



# Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Fall 2010

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## Kentucky's Oldest Documented Tree Turns 400

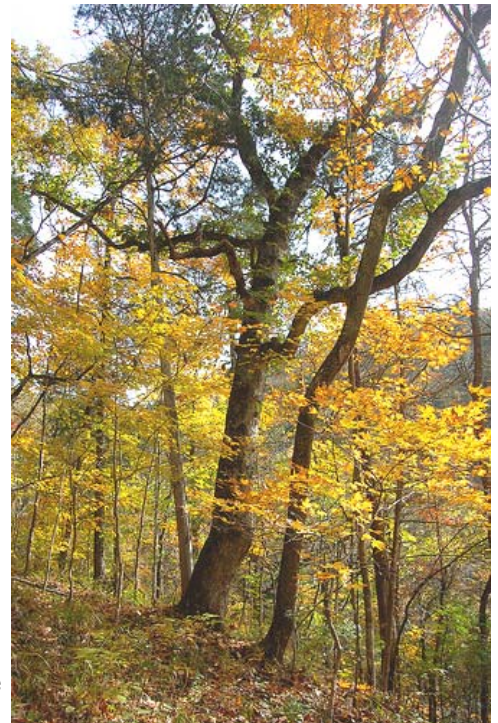
By: Beverly James, Preserve Manager

In Fall of 2008, I invited Neil Pederson, then Associate Professor at Eastern Kentucky University, to core some trees at Floracliff. At the time, I was hoping to gain insight into how old the oldest trees on the preserve were as well as information about land use history and forest disturbances we could infer from the tree rings. In assisting Neil and Ryan McEwan (from the University of Dayton) with this project, I received a fascinating education on the systematic approach of dendrochronology, how to spot the oldest trees in a forest, how to define an old growth forest, and the climate history of the eastern United States.

Due to Floracliff's logging history, the initial predictions were finding trees that may be 180-200 years old. After coring 20 chinkapin oaks, we were all very surprised at the findings, which revealed 13 trees that pre-date Daniel Boone and James Harrod, with 10 of those trees dating to the 1600s. The oldest of those trees is the oldest documented tree in Kentucky, dating to 1611. It is also the second-oldest documented chinkapin oak in the world. On October 23rd, we are planning a celebration of the tree's 400th year with morning and afternoon hikes both led by Neil.

Since discovering the age of these trees, we have shown them to many visitors on various hikes, who are often surprised at how small they are for such old trees. Some of the oldest have diameters that range from 17 to 25 inches, much of which is due to their location on the preserve and competition from other trees over the years. Many also wonder why they were left behind when the area was heavily logged in the early 1900s.

If you attend one of Neil's hikes, you'll learn how to rely on characteristics other than size to find old trees. He'll also be discussing how trees can record events such as droughts, fire history, insect outbreaks, and other environmental events. If you've not been to one of his hikes or programs before, I highly recommend it. You will leave looking at the forest in a completely different light. Plus, Neil is making a special trip from New York, where he is now working at the Lamont Tree Ring Research Laboratory at Columbia University. The first hike is scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. and the second one will start at 1:30 p.m. Come help us "ring in" a new century for the tree. Please see page 3 for more details and registration information.



## Nature Center Open House is Postponed

Due to some unexpected delays, we unfortunately have to postpone the Open House for the Winifred W. Haggart Nature Center. We are hoping to host an event in Spring. Stay tuned for more details. In the meantime, we will be offering tours of the building to those that attend the programs on October 16th, October 23rd, and December 4th.

## Fauna Focus: Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis arthemis*)

By: Emily Campbell



The red-spotted purple butterfly is a mimic of the poisonous pipevine swallowtail. Photo by Ryan Quire

The Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis arthemis*) is a butterfly commonly seen in the eastern United States in deciduous or mixed forests or along forest edges. They have red spots on the underside of their wings but are most recognizable by the iridescent blue markings on the surface of their wings. Their wing span ranges from 2.25 inches to 4.0 inches across. The females are slightly larger than males and have a fuller abdomen. The adults mimic the poisonous Pipevine Swallowtail, which is a great defense mechanism against birds and other predators. The caterpillars are cream colored with a dark colored saddle and mimic bird droppings on the leaves of trees and host plants. They can reach up to two inches long and have prominent brush like bristles behind their heads.

The Red-spotted Purple has two broods a year. The life cycle begins with males perching about 3 feet above the ground to mate with a female. Eggs are laid on the leaves of a host plant that are eaten by the caterpillar after hatching. Some of the host plants for the caterpillars that are found at Floracliff include black cherry, hornbeam, basswood, oaks, and beech. The adult butterflies prefer to feed on carrion, dung, rotting fruit, sap flows, but occasionally seek nectar from flowers. Incorporating both host plants and native flowers such as viburnums, milkweeds, and joe-pye weed can attract these beauties to your yard.

## Fauna Focus: Ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)

By: Laura Baird



The average adult ruby-throated hummingbird is only 3.5 inches long.

The ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) is a delicate, glittering little creature, and the only hummingbird common in eastern North America. Adult males have emerald green backs, dark, ruby-red throats, grey flanks, and a forked tail. The slightly larger females have the same brilliant metallic green backs, but with a white throat and breast, and another flash of white on the tips of their rounded tails. Juvenile ruby-throated hummingbirds look like adult females. An average adult hummingbird is only 3.5 inches long.

These tiny birds build tiny nests, about the size of a walnut. Lichens camouflage the outside of the nest while the inside may be cushioned with dandelion or thistle down to protect the two white, pea-sized eggs that are laid inside. Collected spider webs hold the nest together. The eggs are laid a few days apart, but the oldest hatchling will remain close to the nest until its younger sibling is able to fly.

If you'd like to see ruby-throated hummingbirds in your own yard, plant brightly colored tubular flowers native to the region such as trumpet honeysuckle, trumpet creeper, crossvine, bee balm, and New Jersey tea. You can also buy a commercial hummingbird feeder and fill with sugar water—I part white sugar and four parts water, boiled for several minutes and cooled. Just be sure to clean out the feeder regularly!

## Our Wish List

Please contact Beverly James at 859-351-7770 or [floracliff@aol.com](mailto:floracliff@aol.com) if you wish to donate any of the following items. All donations are tax deductible.

- Handheld GPS
- Tools (hand tool or power tools)
- Regional field guides
- Gift certificate to hardware or office supply store
- Work gloves
- Spray bottles
- Birding binoculars

## Many thanks to those who donated in the last quarter

### Volunteers

Will Overbeck  
David Robertson  
Leigh Ann Robertson  
Bill Rodgers  
Charles Sither

### Donors

#### **Acorns:**

Ramesh and Suzanne Bhatt

#### **Shooting stars:**

Dennis and Elizabeth Chambers  
Kathleen Dalton

Carl and Billye Haslett

Gabriel Popkin

#### **Spicebush:**

William Elwood

# Schedule of Events

All events require advance registration. Cost is \$4 per person or \$10 per family unless otherwise noted. Most programs last 2-3 hours. Call 859-351-7770 to register or for more information.

## Interpretive Hikes

### **Saturday, October 16th @ 10:00 a.m.: Tree Identification**

Join Preserve Manager Beverly James for this leisurely hike to Elk Lick Creek with stops along the way to discuss the natural history of our native trees as well as how to identify them by their leaves, bark, and fruit. Hiking level is moderate.

### **Saturday, October 23rd @ 9:30 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.: Trees as Environmental Historians w/ Dr. Neil Pederson**

Lamont Assistant Research Professor of Columbia University will lead this hike to visit the oldest documented tree in Kentucky on its 400th birthday and other scenic highlights of Floracliff including the recently recognized 'Epicenter' - a clump of old trees dating to before Daniel Boone. Along the way, Neil will discuss the value of old trees and forests, environmental history of the Inner Bluegrass region and the science of dendrochronology. Hiking level is moderate to difficult.

### **Saturday, November 13th @ 10:00 a.m.: Long Hike**

This hike has no particular theme, just a goal of seeing more of the preserve than we do on our other hikes. This is the only hike that features a stop along the Kentucky River. The hiking level is rated difficult due to the length, which is about 4 miles, but there will be an opportunity to only do half the hike.

### **Saturday, December 4th @ 1:30 p.m.: Winter tree ID**

Preserve Manager Beverly James will discuss how to identify trees without their leaves by relying on their bark, buds and leaf scars. Hiking level is moderate.

## Weed Warrior Days - free!

**Saturday, November 6th, 10 am- 1 pm**

**Saturday, December 4th, 10 am- 1 pm**

**Saturday, January 8th (this is the second Saturday due to the New Year holiday), 10 am- 1 pm**

Volunteer activities will involve assisting with the removal of exotic plants from the preserve. This is part of an ongoing effort to protect our native species and we rely on the help of volunteers. Please call ahead to register and receive more information at 859-351-7770. If you are interested in helping out on any other day, give us a call and we can work something out!

## Private Appointments

Private tours can be scheduled for small groups interested in visiting Floracliff. Interested parties can contact Beverly James by calling 859 351-7770 or email [floracliff@aol.com](mailto:floracliff@aol.com) to schedule an appointment.

**THE MARY E.  
WHARTON NATURE  
SANCTUARY AT  
FLORA CLIFF**

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Floracliff is a non-profit organization. We rely on support from community members like you. Please support preservation in your region.

Yes! I would like to contribute a tax-deductible gift to Floracliff.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- \$25 - \$49 acorn
- \$50 - \$99 shooting star
- \$100 - \$299 spicebush
- \$300 - \$499 dogwood
- \$500 - \$999 hickory
- \$1000+ old oak tree
- other

Please make checks payable to Floracliff and mail to:  
Floracliff, P. O. Box 21723, Lexington, KY 40522.



**P.O. Box 21723  
Lexington, KY 40522**

*Address correction requested*