

Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College *Newsletter*



VOLUME 13/NO. 1

WINTER 2009



Red-headed Woodpecker, a threatened bird found nesting at the BFEC

During the summer of 2007, Brown Family Environmental Center intern Ben Warner tramped through every corner of the BFEC's 400 acre preserve in search of birds. Supported by the Jordan Professorship, the internship aimed to accomplish what most of us would consider a tall order: conduct a "Breeding Bird Survey" identifying every pair of birds nesting and raising young.

With exceptional skill, Ben found six hundred breeding birds representing seventy-six species. This information will become a part of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, organized by Ohio State University and Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources. The Audubon Society also collects regional survey information, with the goal of determining how birds are fairing.

Birds on the Brink *Imperiled Species Call BFEC Home*

Unfortunately, some of the news is not good. Audubon has documented over 200 species of national conservation concern in their Watch List 2007. These birds are designated as either "yellow," meaning they are declining or rare, or "red," indicating imminent danger of extinction.

BFEC WATCH LIST BIRDS

Three of the species listed on the Audubon's yellow list were found nesting at the BFEC during our survey: the Prothonotary Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, and Red-headed Woodpecker. The biggest issue facing all three species is loss of habitat. So what makes the BFEC preserve a good home for them?

For the **Red-headed Woodpecker**, it's our policy of allowing dead trees to remain standing until they fall in their own time. This may seem insignificant until one considers that these "snags" are where woodpeckers bore nesting sites and dig for insects. Decline in forested habitat and removal of snags in the forests that remain has driven this species' population down 50% since 1966.

Red-headed Woodpeckers are easily identified by white wing patches and

their (not surprisingly) completely red heads. Other woodpeckers often have some red patches on their heads, but not to this extent. They eat a wide variety of foods, and are one of the best woodpeckers at catching insects in flight. This means that in addition to large patches of forest, they need adjacent open spaces for catching insects.

Warblers are notorious for giving bird watchers a stiff neck because they nest and feed on insects in the upper reaches of mature forest canopies. This is particularly true of the **Cerulean Warbler**, which is a beautiful, distinctive blue color. Once common, it is now one of the most steeply declining warblers, having lost about 4.5% of its population per year over the last forty years.

Habitat has been lost in both its winter range in South America due to agricultural expansion, and here in its summer breeding range where it requires large tracts of mature forest. Luckily, places like the BFEC preserve still provide suitable breeding habitat.

The **Prothonotary Warbler** likewise requires large tracts of mature

Continued page 2

Inside...

Volunteer Spotlight, page 2
Highlights of 2008, page 4
Project Budburst, page 5

... Continued from page 1

forest, though it prefers them next to swamps or rivers. This brilliant yellow bird also requires snags as one of the only warbler species that nests in tree cavities. It makes use of abandoned woodpecker holes (as do many other birds such as bluebirds and chickadees), but can also excavate its own cavity in soft wood.

The Prothonotary Warbler migrates to Central and South America, flying mostly at night on a route that sometimes takes it directly over the Gulf of Mexico. Its decline is tied heavily to the depletion of wintering habitat in mangrove forests, though loss of mature swamp or river bottom woodlands in our area also has reduced its summer breeding habitat.

BFEC land abutting the Kokosing River and its tributary, Wolf Run, provides perfect breeding grounds for Prothonotary Warblers. Our preserve in itself, however, would not be enough to sustain any of the species listed here. In our Ohio landscape, with its many homes and farms, it's important to link remaining wildlife habitats together.

Luckily, there are many organizations in Knox County working towards that end. The BFEC preserve abuts two other notable wildlife areas: Wolf Run Regional Park (operated by the Knox County Park District) and the forested corridor along the Kokosing River and Kokosing Gap Trail. Visitors who head west along the Gap Trail from the BFEC (towards Mt. Vernon) can find dozens of species of song birds and warblers, especially during spring migration.



