



Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Winter/Spring 2026

2025 Year-in-Review

Building on Floracliff's foundation in hands-on conservation and nature education, 2025 was a year of expanding our stewardship capacity and creating new opportunities for volunteers and visitors. As a small nonprofit with a staff of three, we rely greatly on our volunteers to carry out our mission. This year, our team of trained volunteers grew to more than 70 people who together contributed over 3,000 hours to invasive species management, guided hikes and programs, trail maintenance, community science, and more.

To strengthen our volunteer program, we organized and facilitated new trainings. With a grant from Kentucky Employers' Mutual Insurance, program and stewardship volunteers received first-aid and AED certification. In spring, our partners at the Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves led a trail building workshop. And this fall, we hosted Dr. A. Gwynn Henderson and Tressa Brown for *Ancient Native Peoples & the Environment*, a workshop for program leaders and partners to integrate information about Kentucky's native peoples into their programs.

Isabel Cochran joined the team in spring as our Land Stewardship Technician, a position made possible through donor support. In addition to managing and monitoring invasive species at the sanctuary, Isabel launched *Kids Hikes*, a new program series for ages 5-10. She also expanded our outreach in Lexington by hosting activities with volunteers and partners at various community events.

Floracliff continued to offer unique experiences for visitors to connect with nature, and we engaged more people than ever in 2025. In June, we held the 2nd Bluegrass Land & Nature Symposium, a full day of climate conversations, nature walks, land management discussions, and an art exhibit by artist and volunteer Laura Mentor. Her exhibit culminated in August with a final showing and talk at the Trail's End Lodge.

Whether studying wildlife, creating nature-inspired art, or caring for the trails and native habitats, our community continues to grow through shared curiosity and commitment to conservation.

Inside This Issue

- Stewardship Success: 25 years of honeysuckle management
- Kentucky CLIMBS: Climate research comes to Floracliff
- Discoveries from the Field
- Support Floracliff through your IRA



Protecting, Restoring and Sharing Nature in the Bluegrass



“Floracliff’s honeysuckle management program started out small and has continued to expand amazingly. It is so satisfying to visit an area that I recall having had a dense stand of bush honeysuckle and now seeing open forest with many native plants returning.”

~ Bob Wilson, founding board member of Floracliff



Stewardship Success: 25 years of honeysuckle management

By: Josie Miller, Stewardship Director

Most of us who spend time in the Bluegrass are familiar with bush honeysuckle. It dominates the vegetation along our roadways, sprouts up in our gardens and fencerows, and crowds out the native plants in our woodlands. Because it’s so common, some may not realize it is an invasive plant in North America. Indigenous to East Asia, Amur bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) was introduced to the US in the late 1800s as an ornamental shrub. It was later promoted for wildlife habitat improvement and soil conservation. Since then it has escaped cultivation and is harmful to the ecosystems we all depend on.

In the mid-1990s, Floracliff board members were alarmed by the widespread presence of bush honeysuckle and other invasive plants at the sanctuary. Soon after, our partners at the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (now Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves) organized volunteer workdays to remove honeysuckle. In 2000, our first manager, Carey Ruff, launched a program to remove honeysuckle throughout the preserve. According to Joyce Bender, “the effects of removal were almost immediate. The response of Delphinium in treated areas was impressive and so rewarding.”

Later, under the direction of Beverly James (now our Executive Director), honeysuckle was removed from dozens of acres along the steep, biodiverse slopes of Elk Lick Creek and Falls Branch. When Trail’s End was acquired in 2017, management expanded to the upland forest of the historic site. Around this time, the Stewardship Director position was added, and our volunteer program expanded. We now sponsor pesticide licenses for volunteers, allowing more efficient management of honeysuckle during our weekly workdays. Over the past two years, honeysuckle management has focused on the headwater streams above Elk Lick Falls. As part of our climate adaptation initiatives, this latest project promotes healthier, more resilient watersheds.

Over the past 25 years, our honeysuckle management has made an impact throughout Floracliff. We see native plants returning, and we encounter surprises while we work. Recently, volunteers uncovered ladies’-tresses orchids on otherwise bare ground. Our visitors notice the difference, too, as our educational programs are enhanced by the healthy ecosystems we maintain.

In 2021, we received the first Natural Areas award from the Kentucky Invasive Plant Council, recognizing our stewardship program. The success of this program reflects the long-term dedication of our land stewards and supporters, who continue to restore and protect Floracliff’s native habitats.



