



Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Summer/Fall 2024



A Letter from the Director:

As we enter summer at the sanctuary, the pollinator field by the Nature Center is in full bloom and active with bumble bees, great spangled fritillary butterflies, and indigo buntings. Our staff and volunteers are working hard to steward this habitat as well as the surrounding forest. At Floracliff, our stewardship work primarily involves managing invasive plants so that our native wildlife can thrive. It's work that requires persistence and dedication to be successful, and our stewardship team is up to the task. In the coming months, they will continue working on bush honeysuckle and other forest invasives along our upland streams.

This year, we have joined Lexington's Green Check certification program to formally assess our sustainability efforts in energy efficiency, water quality and conservation, waste reduction, landscaping, purchasing, outreach, and more. It's been a valuable exercise to examine where we have been successful, identify areas of improvement, and put new sustainability initiatives in place. As a conservation organization, we recognize that our decisions and actions impact our community, biodiversity, and planet.

Looking ahead to fall, I am especially excited about our upcoming programs. We are thrilled to bring back the Bluegrass Land & Nature Symposium, and we have two new biodiversity seminars. We will also be experimenting with acoustic recorders to document and monitor wildlife at the sanctuary – through sound!

All of this work would not be possible without our generous community of supporters. We depend on donations for half of our annual operating budget which funds stewardship, programs, and wildlife monitoring. Please consider one of the giving options listed on the right to support Floracliff.

Thank you for your partnership in protecting, restoring, and sharing nature in the Bluegrass! Sincerely,



There are a variety of ways to support Floracliff financially:

- Qualified charitable distribution from your IRA
- Gifts of stock
- Mail a check
- Sponsor a program
- Give online at floracliff.org or use the QR code:



For more information, contact Beverly James at bjames@floracliff.org

Thank you for your support!



Learn more about Project NestWatch and how to participate at nestwatch.org:



Community Science Spotlight: Project NestWatch

In 2022, we added Project NestWatch to Floracliff’s ongoing community science efforts to observe and document wildlife at the sanctuary. Project NestWatch “is a monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive.” Tens of thousands of nest watchers from around the world collect and contribute data to NestWatch. The data collected provides important information about what breeding birds need in a nest site to successfully raise a clutch as well as how they are impacted by climate change, weather, habitat change, competition, predators, and non-native wildlife.

Taking on this additional project would not have been possible without volunteers Ward Ransdell and Joyce Fry. They make sure the 11 installed nest boxes are monitored twice a week during breeding season according to NestWatch protocols. All the boxes are built with Eastern bluebirds in mind, but they also support tree swallows, house wrens, and Carolina chickadees – all birds that depend on natural cavities or man-made boxes for nesting. In open grasslands and urban areas, natural cavities are hard to come by, so man-made boxes can fill an essential need. The nest boxes are also designed to keep out European starlings, which can kill bluebird adults and their young.

Along the way, we have learned that nest attempts are not always successful, even with a well-designed box. In 2023, six of eight bluebird clutches survived to fledgling stage. While birds lay a lot of eggs to maximize their survival, we have also taken measures to improve their chances. Last year, we added 8" predator guards to protect against climbing snakes and raccoons, and we installed multiple boxes in close proximity to reduce competition among all the species drawn to the boxes. Before this year’s nesting season, we evaluated each box with data from past years and adjusted their design and placement as needed.

Since the 1960s, nest boxes have played an important role in the recovery of bluebird populations. Knowing this, it’s been rewarding to see them succeed at Floracliff. Ward, who is an experienced birder, has found personal enrichment through NestWatch observations. He says he is “learning more about breeding and feeding behaviors, and is captivated”.



Plant with Purpose: Native alternatives to burning bush by Josie Miller

In fall, bright red foliage in the understory cues our stewardship team to take a closer look. Is it a native plant, or is it burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*), an introduced plant we’re increasingly finding in our woodlands? Grown ornamentally, burning bush seeds are carried in the guts of birds to neighboring yards, green spaces, and natural areas. The resulting seedlings shade out beneficial native plants that sustain our local wildlife.

At Floracliff, we use fall color to detect and quickly remove burning bush seedlings before they establish large colonies that negatively impact the health of our biodiversity. You can help stop the spread of burning bush by removing it wherever you can and replacing it with a regionally native plant – one our local wildlife will recognize as a healthy food source. For fall color, consider:

- **Virginia sweetspire** (*Itea virginica*), whose abundant flowers feed butterflies, bees, and beetles
- **Fragrant sumac** (*Rhus aromatica*, pictured right), whose foliage feeds red banded hairstreak butterfly and luna moth caterpillars
- **Southern arrowwood or blackhaw** (*Viburnum dentatum* or *V. prunifolium*), whose berries provide a healthy meal to migrating birds



Meet Dani Fauzi:

Dani started working part-time at Floracliff in December, helping with invasive plant management, species list updates, community science projects, and more. She is currently a senior at UK studying Natural Resources and Environmental Science. Having grown up in Lexington, she enjoys exploring the biodiversity of the Palisades and seeing how Floracliff’s wildlife changes through the seasons.

The Bluegrass Land & Nature Symposium Returns

On Saturday, September 28, we’ll have a full day of programs led by regional experts for the 2nd Bluegrass Land & Nature Symposium. This event explores the intersection of natural and built environments and how we can be better stewards of nature – at home and in our community. The day will start with bird walks followed by a keynote presentation in the Trail’s End Lodge. Afternoon sessions will visit the sanctuary trails. We are honored to host the following for this event:

Keynote:

Dr. Mary Arthur – *Let’s talk about forests and carbon (and climate change too)*

Session Leaders & Topics:

- Joyce Bender & Michael Patton – Morning bird walks
- Heidi Braunreiter – *Prescribed Fire as a Management Tool in the Bluegrass Region*
- Tyson Gregory – *Native Trees for Urban Landscapes*
- Dr. Nate Haan & Dr. Julian Dupuis – *Bluegrass Bugs*
- Lee Moser – *Soil and Water Stewardship in a Changing Climate*
- Rob Paratley: *The Kentucky River Palisades – A Unique Ecological Corridor in the Bluegrass*
- Meaghan Petix – *Learning from lichens: bioindicators of air quality and climate*

Upcoming Hikes and Programs

- July:**
23rd: Meadow Snorkeling w/ Blake Newton
- August:**
2nd: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
15th: Golden Hour Hike to Elk Lick Falls
- September:**
5th: Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar – “Kentucky’s Land Snails: Citizen Science in Action” w/ Dan and Judy Dourson
6th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
17th: Bluegrass Biodiversity Seminar – “The Mesomammals of Kentucky” w/ Courtney Hayes
19th: Golden Hour Hike
21st: “New Neighbors and a Ticking Clock: the ecology of ephemeral ponds” w/ Dr. Cy Mott
22nd: Plein Air Painting & Drawing
28th: Bluegrass Land & Nature Symposium
- October:**
4th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
5th: Birding for Beginners
- 6th:** Beginning Drawing in Nature
10th & 17th: Golden Hour Hikes
18th: Floracliff’s Sentinels: A tour of the sanctuary’s old oak trees
22nd: Plein Air Painting & Drawing
25th: The Natural Word: Nature Journaling at Floracliff
- November:**
1st: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
9th: Fall Long Hike
15th: “Intro to Winter Tree ID – Looking at all the clues” w/ Rob Paratley
- December:**
6th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
20th: Winter Solstice Golden Hour Hike

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



Staff

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Beverly James

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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.