

FIELD NOTES



Yellow trout lily

SPRING EPHEMERALS

by Catherine Wessel '19, BFEC Student Manager

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ONE OF THE FIRST SIGNS of the awakening Earth is the arrival of the earliest spring wildflowers, often called spring ephemerals because their life cycle tends to be fleetingly short. These plants that appear to be so delicate are hardier than they look, braving the end of winter and fighting their way up through the cold ground. Despite their small size and brief life cycle, a great deal of lore has accumulated through the generations about these spring beauties.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) is perhaps one of the most well-known and easily identifiable of the Ohio spring wildflowers. This member of the poppy family can be found in moist woodlands, blooming in Knox County usually in April. It can be identified by its eight to 14 snowy white petals with many bright yellow stamens at the center and by a single lobed leaf that hugs the stem, unfurling only after the flower petals have fallen. Spotting this flower is a prize, as each bloom lasts only one to two days. The name bloodroot refers to the dark, orange-red sap that is stored within the rhizome.

Bloodroot was and still is a controversial medicinal plant. In the mid-1800s, it had several uses: it was applied to the skin to treat ringworms,

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Spring ephemerals blooming in April include the bloodroot (top), yellow trout lily (middle) and hepatica (bottom).



the root was made into a tea to treat rheumatism and a drop of the sap would be mixed with sugar to treat coughs. The rhizome could be dried and was sometimes sold as a stimulant or as a remedy for rattlesnake bites. Today, we've learned that there are many potentially dangerous side effects of these uses. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of sanguinarine in toothpaste, there is some evidence that suggests it may cause cancer. Sheesh! Perhaps we should just admire these ethereal blossoms while they're blooming in the forest.

Hepatica, also called liverleaf, or liverwort, is in the buttercup family. Most of the names for this plant refer to the shape of its leaves, somewhat resembling the human liver. There are two species of hepatica in Ohio: roundlobe (*Hepatica nobilis* var. *obtusa*) and sharplobe (*Hepatica nobilis* var. *acuta*). Colors for Hepatica range from white to pink to lavender/blue. It is one of the first ephemerals to arrive, usually blooming in Knox County in early April.

In the 18th century, the doctrine of signatures said that plants mimicked the shapes of the body parts they could be used to treat. This thinking was used to validate hepatica as a liver treatment. Over the years, with no successful results, this thinking slowly lost popularity.

Yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), blooming in Knox County in early April, is notable for its waxy, mottled leaves and golden flowers with recurved petals. Trout lilies tend to grow in large colonies that can survive in the same location for centuries. The common name, trout lily, refers to the spots on the leaves, which are reminiscent of trout, and to the plant's blooming during trout season.

This lovely flower plays an important ecological role wherever it grows. The roots draw in more phosphorus than most plants and relocate it to the leaves. When the leaves wither and decompose, they act as fertilizer, creating a cycle of rich soil not only for their continued survival but for other plants that live in close proximity.

While trout lily is edible, we don't recommend eating it because it can cause vomiting. However, in the past, the leaves and the corm (root) have been eaten. Trout lily is a North American species, but there are many *Erythronium* species around the world. In Roman times, fresh leaves were bruised and applied to feet to relieve foot sores and corns.

These are only a small sampling of the early wildflowers of Ohio. There are many others: trillium, dutchman's breeches, harbinger-of-spring and bluebells, to name a few. Finding these beautiful spring ephemerals feels like finding a rare treasure — the first sign that spring is around the corner and there is an even greater bounty to come.

"MEMORIES OF MY OWN CONNECTION TO NATURE"

After a year on the preserve, the BFEC's post-baccalaureate fellow bids farewell

by Maddie Morgan '18

I HAD JUST ARRIVED BACK AT THE FARMHOUSE one March evening not long after an oddly warm downpour had ceased. I unplugged my phone from my car's aux chord, turned off my engine and listened as the newly found silence rattled in my brain. I opened my door to head inside when I noticed something odd. Usually greeted by the silence of winter nights, I became sure that I heard something by the ponds. I stood frozen by my car, holding my breath.