Cerulean Warbler and Prothonotary Warbler, two imperiled species found nesting at the BFEC

WHAT YOU CAN DO

One of the ways that Knox County residents are getting involved is by taking part in the BFEC's **Christmas Bird Count (CBC)**. The CBC is a national event organized by the Audubon Society, with local groups working with volunteers all over the country to monitor bird populations. Collecting this kind of information enables scientists to pinpoint conservation needs and create policy. Last month, the BFEC held its seventh annual CBC, with thirty volunteers counting 600 birds representing 65 species.

There are a lot other things you can do for the birds, many of which start at home and are good for people too:

* **Limit global climate change** by turning off the lights or insulating your hot water heater (with a blanket available at hardware stores).

* **Promote conservation** of local habitat and sound environmental and farming policy through voting and being active in government.

* **Get involved** with organizations that conserve

habitat in our area. In Knox County, check out the Owl Creek Conservancy (www.owlcreekconservancy.org) or the Knox County Park District (www.knoxcountyparks.org).

* **Support birds at home** by installing plants that provide food (such as Serviceberry) and sticking with native species whenever possible. Visit the BFEC Wildlife Garden for ideas and ask us for more information.

Volunteer Spotlight

On page 4 we've highlighted some of our accomplishments this year, none of which would be possible without our members and volunteers. While we recognize them in each newsletter, we wanted to draw special attention to a few volunteers that over the year(s) have put forth extraordinary effort and deserve a special thanks:

Ben Warner, who mysteriously can call birds out of trees

Pat Heithaus, who can whip a garden into shape faster than a genie

Archons Society, who volunteer en masse like no other

Jane Cosby, who shows up without fail within the hour!

Field Trip Leaders, who we depend on to make programs possible. Special thanks to **Denny Wiegman**, who brings

the relaxed expertise that only a retired teacher can.

Tom Gensemer, who does more with dirt in an hour than anyone should ponder in a lifetime.

Mike Dailey, who knows more than he admits and helps our garden more than he'll ever know.

Student Managers, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty.

On the Ground

by Facility Manager David Heithaus

TREE TIME

Just because the weather drives us inside this time of year doesn't mean we're hibernating. It's time to regroup and plan for after the thaw. Given that we're rather fond of trees, we have some planting plans for the spring.

Last time we left off with a question regarding the husking of walnuts. Volunteers with rocks and framing hammers answered it and now we're sitting pretty (and stained) on a small mountain of viable black walnut seeds. They'll be chilling out in the barn for an early spring planting.

Interested in direct seeding some walnuts of your own? Here's a few easy steps:

1) Collect: Wait for the seeds to fall naturally in autumn (hopefully away from windshields).

2) Husk: The simplest method is to soak the nuts in water and then husk by hand. Remember: walnuts are a traditional source of natural dye so wear appropriate gloves or clothing to prevent unwanted staining (or save the water for some tie-dyeing).

3) Trial by water: Place the husked nuts in a bucket of water; discard the floaters...they're wormy.

4) Chill out: Store your husked nuts outside in a shallow pit. Protect them from rodents with a wire cage.

5) Plants away!: Following the spring thaw, dig them up and plant two nuts at each site in a sod-free area at about 2" deep. For extra protection from rodents, cut an 'X' in the bottom of a steel (not aluminum) can, carefully pry up the edges to form a small opening, and plant with that end up and nuts inside.

In other planting news, we'll be expanding our fruit production in the spring... of 2029. But we'll get the

ball rolling in 2009 with the planting of a heritage apple orchard south of the Bemis Barn and Aviary. Motivated by student interest and inquiry, a variety of apple seeds will get a head start in the greenhouse before being moved outside in March.

On the other side of the river, we'll be establishing a second paw paw grove near the Miller Observatory (not *too* near mind you). Many thanks to Jason Bennett for getting the paw paw rolling again this year. Finally, several tulip poplars and sugar maples will be planted around the resource center and elsewhere to replace trees claimed by age or wind.

