Elk Lick Echo

A Newsletter of Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Winter/Spring 2027

2026 Year-in-Review

Conservation work is never finished. Each season brings new opportunities to build on the work of previous years, along with emerging needs that require our attention. This year at Floracliff is no different.

Our stewardship team has been hard at work across the sanctuary. This spring, we completed treatments on more than 100 ash trees to protect them from the Emerald Ash Borer for another four years. This continues a long-term forest health project that began in 2011. New tools and partnerships helped make this round of treatments more efficient. Honeysuckle management is also underway along Falls Branch, where staff and volunteers are continuing a multi-year effort to restore riparian areas along our headwater streams. Staff also attended the Natural Areas Association conference this fall to learn about the latest research and approaches to land management and new ecological threats.

An exciting addition to Floracliff's wildlife monitoring efforts is our Motus Wildlife Tracking Station. Equipped with three types of antennas, the station uses radio telemetry to track the movements of birds, bats, and large insects fitted with tiny radio tags. In April, it recorded its first detection, an Eastern whip-poor-will on its way north from Mexico! Data collected through the Motus network is helping researchers better understand wildlife migration, habitat use, and behavior.

Floracliff's forests and streams may take center stage, but the Nature Center and Trail's End Lodge also play an important role in our conservation work. They welcome visitors, provide space for educational programs and offices, and house equipment needed for the sanctuary's care. These buildings also require ongoing attention and stewardship. A generous grant from the Josephine Ardery Foundation made it possible to replace all three exterior entry doors at the Lodge, improving energy efficiency and accessibility. At the Nature Center, staff and volunteers have developed new displays to enhance the visitor experience. Next time you visit, check out the *Cabinet of Curiosities*, rotating art exhibit, and display on Kentucky's Native peoples.

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Protecting, Restoring and Sharing Nature in the Bluegrass

Ten Years of Counting Butterflies

In July, we organized the 10th annual Central Bluegrass Butterfly Count in Lexington. Over the past decade, participants have counted more than 12,000 butterflies representing 62 species. Two new species were recorded this year, including the harvester at Waveland Historic Site and the swarthy skipper at both Raven Run Nature Sanctuary and Floracliff.

Here are the results from this year's count, held on July 17th:

- 42 participants
- 14 sites
- 42 species observed
- 1,173 butterflies counted

All data are shared with the North American Butterfly Association's Butterfly Count Program. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to 10 years of butterfly data!

KGS Potter Interns Explore Geoscience at Floracliff

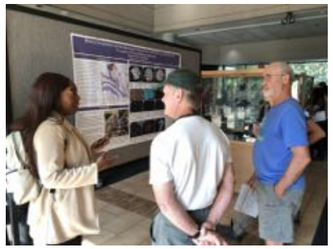
This summer, we were honored to host the Paul Edwin Potter Internship program in partnership with the Kentucky Geological Survey (KGS). Established in 2022, the internship program was made possible by a bequest from the late Dr. Paul Edwin Potter, a geology professor and mentor who wanted to support student internships in the states where he spent much of his professional career: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky.

The 2026 KGS Potter Internship program provided six students with a 10-week opportunity to collaborate with scientists on field-based research projects at Floracliff. The interns came from Ohio University, the University of Cincinnati, the University of Kentucky, and Western Kentucky University. Through their work at several sites across the sanctuary, they gained hands-on experience in geology, hydrology, soil science, and geospatial research, investigating features and processes ranging from landslides and watershed dynamics to soil microbial communities and tufa formation.

The internship concluded with a showcase where each student presented their research project through a lightning talk and the following poster presentations:

- Jillian Bales (OU): "Landslide Differencing Using Lidar in Floracliff Nature Sanctuary"
- Mamie Clark (UK): "Microbial Ecology and Soil Geochemistry Across Landslide Reference Settings"
- Noah Jennings (WKU): "Landform Mapping with Lidar in Floracliff Nature Sanctuary and Elk Lick Creek Watershed"
- Grant Keyton (WKU): "Quantifying Water Budget of the Elk Lick Creek Watershed Using Hydrological Modeling"
- Kendall McGarvey (UK): "Modeling an April 2025 Kentucky Flooding Event to Understand Central Kentucky Tributary Flooding"
- Breanna Pollard (UC): "Mineral Composition and Morphological Characteristics of the Elk Lick Creek Falls Tufa"

Thank you to the Kentucky Geological Survey for selecting Floracliff for this opportunity! Learn more about the KGS Potter Internship program at kygs.uky.edu/intern/



Alerts From the Field: Spicebush Emaravirus

By: Josie Miller, Stewardship Director

In recent years, we have observed unusual puckering and yellow speckling on northern spicebush leaves at Floracliff. Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a major component of our forest understory and the main food source for spicebush swallowtail caterpillars, so the health of these shrubs is particularly important. After ruling out the deadly Laurel Wilt disease, the University of Kentucky Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory confirmed the spicebush plants at Floracliff are displaying symptoms of *Lindera severe mosaic-associated emaravirus*, or spicebush emaravirus. Experts are still learning about the impacts of this virus on spicebush, which was first reported in the USA in 2017 and likely spread by microscopic eriophyid mites.