Peep. There it was! It was soft, yet distinct. I waited. Would it speak again? *Peep!* Aha! What was that? As I began to debate what may be chatting along the ponds' shores, the little ecosystem suddenly broke out into a twinkle of squeaks and peeps. That's when it hit me. Spring peepers! The remarkably warm March day must have woken them from their winter slumbers.

As I stood along the fence outlining our ponds, listening to the spring chorus, I thought back to my small years when my cousins and I would scour the spring grasses for the tiny frogs at their farm. They were so small we could hardly feel them when they sat in our hands. I remember there being dozens of them hopping out in front of us as we bounded through the grasses, giggling and hollering. Our feet and hands were caked with mud, and our shorts and dresses decorated in grass stains.

As I thought about this childhood memory and the warm spring days to come, I thought about the field trips and public programs we offer at the BFEC. I thought about the kids swinging nets through the tall prairie grasses, or digging around in the dirt along the pond edges looking for macroinvertebrates, or wobbling around with their hands out in front of them as they tried on our "bee glasses." I thought about climbing the hill to reach the Pine Plantation with a line of chatty fifth graders trailing behind me while we excitedly pointed out snags, and I thought about the kids pulling apart logs with probes and tweezers in an eager search for decomposers.

The experiences that kids have had while at the BFEC have continued to bring back memories of my own connection to nature. A large part of my childhood was spent outside, chasing the small patches of "wilderness" in my suburban cul-de-sac or spending time on lakes fishing and camping with my dad. I didn't realize it then, but I was becoming a nature-addict. Fueled by my positive, seemingly unbounded experiences with the outdoors, I continued to seek the fresh air and green spaces as I grew up.

And as time has suddenly warped and we somehow find ourselves in April with my journey at the BFEC ending in May, I've thought a lot about these field trips and programs like Family Nature Quests. About the variety of channels the BFEC provides for kids to access nature in its many forms. And about how these experiences have allowed kids to really connect with the Earth and create their own memories outside.



Memories that they too can carry with them as they grow older and interact with their environments as adults.

Obviously, I've been thinking a lot. Probably too much. But it's hard not to think in such a setting as the BFEC, which encourages such positive connections, relationships and learning experiences. And as we gear up for my last Family Nature Quest series in the spring, I'm excited to continue to provide spaces for the creation of these nature memories and to be a part of these experiences.

For those of you who may remember my first article about trails back in the fall newsletter, it's looking like my trail has just become a whole lot clearer. I cannot thank Noelle, Shane, Jill, Dave and the lovely Brown family enough for creating such an incredible position that has allowed me to explore my own interests, grow as a professional and a person, and connect with such an incredible community as this.

Thank you so much to everyone who has made this experience so special and for finding this new trail with me. I have never felt so welcome, supported and encouraged in such a beautiful environment, and I am beyond excited to take these experiences, skills and memories with me onto my next journey. I will never forget my time at the Brown Family Environmental Center and all the people who made it possible. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Family Programs

Family Nature Quest: Amazing Amphibians

APRIL 27, 10:30-11:30 A.M.

Spring is fully upon us, and the BFEC ponds are bustling with activity. Tadpoles, frogs and insects are enjoying the warmer waters, while red-winged blackbirds and dragonflies are taking advantage of the surrounding plant life. Come grab a net to explore and discover our amphibians. *Meet in the picnic pavilion. In the event of inclement weather, program will be held in the Resource Center.*

Family Nature Quest: Baby Birds

MAY 4, 10:30-11:30 A.M.

It's Global Big Day, birding's biggest day. Discover the many birds around our property and take a peek at some of our bluebird boxes. Birds are starting to nest; hopefully we'll see some baby birds and eggs. Then you'll get to make a bird nest of your own to take home. *Meet in the picnic pavilion. In the event of inclement weather, program will be held in the Resource Center.*

Family Nature Quest: Wonderful Wildflowers

MAY 11, 10:30 A.M.- 1:30 P.M.