Kentucky CLIMBS: Climate research comes to Floracliff

Floracliff is excited to serve as a research site for *Kentucky CLIMBS* (Climate Resilience through Multidisciplinary Big Data Learning, Prediction and Building Response Systems). This five-year, \$20-million project is a collaboration of eight universities across the state working on seven research projects with the goal of building climate resiliency for Kentucky’s communities.

One of the seven research projects focuses on “paleo-perspectives.” CLIMBS researchers will be collecting, analyzing, and dating samples from sediments, soils, tree rings, and other sources to understand how Kentucky’s climate has changed over time. At Floracliff, CLIMBS teams are collecting samples from the tufa at Elk Lick Falls and the soils on the Trail’s End floodplain. The paleo-climate data collected from these and other samples will provide insights into past climate trends in Kentucky and will help place future changes in context.

Interested in learning more about Kentucky CLIMBS and paleo-perspectives? Scan the QR code to the right or join us on May 21st for a seminar with lead CLIMBS scientist, Dr. Mike McGlue. He will be presenting “Kentucky CLIMBS - Building Resilience in the Commonwealth using Earth and Environmental Science”.

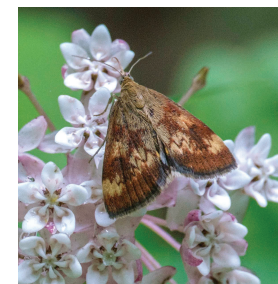


Discoveries From the Field



In 2023, we installed a water feature at the Trail’s End bird-watching station to support wildlife. Through trail camera monitoring and field observations, our community science volunteers have since documented more than 70 different animals visiting the site. These wild visitors include bathing songbirds, breeding frogs, and thirsty mammals. Thanks to all who helped make this project possible!

This year, Floracliff volunteers and staff added more than 40 new insect records, including the *Pyrausta homonymalis* moth (right). Despite our curiosity, little is known about this species, including its hostplant. These knowledge gaps are common with insects, underscoring the importance of documenting and sharing what we find in the field. Findings from Floracliff not only inform conservation at the sanctuary, but provide valuable data for conservationists elsewhere.



Support Floracliff through your IRA

If you are 70½ or older with an IRA, you can support Floracliff’s land stewardship, nature-based programming, and wildlife monitoring through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). For those age 73 or older, these gifts can count toward your Required Minimum Distribution. By giving directly from your IRA, you can reduce your taxable income while helping protect the land and wildlife you love.

Upcoming Hikes and Programs

January:

2nd: Kids Hike: Winter Birds

20th: The Natural Word: Nature Journaling

February:

14th: Birding for Beginners

March:

14th: Well-grounded Relationships - The Botany & Geology of Floracliff w/ Dr. Frank Ettensohn & Quinn Towery

20th, 27th, 28th, & 31st: Wildflower Hikes

April:

3rd: Wildflower Hike w/ Devin Rodgers

4th, 8th, 10th, 14th, 17th: Wildflower Hikes

7th: Kids Hike: Spring Wildflowers

11th: A Close Look at Six Plant Families in Our Spring Flora, a workshop w/ Rob Paratley

17th: Forest Bathing w/ Andi Jasper

18th: Long Hike with the Wildflowers

19th: Plein Air Painting & Drawing

24th: The Natural Word: Nature Journaling

28th: Seminar: "The Science of Bird Coloration: How Kentucky's Birds Create and Use Their Hues" w/ Mallory Miles

May:

1st: Forest Birds of the Palisades

3rd: Birding for Beginners

9th: Beginning Drawing in Nature

16th: Introduction to Adaptation Planning and Management in Changing Systems, a workshop w/ Dr. Jacob Muller, Lee Moser, & Logan Baker

17th: Plein Air Painting & Drawing

21st: Seminar: "Kentucky CLIMBS - Building Resilience in the Commonwealth using Earth and Environmental Science" w/ Dr. Mike McGlue

29th: Live Raptor Program w/ Raptor Rehab of KY

June:

9th: Kids Hike: Reptiles

25th: Butterflies of Summer

26th: The Beetles of Floracliff w/ Paul Baker

Scan the QR code for event details, registration, and the full event calendar (including **monthly bird walks** and **golden hour hikes**)



Staff

Beverly James
Executive Director

Josie Miller
Stewardship Director

Isabel Cochran
Land Stewardship Technician

Elk Lick Echo

Beverly James

Board of Directors

Ellen Tunnell, *President*
Neal Dornbusch, *Vice-President*
Lucia Gilchrist, *Treasurer*
Charles Chandler, *Secretary*
Greg Abernathy
Misty Fenech
Susan Hill
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 501(c)(3) nonprofit nature sanctuary. Our mission is to promote conservation and appreciation of nature through education, shared experiences, and stewardship of the sanctuary.