RETHINKING WATER

In our last issue we also included a cautionary tale about the fruits of gardening hubris and promised a more specific follow up. The answer to several of our dilemmas lies in a project we're planning to launch in the spring as we bring conservation irrigation to the Wildlife Garden.

The most common method of watering lawns and gardens, aerial watering via a sprinkler system, is also the

least efficient and potentially harmful. A healthy volume evaporates before ever reaching the soil. Additionally, many plants are sensitive to excessive water contact (especially on their leaves) and can become afflicted with a variety of molds, mildews and fungi if soaked too long or too often.

A drip-irrigation system or soaker hose can drastically cut down on water waste and the risk of some diseases. Here at the BFEC we'll be establishing an exhibition project demonstrating how these simple technologies can save you time and money and have your gardens looking better than ever! By including timers and soil moisture readings in the equation we'll take it a step further towards peak efficiency while minimizing the risks of harmful *over* watering. Keep your eyes peeled for the announcement of our conservation irrigation workshop scheduled for March 21.

FISH OF THE KOKOSING

In Resource Center news, fish has been added to the menu! With the help of ODNR Division of Wildlife biologist, Brian Zimmerman, we've established a 'Fish of the Kokosing Watershed' display that includes a number of local species, several of which are rare outside of our area. Through Brian's generous donation of fish (and time) and a 55-gallon aquarium contributed by Gambier resident Richard Baer, we've a solid start that we look forward to expanding in the coming months.

ADOPT-A-BENCH!

Speaking of expanding, we're still planting custom benches all around our trail system. Many thanks to those who have already answered the call! Everyone else, keep that adopt-a-bench contribution in mind and I'll be ready with a shovel... and ice axe until March. See you on the ground!



Highlights of 2008

2008 had been a very productive year at the BFEC, and we wanted to share a few of the highlights. Please join us in celebrating some of our accomplishments, and as members, volunteers, and general supporters, accept our thanks for making it possible. With your help, we're looking forward to another great year ahead!

A record 4,000 people participated in 88 BFEC programs

such as our Harvest Festival, summer camp, Earth Day Health Expo, and Dog Days Family Trail Races.

We surpassed the 10,000 students mark for school field trip visits made to the BFEC since the program was started 13 years ago.

Over 3,000 trees were planted

on the hillside above the prairie as a long-term invasive species control and habitat recovery project.

Strides were made to increase campus sustainability,

with projects such as the distribution 75 additional recycling bins, hundreds of new bin labels, and posters that clearly define how the recycling system works.

We underwent an independent review of our operations

to ensure that we are efficiently and effectively meeting our mission. With feedback in hand, staff will take a strategic planning retreat in May 2009. We look forward to sharing new goals with you soon.

Support the BFEC ~ Become a Member

Now is the time to become a member or renew your annual membership to the BFEC. There are many reasons to give, perhaps foremost for that sense of satisfaction knowing you're helping us achieve our goals of environmental education and conservation. Your membership entitles you to being the first to know about offerings, receive a hard copy of our newsletters, a 10% discount on high quality bird seed, and preferential RSVP status on popular workshops. Please use the form below or payment envelope to send in your membership today, and thanks!

We're also offering a new opportunity for members to have a bench placed at a BFEC trail location of their choice with a plaque honoring their special contribution. Please check the box below if you'd like to contribute to this project, and see page 5 for more details.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Membership level: | Student ___ \$20 | Individual ___ \$35 | Name _____ |
| Family ___ \$50 | Friend ___ \$100 | Patron ___ \$250 | Address _____ |
| Benefactor ___ \$1000 + | | | City _____ |

Amount enclosed: _____
State, zip code _____

My check, payable to Kenyon College, is enclosed
Telephone _____

Please bill my ___ Visa or ___ MasterCard
Email _____

Card number _____ Exp. date _____

Yes! I've enclosed a special gift of \$250 to have a bench placed along a BFEC trail of my choice, along with a plaque recognizing my contribution.

Your donation is tax deductible as allowed by law. The Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College is part of Kenyon College, a 501C(3) nonprofit organization.