Take a hike and search for beautiful spring wildflowers. Learn about the life cycle and preferred habitats of a few of our favorite wildflowers. We'll make beautiful cards decorated with wildflowers as we prepare to celebrate Mother's Day. *Meet in the picnic pavilion. In the event of inclement weather, program will be held in the Resource Center.*

Family Nature Quest: Beautiful Butterflies

MAY 18, 10:30-11:30 A.M.

Join us as we travel our prairie and garden in search of some beautiful butterflies. We'll learn about butterflies and other pollinators like our native bees. Then, we'll spend some time drawing and painting the beautiful garden (and pollinators) around us. *Meet in the picnic pavilion. In the event of inclement weather, program will be held in the Resource Center.*

Programs for All

The Buckeye Trail: Hike Ohio

APRIL 4, 7 P.M.

Mount Vernon resident Pam Leonard celebrated her 50th birthday by taking a little hike – 1,442 miles, circling Ohio. The Buckeye Trail is a nationally recognized loop trail highlighting much of Ohio's rural beauty and Leonard is one of the few women to have completed the entire trail. She will join representatives of the Buckeye Trail to discuss this resource and share some of her tales from the trail. *Meet at the BFEC Resource Center.*

Wild Edibles

APRIL 13, 1 P.M.

Find and sample common dandelions, reclusive wild leeks and stinging nettle with Mount Vernon resident Shawn Dailey. Hike about 2.5 miles of hilly terrain and sample wild foods after the hike. Participants should bring a water bottle, hiking boots or other suitable footwear, appropriate outerwear for the weather, and most importantly, an adventurous spirit. No registration required. *Meet at the Miller Observatory parking lot.*

Keep It Wild: Earth Day at the BFEC

APRIL 20, NOON-4 P.M.

Celebrate Earth Day with this free event. We'll have owls, hawks, skunks, river otters, snakes and more for you to meet up-close. Make and take bluebird boxes, bat boxes and more. Live music and a food truck will round out the afternoon.

Bird Walk

MAY 11, 8 A.M.

Join us for an easy stroll through a portion of BFEC property and along the Kokosing Gap Trail to search for and identify birds. The focus will be visual identification, behaviors and niche preferences. All experience levels welcome. Bring your own field guide and binoculars, or use ours if you're a beginner. Jake Peer, wildlife specialist for Knox County Soil and Water, will be leading this adventure. *Meet at the BFEC Resource Center.*

Recycle: Let's Get it Right

MAY 11, 2 P.M.

Randy Canterbury from Knox County Recycling and Litter Prevention will clear up any and all questions about recycling. Know what items are acceptable at drop-off centers, where these centers are located and why we can't recycle everything. He will also tell us how we can save money by recycling. *Meet at the BFEC Resource Center.*

Native Ohio Pollinators

JUNE 8, 2 P.M.

Andrew Lybbert, a Ph.D. candidate at the Ohio State University, discusses Ohio pollinators, especially our native bumble bees. Lybbert worked on the Ohio Bumble Bee Research team during the past two summers and will discuss findings from the team's survey, native plants that native bees depend on and what we can do to support them.

Tastes of Nature: Jams and Jellies

JUNE 15, 2 P.M.

In this hands-on program, Kathy Dean-Ridenour teaches how to make jams and jellies using edible flowers like roses, lilacs and apple blossoms. Make a batch to take home and taste several varieties. Dean-Ridenour has been a backyard forager and garden grazer for many years. *Space is limited; call 740-427-5052 to reserve a seat. Materials fee: \$10*

Make Your Own Native Bee Hotel

JUNE 22, 2 P.M.

Join us for a hands-on adventure in honor of National Pollinator Week. Jason Bennett, a beekeeper for 20 years, will lead demonstrate how to build a native been hotel — a lovely addition to your garden. *Space is limited; call 740-427-5052 to reserve your seat. Materials fee: \$10*

WHAT'S NEW AT THE BFEC?

by Noelle Jordan

THANKS TO MADDIE MORGAN, BFEC's Post-Baccalaureate Fellow, and Ervin Hershberger of Danville, we have BFEC syrup. The maple trees in front of our Resource Center were tapped by Maddie. She collected the sap and took it to Ervin who used his fancy evaporator to boil it down and turn it into the yummy stuff. If you want to taste our special BFEC syrup, come on by!

