

# Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Winter / Spring 2024



*Protecting, Restoring and Sharing Nature in the Bluegrass*



## 2023 Year-in-Review

Biodiversity plays a central role in everything we do at Floracliff — from stewarding the land and monitoring our wildlife, to providing connections to nature for visitors and volunteers. This biodiversity is not just the individual plants and animals of the sanctuary. It also includes the various forest, grassland, and aquatic habitats as well as the farmlands, urban parks, and yards of our community. Biodiversity is every living thing, including us. We focus on protecting, restoring, monitoring, and promoting biodiversity at Floracliff because it’s essential to the function and resilience of these ecosystems in the face of climate change and other impacts.

This year, our stewardship projects prioritized aquatic habitats. The young forest around Kettle Springs and our upland ponds is former agricultural land that is much invaded by Amur bush honeysuckle. Since honeysuckle leaf litter is harmful to water quality and aquatic life, we worked with volunteers and students to continue managing the honeysuckle and other invasive plants, improving habitat for macroinvertebrates and breeding frogs. Along the way, we have also been encouraged by the presence of native plants like Christmas fern, spicebush and the sanctuary’s only population of blue-eyed Marys.

While bush honeysuckle has been a management priority for decades at Floracliff, we are also targeting newer invasive species before they become widespread. This summer, our stewardship team scouted out and removed populations of Japanese chaff flower on the banks of Elk Lick Creek. This invasive plant creates tall dense stands that can easily crowd out all other plants around it, impacting streamside and forest habitats.

With support from donors, a grant from the Fayette County Conservation District, and our hard-working volunteers, a water feature was added to the Trail’s End bird watching station. This site is included in monthly bird surveys at Floracliff, and it is where we record observations for Project FeederWatch from November through April. With no natural water sources nearby, creating the water feature provides support for a greater diversity of birds and wildlife. It also provides an example for supporting biodiversity in small greenspaces and yards. Since its installation, a variety of warblers, thrushes, goldfinches, robins, and other songbirds have used it to bathe and drink.

Opportunities to experience nature at Floracliff are reaching more people every year. This spring, Kentucky’s aquatic wildlife was spotlighted for a new series of free programs — the Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminars. The historic Trail’s End Lodge was the perfect setting to learn from experts about freshwater mussels, caddisflies, and crayfish. We also hosted over 100 guided hikes this year, from spring wildflower hikes and summer creek walks to fall nature journaling and winter tree identification. We recognize that program diversity is important to connecting more people to nature. In addition to healthy ecosystems, those personal nature connections are essential to our well-being.



Josie Miller leads a stewardship demonstration for UK students (Ward Ransdell)



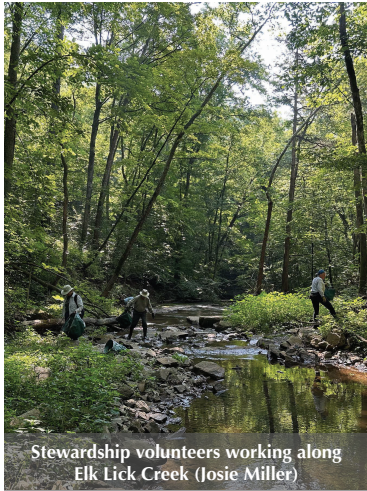
Golden Hour Hikers (Ward Ransdell)



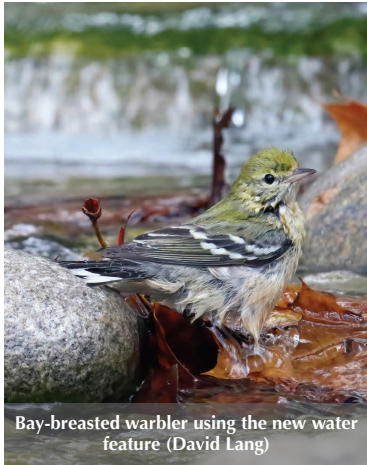
New water feature with volunteers (Ward Ransdell)



Creek Walk hikers (Rick Metzger)



Stewardship volunteers working along Elk Lick Creek (Josie Miller)



Bay-breasted warbler using the new water feature (David Lang)

## Discoveries From the Field

What do a black bear, a harvester butterfly, and a brown wasp mantidfly all have in common? They are all new species records for Floracliff for 2023, and they all captured our attention.

In mid-July, a young male **black bear (*Ursus americanus*)** walked by one of our trail cameras on two separate occasions. After seeing multiple reports of black bears in the area over recent years, we were pretty excited to finally get a record of one at Floracliff. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife shares, “Offspring remain with their mother for the entire year after birth and generally throughout the second denning season. After spring emergence, the mother will run off the yearling bears as she comes into estrus and prepares for the new breeding season.” Black bear populations east of central Kentucky are doing well, so these young males often venture several miles during the summer months.

