



Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College Newsletter



Volume 11 / No. 1 JANUARY-MARCH

P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022

On your agenda: Join the BFEC

Now is the time to become a new BFEC member or to renew your membership.

Your membership enables the center to:

- Purchase materials for nature programs.
- Provide field-trip experiences for more than a thousand area school children each year.
- Offer a summer day camp
- Publish the newsletter
- Host our open houses

Your support creates valuable opportunities for the community to enjoy, appreciate, and learn about the natural area of the Kokosing River Valley. Please use the enclosed form to join the BFEC and include a membership contribution.

For more information, call 740-427-5050.

BFEC Says Farewell to Heidi May

Just before Christmas, Heidi May received an unexpected gift. She was offered a full-time position to teach for the Mount Vernon City school system at the Career Development Center. Although we are happy for Heidi's professional opportunity, we are very sad to lose her many contributions to the BFEC programs.

Heidi joined the BFEC late in 2003 to assist our new program director, Jason Larson. She steadily expanded her role at the center. Most recently she was appointed as program manager, collaborating with our newly hired facility manager to share responsibility for all the operations of the BFEC.

Heidi organized many events and programs at the BFEC and helped to start several new traditions such as Wildlife Day, Kokosing Scenic River Day, the Christmas Bird Count, and the Nature's Keepers Summer Day Camp. She organized community programming and special



through an education degree program. She took courses at Kenyon and Mount Vernon Nazarene University. It was through this program that Heidi's talents were recognized by the Mount Vernon city schools.

Heidi's activities and successes at the BFEC were too numerous to list here, but we thank her for all that she contributed. We look forward to future collaborations with Heidi in her role as an environmental educator!

Best of luck, Heidi!

The BFEC staff

events with good humor, making complicated coordination look easy. Heidi took on responsibility for supervising our Student Managers, and she was the first smiling face encountered by anyone entering the BFEC Visitor Center.

Her special interest was the school visitation program. The program grew under her guidance, and she improved our environmental education programs by linking them to state achievement standards. Heidi decided to continue her professional development

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On The Ground: From Facility Manager David Heithaus

Greetings from the BFEC. It's been a fantastic fall for our land management program with a lot of fixing up, adding on, and looking forward. We've broken new ground and are tremendously excited to share both what's been accomplished and what we've got in the works.

Our primary lands initiative, the Fall Trails Campaign, has been a huge success thanks to a lot of sweat and a lot of calluses on a lot of dedicated volunteers. The weekend trail building sessions were consistently productive and several special large-group efforts were invaluable. The trails have been overhauled and upgraded and over three new miles of trail—accessible on foot from Gambier—will be open and completed by the spring thaw. The Miller Observatory Loop Trail is already open and seeing some good use. The intrepid explorer can continue from there, through our newly fenced hiking corridor and all the way to our Bishop's Backbone and Wolf Run Loops—both hikable but without finished grading on some portions. Whatever is lacking in the few short, unimproved sections is more than made up for with the beautiful views of Wolf Run Creek and the wetland and fields beyond. The return trip from West Brooklyn Street. stacks up to around 4.6 miles and has a rigorous enough elevation profile to let you know you've done something.

The next phase of our trails campaign will focus on improving access and interpretive materials. Access will be greatly

improved by the addition of two safe parking areas, two bridges over Wolf Run Creek, and an eventual wetland boardwalk and observation platform. Professional directional and interpretive signage at trailheads and on the track will further enhance a visitor's experience, whether their goal is wildlife observation, trail running, cross-country skiing, or just a stroll through the forest.



Facility Manager Dave Heithaus (in back) takes a break with Kenyon trail volunteers (left to right) Sascha Lodge '07, Shaina Cantino '10, Colleen McLellan '09, and Evan Axelbaum '10

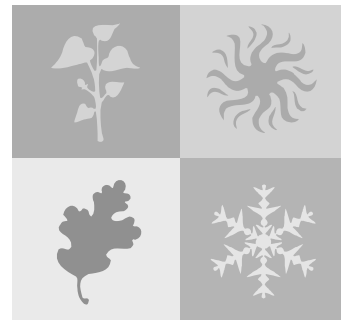
Whatever your particular interest is in exploring the BFEC, the means to do it will be waiting for you.

Off the trails, we've been busy as well. The Butterfly and Medicinal Herb Gardens have been put down for the winter, but we're already gearing up to wake them up brighter than ever next spring. By opening up opportunities for local gardeners to express themselves in these beds as well as in two new special-project vegetable gardens, we hope to engage horticulturists of all levels in 2007.

Around the rest of the BFEC, our eyes are on long-term sustainability and the reduction

of invasive plant species. In its embryonic stages is a plan to greatly expand our native prairie—a type of habitat for both plants and wildlife that requires minimal maintenance and is, by its nature, an effective deterrent for many aggressive invasive species. We are currently investigating funding avenues that would allow work to begin on more than ten acres by the spring of 2008.