Mail to: BFEC, P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022



NEWS from the BROWN

AND THE WINNERS ARE....

We're delighted to share the results of two contests held at the BFEC this fall. Hail to the victors!

The **Mudman Triple Trail Race Series** featured three races held on November 7th and 8th. Below are individual race winners, and the Mudman King & Queen who held the highest rankings over all three races. The event saw a great turnout, with 68 runners, 26 of which ran all three races!

| <u>Race</u> | <u>Female Top Finisher</u> | <u>Male Top Finisher</u> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 5k Time Trial | Jeanne Bascuk | Daniel Moore |
| 5k Steeple Chase | Jeanne Bascuk | Ty Gregg |
| 10k Cross Country | Jeanne Bascuk | Heath Boylan |
| Mudman King & Queen! | Jeanne Bascuk | Joey Montoya |



The **9th Annual Community Photography Contest** was judged at the BFEC on October 17th. Thank you to all of all the participants for gracing our walls with their fabulous photographs!

| <u>Adult Division</u> | <u>Children's Division</u> |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1st - John Hofferberth | 1st - Nick Light |
| 2nd - Sarah Heidt | 2nd - Nora Rice |
| 3rd - Pat Heithaus | 3rd - Will Clark |

REUSE - A - SHOE



Anyone has been to the BFEC Visitor Center lately may recognize our shoe recycling symbol. The BFEC started collected shoes over two years ago and shipping them to Nike through their Reuse-A-Shoe initiative. Nike separates the rubber, processes it into pellets, and uses the material to make track and gym surfaces for at-need communities. Not long after we started the program at the BFEC, the Kenyon Athletic Center also picked it up. Given their high rate of gym shoe traffic, shoe recycling volume has increased by an order of magnitude. What's more, the SAACs (Student Athlete Advisory Committees) of all ten colleges in the North Coast Athletic Conference (of which Kenyon is a part) has endorsed this program and are now participating in the drive to recycle.

PROJECT BUDBURST

For those who wait and watch with great anticipation for the first wildflower to open, Project Budburst may be for you. It's a national campaign designed to engage the public in the collection of climate change data based on the timing of the first bud bursts and leaves appearing in spring. Thanks to historical data kept by naturalists and scientists all over the world, we already know that plant species are beginning to awaken earlier in the spring. Aside from tracking climate change and providing data about how the ecological systems that support us are changing in response, wildlife scientists are interested in how changes in plants will affect the animals that depend on them. For instance, an insect emerging from hibernation eager to find its favorite food may discover that the plant is past its usefulness, having bloomed two weeks earlier than usual. Visit www.budburst.org to sign up.



Calendar of Events

All events start from the BFEC Resource Center at 9781 Laymon Road unless stated otherwise.
Please contact 740-427-5052 or doherty@kenyon.edu for additional information.



Moon Rise Hike - Sunday, February 8th, 5:30pm

Shake off winter lethargy by warming up with a brisk hike to take in the sunset *and* full moon rise! We'll hike approximately two miles along our prairie and up the steep Fern Trail to a fantastic view of the Kokosing River valley and the afore mentioned celestial bodies at their most brilliant. Please dress for cold weather and wear sturdy hiking shoes.

Bluebird Workshop – Sunday, March 1, 1:00pm

Our popular Bluebird Workshop is back for its seventh year, though with a different format. The Ohio Bluebird Society coordinator for Knox County, Dale Glass, will give a chock-full presentation about bluebirds, how to attract them, and proper sighting of nesting boxes. BFEC staff will also talk about their extensive bluebird trail and research. Workshop attendees will have a chance to purchase high quality bluebird housing systems. Materials and space are limited - RSVP REQUIRED.

Water Conservation in the Garden – March 21, time TBA

Avoid water waste, mildew and fungal disease all at the same time with a safe, efficient drip irrigation system. Traditional sprinkler watering leaves wells and wallets dry and plants at greater risk for maladies of the leaf. Learn how to install your own cost-effective irrigation system, explore available options and see our own demonstration system as it's laid down.

