

Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Summer / Fall 2023



Protecting, Restoring and Sharing Nature in the Bluegrass

Taking Flight: Counting Butterflies in Lexington

In 2017, we established the Central Bluegrass Summer Butterfly Count, a one-day event to document butterflies in a 15-mile circle in and around Lexington. It is one of 400+ organized butterfly counts that recruits people to find butterflies, record the number of each species observed, and submit the data to the North American Butterfly Association. Modeled after the Christmas Bird Count, the July 4th Butterfly Count began in 1975 to track butterfly populations and increase public interest in butterflies. At Floracliff, we had been making casual observations of butterflies for years, but we wanted to formally track what we were seeing (and not seeing) year after year. At the time, there were two active butterfly counts in Kentucky, and they were nowhere near Lexington. Organizing a local count provided a way to monitor butterflies not only at Floracliff, but elsewhere in our community with the help of partners and residents.

Butterflies are worth monitoring for many reasons. While adult butterflies nectar from a variety of flowers, they are much more particular about their food as caterpillars. Many female butterflies require specific hostplants to lay their eggs – monarchs need milkweeds, fritillaries need violets, satyrs need woodland grasses, and juniper hairstreaks need Eastern red-cedar, to name a few. On the other side of the food chain, butterflies, in all their life stages, are food for other animals. Because of these interconnected relationships, butterflies are indicators of ecosystem health. A habitat with an abundance and diversity of butterflies is likely supporting a variety of other beneficial insects, birds, and other wildlife. The quick response of butterflies to changes in their environment from habitat loss and degradation, climate change, and weather events provides important information about the environment we live in, too.

With practice, most butterflies are fairly easy to observe and identify. This makes them a great subject for community science. In comparison to other insects, they are large. Their colorful patterns catch our attention. They are also active during the day and predictable in their behavior and habitat preferences. The Lexington area count includes natural areas with a mix of grassland and woodland habitats as well as urban parks, cultivated greenspaces, and backyards. Over the past six years, we have trained participants in butterfly identification during the weeks leading up to the count. We team beginners with seasoned naturalists on the day of the count to cover sites like Floracliff, Raven Run, Hisle Farm Park, The Arboretum, and more. The number of dedicated counters has more than tripled since our first butterfly count in 2017.

Since that first count, over 6,000 butterflies representing 58 species have been documented in our count circle. In 2021, we counted 866 meadow fritillaries, a record high for that species in any NABA count. A much less common butterfly, the golden-banded skipper, was found at Floracliff during the 2019 count. It ended up being a new Fayette County record. Considered a vulnerable butterfly in Kentucky, it has since been observed one other time in the same area of the sanctuary, and we continue to monitor for it.

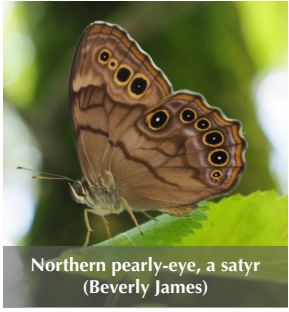
While new species records and high numbers provide interesting data, counting butterflies is also fun and inspiring for those who participate year after year. Kathleen Ratliff shared, "I have participated in the (Lexington) butterfly count for several years and my knowledge and fascination with butterflies has grown each year. One of the best parts of the count is seeing many familiar faces and spending time with them doing something we all love and are passionate about. We all seem to learn something new from each other every year...I have also learned how important counts like these are in regards to being a barometer for how healthy our environment is, or isn't – and how the numbers we come up with may help shape future conservation efforts."



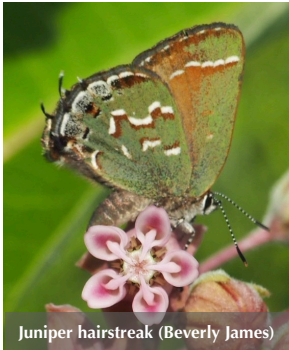
Butterfly counters at The Arboretum (Karen Michul)



Meadow fritillary (Laura Baird)



Northern pearly-eye, a satyr (Beverly James)



Juniper hairstreak (Beverly James)



Butterfly counters at Floracliff



Golden-banded skipper (Ward Ransdell)

Observe, Imagine, Document: Nature Journaling at Floracliff

By: Carol Spence, Floracliff Volunteer

June 13, 2023, 1:25 p.m. 71 degrees
A June breeze pushes aside some leaves and invites the sunlight through the canopy. Just in time, the light dances across the path, catching a few strands of an orb web, seconds before I would have plunged through it. In the center, an orchard orbweaver spider sits. Does she know I'm there? The leaves move again, and this time the sun strikes her, changing her from dull and nearly invisible to gleaming white with emerald legs that perfectly match the forest behind her web. Does she see me taking her picture or only feel me when I accidentally touch a web thread? Though aware of the tremor, I apparently vibrate differently than a gnat or a hoverfly, and she ignores my stumbling maneuver.

There is a term for a creature's personal sensory bubble – *umwelt*. The word is related to the German for "environment", but in this context it specifically means the sensory environment in which an animal exists. Because our senses are so different from those of other organisms, we may never be able to perceive the world in the exact way another creature does. We do, however, have a powerful tool to help us bridge that gap. Nature journaling trains us to observe, imagine, and possibly understand a tiny fragment of the larger sphere of life around us.

