenyon graduate for a 12-month appointment, from June through May of the following year. During those 12 months, the PBF focuses on programming and event planning but also spends a healthy dollop of time on the property working with our land manager and gardener.

MADDIE MORGAN '18 2018-29

Maddie Morgan had the distinction of filling the role for the first time in 2018-19. She helped us understand what was really possible for this position. When she left the BFEC, she moved to Boston to be closer to her family. Here's what she had to say:

After leaving the BFEC, I worked as the director of programs at the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network. I organized our annual conference, awards ceremony, and meetings across the state of nonprofits of all shapes and sizes. I also worked with business partners and sponsors to support those events and connect them with nonprofits.

I'm now the community engagement and operations manager at Friends of the Middlesex Fells. The Fells is a 2,200-acre state park about five miles north of Boston. We support the state park agency by wrangling volunteers to remove invasive plants, pick up trash, collect park data, maintain trails, advocate on behalf of the park, and more! In my role, I lead our volunteer recruitment and engagement efforts. We also host many free guided hikes led by our volunteers whom I coordinate. I also do a lot of our communications work, manage our membership, and maintain the office space and inventory. Lots of hats as always in the nonprofit space.

Outside of work, I rock climb, bike, try to get back into running with a persistent injury (boo), and participate in fun social recreational sports leagues around Boston! We've played

volleyball, basketball, kick-ball, softball, flag football, frisbee and even dodgeball. Crazy what we'll do to make friends as adults! A few friends and I recently picked up line dancing and are really enjoying that. I'll also be going on a few backpacking and camping trips this summer with a few day hikes to the White Mountains in New Hampshire sprinkled in there.



I throw them in quickly, mentoring them to design and lead Family Nature Quest programs in July. Then they dive into working with faculty to engage classes on the property while planning the Fall Harvest Festival, teaching elementary field trips, and designing and teaching after-school programs. They receive a brief respite during December, only to start all over again for the spring semester. Throughout all of this, they work with the land manager to learn the arc of activities necessary to maintain all-season trails and to manage the property for biodiversity while learning the names of the plants and animals of central Ohio.

Each PBF has brought their own strengths and talents to the position and has left their mark on the BFEC.

MIA FOX '19 2019-20

Mia Fox was next in the lineup and was the lucky person to get us through the pandemic's initial lockdown. After a very successful summer, fall and winter, we were both stymied by the lockdown and how we might make the most of it. She and I found creative ways to pivot, and we laughed a lot. At the end of her appointment, she moved to Philadelphia for grad school. Here's what she is up to now:

I am currently working at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, based in Philadelphia. After completing my master's in environmental studies, I found myself as a tree specialist, focusing on volunteer education, field work, and urban forestry in Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties. Every year we help our volunteer groups plant 6,000+ plus trees across the spring and fall.

When we aren't hosting tree distributions, I'm putting my BFEC post-bacc skills to the test through youth education and identifying birds, bats, and the like around the city.

Last year, our fall distribution event featured a visit from the Phillie Phanatic, and I got to dance with him!



Upcoming Programs and Events

Blue Skies and Rainbows

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 10:30 A.M.

In this program, we will make our own rainbows and observe how and why we see such vibrant colors in our environment. Though the colors of the rainbow are a beautiful sight, the science behind them reflects the importance of Earth's atmosphere. Suitable for grades 3-6. *Meet at the picnic pavilion.*

Himalayan Bowls and Chanting

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 10:30 A.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. *To reserve your spot, contact schutte1@kenyon.edu.*

"Un" Urban Sketchers at the BFEC: Intro + Gouache Opaque Color

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 5-7 P.M.

Join us for BFEC's take on the urban sketchers movement (on-location drawing, usually in urban settings) — but in the beautiful setting of the BFEC grounds, hence "un"urban sketchers. This is the perfect class to get started or fine-tune your plein-air (in the open air) painting skills. Materials are provided. This class focuses on intro and gouche opaque color, runs rain or shine and meets at the picnic shelter. *Teens and adults, please register for a spot by contacting schutte1@kenyon.edu.*

Geology Rocks! Fossils, geodes and more

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 10:30 A.M.

Rocks are all around us. We use them to build, we step on them every day, and we even ... eat some of them? We will learn about the formation of sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic rocks, and will also discuss gemstones, fossils, and lava. We will break open geodes to discover what is inside! Suitable for grades 3-6. *Meet at the picnic pavilion.*

The Prehistoric Cultures of Knox County

SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 1 P.M.

Learn about the Paleolithic peoples who lived in Knox County. The presentation will be followed by a display of authentic artifacts, including clovis points and arrowheads, that have been found in Knox County. Presented by the Kokosing Chapter of the Archeological Society of Ohio. *Meet at the picnic shelter.*

Flower Hammering

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 10:30 A.M.

Inspired by the work of Carly Glovinski, The Gund's inaugural summer fellow at The Annex, join us at the Brown Family Environmental Center for a flower hammering workshop. Similar to flower pressing, flower hammering is another way of preserving blooms. By hammering the petals onto paper or fabric, the bright pigments become beautiful works of art. *Meet at the picnic pavilion.*



Enjoy all the BFEC has to offer as summer turns to fall. Learn about the prehistoric peoples of Ohio, turn flowers into beautiful works of art, or simply enjoy the trails on a summer hike.

Donors and Volunteers

SPRING 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.

VOLUNTEERS

This past quarter, our dedicated volunteers removed invasive species, monitored our bluebird trail, led elementary field trips, staffed our Earth Day event, and so much more. Collectively, they volunteered over 200 hours. WOW! Thank you so much. Unless otherwise indicated, our volunteers are Kenyon students:

Kait Alaimo, *MVHS student*
 Catelin Bromfield
 Lynne Bush
 Madeleine Campbell
 Ellis Copley
 Damaris Darkwah
 Owen Edelson
 Jim Featherstone,
community member
 Julius/Sophi Gabelberger
 Audrey Gibson
 Cam Gambre
 Sala Glandon
 Josh Greville
 Julia Harrington
 Paul Helser, *community member*
 Tommy Hillmer
 Madeline Lawler
 Mollie Leist
 Saffron Martin,
MVHS student
 Chelsea Menke,
community member
 Libby Musolino
 Vivian Noble,
MVHS student
 Olufemi Odiah,
MVHS student
 Lilly Percy
 Sarah Goslee-Reed,
community member
 Larry Reed,
community member
 Caeley Shea
 Madison Ann Thomson
 Yaell Urrunaga

BENEFACTORS

Allan Bazzoli M.D.
 Geoffrey and Lori Brown
 Kathleen Dean-Ridenour
 Margo deCamp and
 Joe Marietta
 Peter G. Glassman,
 in memory of
 Jonathan E. Hartmann
 Buffy and Robert Hallinan
 Ray and Pat Heithaus
 James Hofferberth
 and Marita King
 Joseph and
 Kimberlee Klesner
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Judith Fisher: *Bird and plant identification books*



Photo: Rebecca Kiger

Brown Family Environmental Center

Kenyon

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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

Jada Swearingen '24, *Post-Baccalaureate Fellow*

Terri Hieronimus, *Gardener*

Bonnie Schutte, *Administrative Assistant*

Shane McGuire, *Land Manager Naturalist*

Noelle Jordan, *Director*

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.**

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