Bald Eagle Watch - Wednesday, March 25th, 6:00pm

Did you know that in 2008 Knox County boasted four nesting pairs of bald eagles? Hear about Ohio's eagle population from the Division of Wildlife, and then catch a glimpse of eagles nesting along the Kokosing River. If we're lucky, we may catch adult eagles feeding hatchlings! Transportation will be provided. Program will begin promptly to ensure adequate daylight for viewing the nest. Come a few minutes early to talk with local eagle experts! Co-sponsored by the Knox County Park District.

Earth Day Health Expo and Earth Day Challenge Marathon - Sunday, April 19th, Kenyon Athletic Center. The Expo is a FREE event that will focus on how to keep ourselves and our world healthy - two goals that often go hand-in-hand! The event will run from 12:00 - 4:00pm and feature door prizes, music, retail vendors, exhibits, farmers market, and hands-on activities for people of all ages. The Marathon will also start and conclude at the Athletic Center - help cheer on runners as they finish! Entry information is available at <http://bfec.kenyon.edu/EDCFrameset-1.htm>.

Sounds of Spring – Thursday, April 30th, 7:00pm

Frogs and tadpoles abound at the BFEC ponds! Our small ponds are located between the BFEC Resource Center and Farm House. Come learn about the many species that call our ponds home, identify them by sound, and enjoy the blissful spring cacophony. Led by Professor of Biology Siobhan Fennessy, all ages welcome.

The Spring Peeper is one of the many frogs that call the BFEC ponds - as well as many other ponds in wetlands in the area - home. It's one of the earliest to start calling - listen for their chorus as soon as the ice melts!



Thank You to...

Our Members...

Membership is based on the calendar year. Please see page 4 for a membership form.

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 Jeff & Annie Robinson
 David Newell
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 Karen Wright

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 Bob & Buffy Hallinan

Rod Zolman of Sharkz Design and Sign, *for donating the BFEC logos on our new truck*

Tom Gensemer of Jelloway Valley Builders, *for donating time and materials to build Wolf Run Bridge*

Our Volunteers...

In the office, classroom, and on the trails:

Jane Crosby
 Karen Hicks
 Brian Zimmerman
 James Gyenes
 Nate Fedor
 Tim Shutt
 Ben Warner

* Kenyon Archons, for providing many volunteer hours at our Harvest Festival and Mudman Triple Trail Race Series

* Mt. Vernon High School Environmental Club, for volunteering at the Harvest Festival

* Pumpkins on Parade planning committee, including OSU Extension

* Mudman Triple Race Series Volunteers

* Christmas Bird Count Volunteers, especially brave field counters Ben Warner, Susan Walker, Keith Kitchen, Buffy Hallinan, Tim Shutt, Susan Ramser, Chris Bowman, Opal & Gene Shepherd, Bill & Jan Smith, and Kathy & Chris Gillen

THE BROWN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER *at Kenyon College*

9781 Laymon Road, Gambier, Ohio 43022 ~ (740) 427-5050 ~ <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>



Our Mission

The Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College is dedicated to research, environmental education, and the preservation of the natural habitats and cultural heritage of the Kokosing River Valley.

Co-Executive Directors

E. Raymond Heithaus, *Jordan Professor of Environmental Studies & Biology*
Siobhan Fennessy, *Associate Professor of Biology*

Facility Manager
David Heithaus

Program Manager
Heather Doherty

Facility & Program Assistant
Jill Kerkhoff

Upcoming Events

See page 6 for more information

February 8: Sunset + Moonrise Hike

March 1: Bluebird Workshop

March 21: Water Conservation in the Garden

March 25: Bald Eagle Watch

April 19: Earth Day Health Expo &
Earth Day Challenge Marathon
Registration now being accepted!

DATE MAILED: January, 2009
CONTAINS DATED MATERIAL

The Brown Family
Environmental Center
at Kenyon College
P.O. Box 508
Gambier, Ohio 43022