Since confirming emaravirus at Floracliff, we've encouraged volunteers and visitors to document symptomatic spicebush wherever they are observed. Dr. Ellen Crocker, UK Associate Professor of Forest Health Extension, has created the *Spicebush Emaravirus* project on iNaturalist. Each observation in the project helps researchers understand how widespread the virus is. Increasing scientific knowledge around spicebush emaravirus will inform if and how we manage our spicebush population at Floracliff in the future. Please join and contribute to the project on iNaturalist here: inaturalist.org/projects/spicebush-emaravirus

Introducing the Shooting Star Legacy Society

Legacy gifts have shaped Floracliff from the beginning. Floracliff founder Dr. Mary Wharton provided the financial resources to hire the sanctuary's first manager, establishing stewardship operations and educational programming. Another legacy gift provided funds to build our Nature Center in 2010, transforming our programs and visitor experience.

The Shooting Star Legacy Society recognizes individuals who have communicated their intention to leave a legacy gift to Floracliff. Legacy gifts may include bequests, beneficiary gifts, and more. By joining this community of forward-thinking supporters, you can help build on Dr. Wharton's vision for Floracliff. Please consult your attorney and/or financial advisor about the best legacy options for you.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Shooting Star Legacy Society or contact Beverly James at bjames@floracliff.org or (859) 296-0986.

Thank You to Our Community Partners!

Central Bluegrass Butterfly Count
The Arboretum
Lexington Parks & Recreation
KY Department of Fish & Wildlife
NABA - Central Kentucky
Office of KY Nature Preserves
Shaker Village

Forest Stewardship
Fayette Co. Conservation District
Floracliff Stewardship Volunteers
Mediocre Creative
Natural Resources Conservation Services

Pollinator Field Stewardship
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Research Projects/Species Surveys
Floracliff Community Science Volunteers
KY Department of Fish & Wildlife
Kentucky Geological Survey
Office of KY Nature Preserves
University of Kentucky

Trail's End Lodge Door Replacement Project
Josephine Ardery Foundation

Summer/Fall Hikes & Programs
Floracliff Program Volunteers
Floracliff Trail Volunteers
Human-Nature Systems
Lexington Bird Cult
Kentucky Natural Lands Trust
NABA - Central Kentucky
Red Oaks Forest School
UK Department of Entomology
Wild Birds Unlimited of Lexington

General Support
Good Foods Coop

Photos: ***Front*** - Twinleaf & snout beetle (Beverly James); Elk Lick Creek painting (John Davis); ***Top of page 2*** - red admiral butterfly (B. James), Stewardship in Action (Josie Miller), dark-eyed junco (Ward Ransdell); ***Left*** - red-spotted purple (David Lang); ***KGS Potter Intern article*** - fieldwork (Kentucky Geological Survey), group photo and showcase (B. James)

Photos: ***Top of page 3*** - Floracliff staff (Ward Ransdell), pawpaw in bloom (Patty Pennington), Floracliff Field Day birding group (W. Ransdell); ***Spicebush emaravirus article*** - Spicebush with emaravirus (Josie Miller); ***Shooting Star Legacy Society article*** - shooting star (Elizabeth Hench); **Back page** - Elk Lick Creek (Beverly James)

Upcoming Hikes and Programs

January:
3rd: Kids Hike: Winter Birds
8th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
30th: Winter Tree ID Workshop w/ Dr. Marvin Ruffner
31st: Still Life Sunday at the Lodge

February:
5th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
6th: The Natural Word: Winter Nature Journaling
13th: Birding for Beginners at the Lodge
28th: Still Life Sunday at the Lodge

March:
5th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
13th: A Tour of Floracliff's Old Oak Trees
18th: Golden Hour Hike
19th & 27th: Wildflower Hikes
21st: Plein Air Painting & Drawing
26th: Wildflower Hike w/ Judson Collins
30th: Wildflower Hike w/ Joyce Bender

April:
2nd: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
2nd, 4th, & 10th: Wildflower Hikes
6th: Kids Hike: Signs of Spring
8th & 22nd: Golden Hour Hikes
9th: Wildflower Hike w/ Tara Littlefield
16th: Wildflowers & Birds Walk w/ Dan Patrick
22nd: The Natural Word: Earth Day Nature Journaling
25th: Plein Air Painting & Drawing

May:
1st: Stewardship in Action Volunteer Day
7th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
7th: Forest Birds of the Palisades
15th: Creek to River Hike
20th: Golden Hour Hike
23rd: Beginning Drawing in Nature: Trees

June:
1st: Seminar: *Butterfly community trends and conservation in the Midwestern United States* w/ Dr. Wendy Leuenberger
4th: FLOC: First Friday Bird Walk
10th: Golden Hour Hike
20th: Plein Air Painting & Drawing
24th: Seminar: *Fireflies in Kentucky* w/ Robert Chambliss
25th: Native Bee Field ID Workshop w/ Kristin Conrad

Scan the QR code for event details, registration, and to see the full event calendar.

Staff

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Josie Miller
Stewardship Director

Isabel Cochran
Land Stewardship Technician

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Beverly James

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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.