The value of nature journaling isn't dependent on writing or artistic skills. Instead, it teaches us to observe, to become one with all that is going on around us. It gives us permission to take a moment and breathe, to note what we're seeing. A nature journal can be art, prose or poetry, or just a list. It can be all or one of the above.

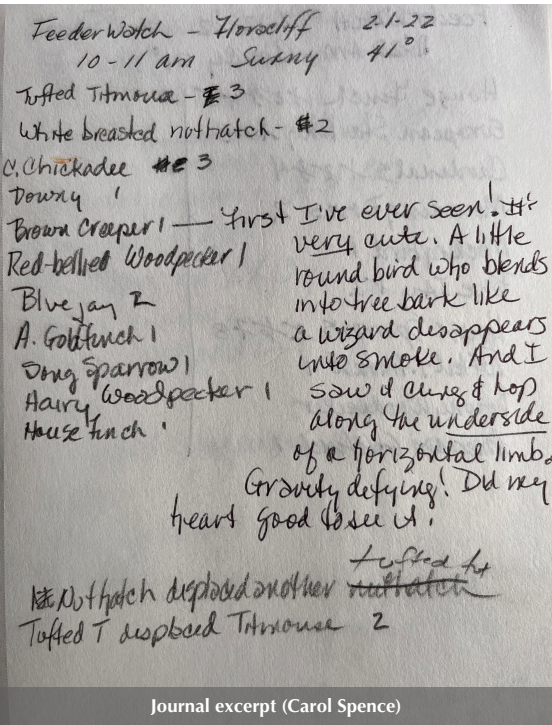
Jan. 29, 2023, 9:10 a.m.
After a perfect snowfall yesterday, I was standing by my window soaking in the scene. Two male cardinals, motionless in the viburnum 20 feet away, dropped the thought into my head that cardinals add color to a snowy landscape like chimes add music to the air. In the quiet, a third male suddenly materialized deeper in the shrub. He'd been there all along, but my eyes hadn't picked him out of the thicket. Then, like finding the right jigsaw puzzle piece, my brain located a female cardinal in the same shrub, and then another. It was as if they magically appeared, dissolving into the scene through cinematic effects. A junco, slate gray and white like the landscape around him, appeared on a closer branch, and another junco dissolved in not far away from him. Where I thought only two cardinals perched, there were suddenly seven birds. It was amazing the way my brain deciphered the scene and put the pieces together. What a gift.

Hone your observational skills through journal writing, as we use our words to explore Floracliff in different seasons. These hikes will give you permission to sit and soak in the life around you and open your senses to appreciate and imagine a bit of each creature's *umwelt* or study the intricate beauty in a stone or a leaf. Whether you've nature journaled for years, or this is your first foray, all are welcome. We will have specific tasks during each hike that will give you a structure on which to build your thoughts. There will be an opportunity to share our entries at the end of each session, but there is no pressure to do so. The idea behind these sessions is to slow down, stretch our senses, and appreciate the natural world in a nonjudgmental gathering.

Join Carol Spence on October 20th and January 26th for "The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff." See our events calendar for more details.



Orchard orbweaver (Laura Baird)



Journal excerpt (Carol Spence)

Upcoming Hikes and Programs

All events require pre-registration. Visit floracliff.eventbrite.com for registration and more information.

September:

5th, 16th, 26th: Creating Art in Nature

14th: Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar:

"Amphibians and Reptiles of the Kentucky River Palisades" w/ John MacGregor

20th: New Volunteer Orientation

21st: Golden Hour Hike to Elk Lick Falls

October:

3rd, 14th, 24th: Creating Art in Nature

3rd: Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar:

"The Bats of Kentucky" w/ Price Sewell

7th: Birding for Beginners

12th: Golden Hour Hike to Elk Lick Falls

13th: A Tour of Floracliff's Old Oak Trees

19th: Golden Hour Hike to the Kentucky River

20th: The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff

21st: Fall Color Long Hike

28th: "Forests and Carbon: What's the big deal?," a hike w/ Dr. Mary Arthur

November:

10th: Winter Tree I.D. Workshop w/ Rob Paratley

11th: Fall Long Hike

December:

21st: Winter Solstice Golden Hour Hike

January:

26th: The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff



Scan the QR code for the full event calendar and details.



Staff

Beverly James
Preserve Director

Josie Miller
Stewardship Director

Elk Lick Echo

Beverly James

Cover photo: American bumble
bee nectaring on wild bergamot
(David Lang)

Board of Directors

Ellen Tunnell, *President*

Charles Chandler, *Vice-President & Secretary*

Lucia Gilchrist, *Treasurer*

Greg Abernathy

Debra Dawahare

Elizabeth Graves

Lisa Morris

Rob Paratley

John Park

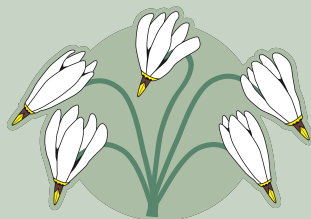
Dan Patrick

Vicki Reed

Dale White

Floracliff Nature Sanctuary
P. O. Box 21723
Lexington, KY 40522

floracliff.org
info@floracliff.org
facebook.com/floracliff
instagram.com/floracliff



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.