This spring, our barn will get a face-lift. A local company will be working to improve both the structural integrity and the visual appearance of our barn.

If you stop by to check it out, be sure to wander south of our barn until you reach a small babbling brook. By May, we will have a new trail that provides access to this stream and connects to an area along the western border of BFEC property. A portion of this border area was planted with 75 native hardwood trees last spring, and another section was turned into a new pollinator plot this past winter.

The pollinator plot includes native wildflowers like cardinal flower and Ohio spiderwort. We hope to attract many native insects and perhaps a few birds with this planting. We may not see many flowers this year, but next year the area should be a riot of color and buzzing insects.

On the programming side of things, we saw a jump in the number of students, chaperones and teachers who attended our elementary field trips this school year. Thanks to the Knox County Foundation and many other very generous donors, we are now able to reimburse every classroom for their transportation expenses when they visit the BFEC for a field trip. The cost of transportation is often high enough to prevent many classrooms from taking field trips. After removing this barrier, the number of participants last fall (792) was the highest in BFEC's 23-year history for a single semester. For this spring, we currently have 807 students on the schedule.

The Green Corner

SPRING AT THE KENYON FARM

by Ryan Hottle, Manager of the Kenyon Farm

SPRING HAS SPRUNG! As of 5:58 p.m. on Wednesday, March 20, the Northern Hemisphere entered into official springdom. Even if the weather hasn't become appreciably warmer, a careful observer may have noticed subtle phenological changes starting to take place: buds on the forsythia, a member of the olive family, are ready to pop (once they do, so the adage goes, only three more snows thereafter), spring peepers have started peeping in vernal ponds across the county, and growers of plants are anxiously awaiting turning their winter daydreams of seed catalogs into reality astutely forgetting about the labor and weeds of yesteryears gone by.

At the Kenyon Farm, the students have been carefully plotting out their next moves. Four of our does (female goats) will be birthing their kids in late April or early May. Our high tunnels, already full of greens and brassicas, will be harvested and readied for a fresh crop of warmth lovers: tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. We're also going to try our hand at ginger root and turmeric this year in the high tunnels, which promises to be a learning experience. We were able to get a few hundred feet of snow and sugar snap peas planted already, and we're hoping our yellow, white, purple and blue potatoes come in soon so we can slice them between the eyes and tuck them carefully into some fertile soiled beds.

We recently transformed our garage into a mixed-use retail, classroom and gathering space to make the farm more accessible to students, faculty, staff and community members visiting to share in the bounty with us. During the academic year, we work from 4:30-6:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and from 1-4 p.m. on Saturdays. We welcome anyone and everyone to come visit. Here's to a fruitful growing season ahead!

DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Winter 2018-19

Your support helps us grow. Thanks to the following donors who supported the Brown Family Environmental Center and the small but mighty volunteer corps who have been working hard through the cold winter months.

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Sutton Amthor '22:
projects on the property

Lindy Wittenberg '19:
office support

Ellen Beller, community member: office support

Dianne Mack, community member: office support

Brad Imhoff, community member: program leader

Tim Shutt, Kenyon faculty: program leader

Ray Heithaus, Kenyon emeritus faculty: program leader

And a special thank you to **Ervin Hershberger** of Danville, who has been processing our maple syrup.





Brown Family Environmental Center

at Kenyon College

bfec.kenyon.edu | 740-427-5050

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OUR MISSION

The Brown Family Environmental Center exists to support the academic goals of Kenyon College, to provide opportunities for education and research, to engage Central Ohioans of all ages with nature, and to conserve the natural diversity of the Kokosing River valley.

OUR STAFF

Madeleine Morgan '18, *Post Baccalaureate Fellow*

Jill Kerkhoff, *Facilities Coordinator and Office Administrator*

Shane McGuire, *Land Manager Naturalist*

Noelle Jordan, *Manager*

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