Due to its small size, unique feeding behavior, and brief lifecycle, the **harvester butterfly (*Feniseca tarquinius*)** can easily go unnoticed. As North America’s only carnivorous butterfly, it’s one we were hoping to find at Floracliff. Over the summer, stewardship staff and volunteers were managing invasive plants along Elk Lick Creek when one landed on a volunteer. The proboscis of an adult harvester is too short to feed on flower nectar, so you’re more likely to find one feeding on dung, carrion, aphid honeydew, wet sand—or sweaty skin. As a caterpillar, it feeds on a few different genera of woolly aphids rather than hostplants. This protein-rich diet enables them to complete their larval stage in as little as eight days!

During our annual summer butterfly count, Floracliff’s counting team came across an unusual looking insect – the **brown wasp mantidfly (*Climaciella brunnea*)**. While it shares characteristics with each group, this mantidfly is not a wasp, a mantid, or a fly. It is in the order Neuroptera with lacewings and antlions. Its appearance alone is fascinating, but its lifecycle also deserves attention. Mantidflies parasitize spiders for their development, and the brown wasp mantidfly uses wolf spiders as hosts. The larval mantidfly hitches a ride on a passing spider where it subsists on the spider’s blood. After the spider mates, it takes up residence in the egg sac, feeding on the eggs until it pupates. It emerges from the egg sac as an adult mantidfly. How fascinating!

## Pollinator Week 2024

It’s no secret that pollinators provide essential services to flowering plants, but it can be easy to take this process for granted. Everyday, we are benefitting from flowering plants and their pollinators for food, fiber, building materials, carbon sequestration, ecosystem function, and more.

For over 15 years, Pollinator Week has taken place in June to celebrate and promote pollinators around the world. In Kentucky, our pollinators include bees, birds, butterflies, beetles, moths, wasps, and flies. The next Pollinator Week takes place June 17 – 23, and Floracliff is hosting two events about butterflies and bumble bees. Join us to learn more about these pollinators and how to get involved with monitoring them in Kentucky:

- June 18, 2:00 PM: “Butterfly I.D. for Beginners” with Beverly James**, Floracliff’s preserve director. Beverly will present an indoor slideshow of the region’s most common butterflies before heading outside with participants to observe and identify butterflies in the pollinator field.
- June 20, 6:30 PM: “The Bumble Bees of Kentucky” with Katie Cody**, invertebrate biologist at the Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves. Katie will present this program at the Trail’s End Lodge as part of the Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar Series.



Eastern black bear (Floracliff trail camera)



Harvester butterfly (Beverly James)



Brown wasp mantidfly (Josie Miller)



Eastern tiger swallowtail (Ward Ransdell)



Two-spotted bumble bee (David Lang)



## Upcoming Hikes and Programs

*All events require pre-registration. Visit [floracliff.org](http://floracliff.org) for registration and more information.*

### January:

**26th:** The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff

### February:

**17th:** Birding for Beginners

### March:

**9th:** Signs of Spring Long Hike

**14th & 21st:** Golden Hour Hikes

**22nd, 23rd, 26th, & 30th:** Wildflower Hikes

### April:

**2nd:** Wildflower Hike w/ Joyce Bender

**5th, 6th, & 9th:** Wildflower Hikes

**9th, 21st, & 30th:** Creating Art in Nature

**11th & 18th:** Golden Hour Hikes

**14th:** Wildflower Hike w/ Rob Paratley

**12th:** Wildflower Hike w/ Tony Romano

**19th:** The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff

### May:

**3rd:** Forest Birds of the Palisades

**7th, 19th, & 28th:** Creating Art in Nature

**16th:** Golden Hour Hike to the Kentucky River

**18th:** Elk Lick Creek Exploration

**23rd:** Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar:

"The Raptors of Kentucky: Natural History and Conservation" w/ Michael Patton

### June:

**4th, 16th, & 25th:** Creating Art in Nature

**13th:** Golden Hour Hike to Elk Lick Falls

**18th:** Butterfly I.D. for Beginners

**20th:** Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar: "Bumble Bees of Kentucky" w/ Katie Cody

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



Eastern screech owl (Ward Ransdell)

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Beverly James  
*Preserve Director*

Josie Miller  
*Stewardship Director*

### Elk Lick Echo

Beverly James

Cover photo: Jacob's ladder and mining bee (Laura Baird)

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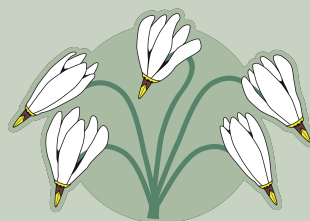
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**Founded in 1987, Floracliff is a nonprofit nature sanctuary. Our mission is to care for the sanctuary property, ensure its protection as a nature preserve, and promote public education of the natural history of the Inner Bluegrass Region.**