



Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Winter/Spring 2021



Protecting, Restoring and Sharing Nature in the Bluegrass

2020 Year-in-Review

Like everywhere else, the past year at Floracliff has been a year of adapting. This was especially true for our stewardship work and educational programs. After closing the sanctuary this spring due to COVID-19, we developed detailed protocols to keep our staff, volunteers, researchers, and visitors safe while working and hiking at Floracliff. In June, we phased in our tenured volunteers for field work and modified our work plans to keep everyone at a safe distance. In July, we resumed private tours for small groups and hosted a few small public hikes in the fall.

An unexpected outcome this year was the development of virtual programming. Since June, we have offered in-depth webinars for hundreds of participants on a variety of natural and cultural history topics. This series would not be possible without our partners at the Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves, the University of Kentucky, and the Kentucky Archaeological Survey. Additionally, our partnership with Bluegrass Greensource allowed us to provide live virtual programming on water quality and benthic macroinvertebrates for Fayette County high school students and 4th graders.

Floracliff’s founder, Dr. Mary Wharton, prioritized the sanctuary’s use as a research site and that focus has continued. This year, biologists from UK used Floracliff to collect baseline data of larval spicebush swallowtails on their host plants and another researcher used Elk Lick Creek as a reference stream to evaluate stream restoration projects. This fall, a Centre College professor established plots to investigate woody seedling response to invasive species removal.



A Force for Nature

Through all the challenges and changes this year has brought, Floracliff’s volunteers proved a dedicated force. To better understand the wildlife and habitats Floracliff protects, our Community Science Volunteers documented hundreds of species, including new records for plants, land snails, moths, butterflies, and more in the Floracliff Biodiversity Project on iNaturalist. They also assisted with a canopy assessment of over 100 ash trees that were treated in 2018 to protect them from the Emerald Ash Borer. Treatments were determined to be over 95% effective and plans are underway for the next round of treatments. Meanwhile, our Forest Restoration Volunteers worked tirelessly to remove invasive plants like garlic mustard, wintercreeper, Japanese stiltgrass, and bush honeysuckle that outcompete our native plants and provide little in the way of sustenance or habitat to our wildlife.

As we prepared to reopen for public and private hikes this summer, our Trail Restoration Volunteers visited every trail to clear blowdowns, repair stairs, and prune and trim encroaching vegetation. Our neighbors also helped by mowing our road frontage and field. Our Volunteer Naturalists allowed us to increase our outreach by leading and assisting with guided small-group hikes and livestream environmental education programs.

In 2020, Floracliff’s trained volunteers were essential to our work to protect, restore, and share nature. As 2021 unfolds, we look forward to training new volunteers who are committed to conservation in the bluegrass.

2020 by the Numbers:

- 2,225 hours contributed by 47 volunteers
- 585 people attended educational webinars and virtual field trips
- 542 species documented on iNaturalist
- 13 acres managed for Amur honeysuckle

Discoveries From the Field

Most of the discoveries we note are plants or animals that were not previously documented at Floracliff. These discoveries provide useful information about our ecology and natural heritage. This year, we are happy to share two discoveries that provide a window to the past about our cultural heritage. Both are artifacts found by Floracliff caretaker, Nathan Skinner.

The first artifact is a spearpoint (top right) found in a creekbed above Elk Lick Falls. This point, made from Boyle chert, dates to the Early Archaic period (8000 – 6000 B.C.) when Hunter-gatherers lived in Kentucky. This point would have been used with the atl-atl weapon system and its shape indicates it has been sharpened and resharpened many times. The original size of the blade would have been considerably larger.

The second point (bottom right), which is considered an arrowhead, was made from flakes of chert and was found on the Trail’s End tract. It would have been made by the Fort Ancient farming peoples of central and eastern Kentucky (A.D. 1000 – 1750). Since Trail’s End has seen much human activity in the last century, this point may not have originated here. The closest known settlement from this time period would have been near Athens-Boonesboro Rd.

We’re very grateful to Dr. Gwynn Henderson and Eric Schlarb of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey for providing this information and giving us greater insight about central Kentucky’s native peoples and their relationship to the land.



City Nature Challenge 2021: Lexington

This spring, we are thrilled to bring the City Nature Challenge 2021 to Lexington. The City Nature Challenge is a community science project and celebration of biodiversity in and around urban areas. It is organized on a global scale by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the California Academy of Sciences. The City Nature Challenge began in 2016 as a friendly competition between San Francisco and Los Angeles and has since grown to an annual event with over 240 participating cities in 40 countries.

Floracliff is the local organizer for City Nature Challenge 2021: Lexington, which will take place April 30th to May 3rd throughout Fayette County. Lexingtonians of all ages will be encouraged to participate by photographing the wild nature around them and uploading those photographs to iNaturalist, an online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to contribute to our knowledge of nature. Even in the urban core of Lexington, there are many wild plants, animals, and fungi to be discovered. In addition to contributing to global community science, the City Nature Challenge encourages us to spend time in and notice the nature around us, which benefits both our physical and emotional well-being. While we do not yet know if in-person events will be feasible during the City Nature Challenge, we are certain that individual contributions will support a collective effort throughout Lexington.

It’s not too early to prepare for the City Nature Challenge 2021. You can get started now:

- 1) **Download iNaturalist**, a free mobile app, on your iPhone or Android device.
- 2) **Get to know iNaturalist.** Upload past photos of plants and animals or take new photos of biodiversity found in your backyard, neighborhood, or local parks.
- 3) **Look for City Nature Challenge updates** at floracliff.org or facebook.com/floracliff and plan to attend our free City Nature Challenge webinar on April 20, 2021.



Upcoming Programs

Pre-registration is required for all events. Tickets will be available January 1, 2021 at floracliff.org.

January:

26th: Webinar: *The Memories of Past Climate and the Gifts of Ecological Knowledge Engrained in the Rings of Trees* – presented by Dr. Neil Pederson, Harvard Forest

March:

2nd: Webinar: *Classifying Nature after Linnaeus: Charles Darwin's Insight Changes the Game* presented by Rob Paratley, University of Kentucky

23rd: Webinar: *The Ecology of Spring Ephemerals* presented by Beverly James, Floracliff

April:

20th: Webinar: *The City Nature Challenge: A New Way to Discover Lexington* presented by Beverly James, Floracliff

Guided Hikes and Private Tours

While we are unable to plan in-person events months in advance, we are hopeful that we will be able to offer small guided hikes in spring 2021 to feature our wildflower display and seasonal wildlife. To stay up to date on events, subscribe to our email newsletter at floracliff.org.

Through the winter months, private tours may be available for small groups. Please email info@floracliff.org for more information about private tours.



Cedar waxwing fledglings (Ward Ransdell)

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Cover photo:
Elk Lick Valley (Beverly James)
Inside photos:
Spearpoints (Beverly James)

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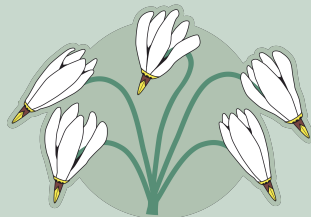
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Founded in 1987, Floracliff is a nonprofit nature sanctuary. Our mission is to care for the sanctuary property, ensure its protection as a nature preserve, and promote public education of the natural history of the Inner Bluegrass Region.