Looking back on the semester, we've seen the completion of projects long in the works, the beginning of projects that will help to define the face of the BFEC in the future, and a general reinvestment in cooperative land stewardship. Striving to fulfill the BFEC's potential as an example of conservation, sustainability, and environmental awareness is an ongoing process defined by steps such as those taken this fall. At each step, we've been afforded a look back as well as a look forward—gaining perspective as well as renewed energy and excitement. I am anxious to share what we've done and what we will do and to work with the entire BFEC constituency to make sure next year's steps are as productive and rewarding as this year's have been.



Audubon Christmas Bird Count 2006

The BFEC recently sponsored the fourth annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Knox County. Forty volunteers observed more than 10,000 birds of seventy-five species. Local birders combed more than 400 miles of roads, fields, and woods and observed feeders for the entire day of December 17. All this activity was concentrated in a fifteen-mile diameter circle centered just north of Mount Vernon. Additional species were counted through December 20.

These Knox County observers participated in a traditional census dating back to 1900, when conservationists in twenty-five localities started a count as an alternative to a then-traditional "kill as much as you can" hunt on Christmas day. The CBC now is sponsored by the Audubon Society and it is a major example of citizen science. Data are compiled from more than 2000 counts such as the Knox County CBC. During last year's count in the United States and Canada, about 62 million birds were counted by more than 57,000 volunteers. With the information collected during the counts, scientists can detect changes in the numbers and locations of birds during the stressful winter period.

The weather for the Knox County CBC this year was not very stressful, as the counters and birds both enjoyed near-record warmth. Compared to last year, there were changes for many species of birds. On the increase by 20% or more were bald

eagles, mallards, mourning doves, kingfishers, Carolina wrens, eastern bluebirds, and starlings. More species, however, were seen in much lower numbers (declines of 50% or more): four species of ducks, three species of woodpeckers, tree sparrows, white-crowned sparrows, cardinals, goldfinches, and house finches, for example. Some of the decreases can be attributed to the fact that during warmer winter weather fewer birds concentrate their activity at feeders or unfrozen water—this makes them harder to count. Some of the increases likely are related to the fact that some species are better suited for warmer winters, while increases in bald eagles, barn owls and bluebirds may reflect successful conservation efforts. Differences between just two years in one place are not enough to lead to scientific conclusions, but Knox County Christmas bird counters are looking forward to seeing how the local count fits into regional, national, and long-term patterns. This is a great advantage to participating in the Audubon Society program.

For anyone interested in seeing past results of the CBC, they are available at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc. If you would like to participate next year, please contact the Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College.

Ray Heithaus
BFEC Executive Director

Thank You !

While Kenyon College has supported the BFEC since its inception and will continue to do so, it is largely through the generous work of students, community members, and benevolent sponsors that the BFEC has been able to grow.

In particular, we would like to give special thanks to Mr. Richard Baer of Gambier for his generous donation of four sectional reptile cages that will greatly improve both

the comfort of our educational animals and their usefulness and visibility in the visitors center.

Also, special thanks to Mr. Tom Gensemer of Jelloway Valley Builders for his equipment, expertise, and tireless volunteering on so many occasions. Without Tom's help, the new and improved trail system would be months rather than weeks from completion. We look forward to working with Tom in the future on the Wolf Run bridge and wetland

boardwalk.

If you would like to contribute a gift or volunteer to help with a project, please call the BFEC at 740-427-5050.





THE BROWN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER AT KENYON COLLEGE
 9781 Laymon Road
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WE ARE ON THE WEB

www2.kenyon.edu/BFEC/

The Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College (BFEC) exists to create opportunities for individuals and collaborative study of organisms and habitats of central Ohio...and to benefit the general public of Knox County through environmental education and recreation consistent with its educational goals.

Co - Executive Directors

E. Raymond Heithaus

Jordan Professor of Environmental Studies and Biology

Siobhan Fennessy

Associate Professor of Biology

Facility Manager

David Heithaus

Program Manager

Heather Doherty

Facility & Program Assistant

Jill Kerkhoff

Advisory Board

Meryl Brott, Frances and Miles Christian, Guy Denny, Anne Downey, Charles and Linda Findlay, Pat and Ray Heithaus, Ann Laudeman, Barbara Lipscomb, John Oliver, Denise and Mark Ramser, Susan Ramser, Rebecca Reimbold, Anne and Jefferson Robinson, Florence Short, William Stroud, Joan and David Trautman, Harlow Walker, Oscar H. Will III, and Henry Woolsey. Emeritus members: Shelia and Phillip Jordan.

DATE MAILED: JANUARY 2007
 CONTAINS DATED MATERIAL

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