

Berea College Forestry Outreach Center December 2023 Year in Review



December Events:

- Pinnacles group hikes Saturdays at 1:00 pm. Meet at the FOC. All welcome! *No group hikes Dec. 23rd or 30th*
- Dec. 3rd, 2:00-3:30 pm, Family Activity: Wildlife Math Exploration

December Moon Phases:

Last Quarter: Dec. 5th First Quarter: Dec. 19th
New Moon: Dec. 12th Full Moon: Dec. 27th



Learn about what telescope to buy as a gift along with this month's astronomical events on our website under 'Skies Over the Pinnacles'

2047 Big Hill Rd. Berea, KY
FOC Hours:

Tues.-Sat. 10:00-4:00
Sun. 12:00-4:00

**Closed Dec. 20th- Jan. 3rd
Trails & outdoor restrooms
will be open, dawn to dusk**

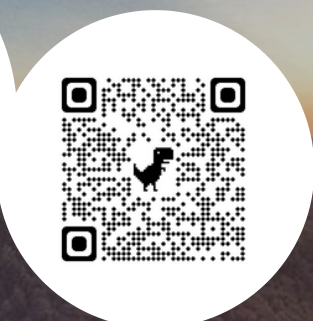


FOC fall labor students

2023 was filled with community connections

Thank you to everyone who partnered with us, attended an event, or walked on the trails. We are thrilled to share the Berea Forest with old and new friends. We are thankful for new partnerships we have made this year that strengthen our community and our stewardship of the natural world.

The Center welcomed over 12,000 visitors in 2023! That makes a total of 60,000+ since we opened in 2018.



Restorative Forest Management

The Forestry Department manages over 9,000 acres that include Berea's watershed, hiking trails, and immense biodiversity. Learn about their work through a Story Map made by forester Phil Vogel by scanning this QR code or under "Culture of Caretaking" on our website, forestryoutreach.berea.edu.

Additions to the Crew

After graduation, Zen Dean '23 transitioned into a horse logging technician role. Abbie Phelps '21 is returning to the work she was passionate about as a labor student by stepping into the role of horse and barn care technician. We are so happy to have them!



Getting Folks Outdoors

This year we had the pleasure of hosting over 1,500 people of all ages who joined us for hikes, events, and programming. We appreciate each and every one of you and hope to see you again in 2024! We love getting people of all ages engaged in learning about the natural world around them. We practice place-based learning, which means fostering inquiry and curiosity about our home and focusing activities on the native wildlife we have here in Berea.

Thank you to Berea Kids Eat, Berea Community Schools, GEAR UP Kentucky, and various homeschool groups for learning with us. We also introduced over over twenty Berea College classes and staff groups to their forest campus.



3,498

Species
identified to date

(3,151 in 2022)

by
681

Observers on
iNaturalist

(561 in 2022)



Berea's Biodiversity

The Biodiversity of the Berea College Forest is a project on iNaturalist.com that is built by citizen science--community-driven data collection of the flora and fauna found here. Hundreds of visitors to the Berea College Forest have helped document over 3,000 unique species of wildlife.

Our project, "Biodiversity of the Berea College Forest," has nearly 30,000 total observations!

Photos are automatically added to the project when you make observations on campus or in the forest!

John Abrams, the FOC's Ecologist, dedicates many hours to exploring and identifying species. Every day it becomes more evident just how complex and healthy this unique ecosystem is.

What's New?

Nature R&R

In 2023, Wendy Warren gained certification through the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy guides to lead what we call "Nature R&R": Relaxation and Restoration. The mental and physical health benefits are well researched, widely practiced in Japan, and are now spreading across the globe. Thanks to the many campus classes and groups who asked for an introduction and/or attended a full two hour session. Wendy also led a dozen sessions open to both campus and community since her certification in April. Watch the February newsletter for the next offering. If you want to learn more about it, click the QR code or find us on YouTube to watch a short video describing the experience and its benefits.



Art in the Forest

Local artist bugz fraugg created hand-carved wooden signs to teach about several species of trees in the Berea College forest. The signs start in the lower forest and continue up the main trail. When you pause to read them, you will learn more than just the names of our tree friends. These identification signs encourage us to pay attention to a tree's bark, buds, leaves, seeds, and silhouette. Each sign also describes the role of the tree in its ecosystem--including how it benefits humans. Most include names or space to add names in the languages of the Shawnee and Cherokee people who call this land home. Stop by the Center to pick up the zine bugz designed to accompany the signs, or find it on the front page of our website!

Thank You to Our Volunteers!

Ann Longworth has put countless hours of work into the preservation of native wildflowers that are important for our pollinator friends. She tends to the garden in front of the FOC as well as collects seeds to help flower population's genetic diversity.

Jeff Hutton has helped us to have a new way of looking at things...through a telescope! Jeff has hosted star gazing events and contributed so much knowledge through his "Skies Above the Pinnacles" articles that can be found on the front page of our website.

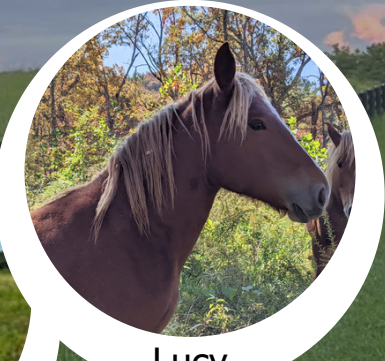


If you visit the FOC on a Saturday you're likely to meet Diane at the welcome desk. As the weekends are our busiest time, Diane has been there to greet and answer questions of hundreds of visitors this year!

Josh began working with us when he was a high school student and has continued after graduation! He helps us keep the building clean for visitors and tells us the best jokes!

The More the Mare-ier

As of this year, the College draft barn and farm is home to two mules and six Suffolk punch horses. As this year closes, they are about to start working in a new area of the forest harvesting timber through worst-first selection.



Floyd

Theo

Hallie

Lena

Holly & Willow

Tom & Jerry

Lucy

Restoring the Forest Giants

Historically, the tree species in Berea's forest were predominately American chestnut, white oak, hickory, and shortleaf pine. Through fungal blights and clear cutting, these forest giants' numbers have declined. There are multiple targeted restoration projects occurring on the Berea College forest to help restore the ecosystem's balance:

Two orchards of natural American chestnut trees are being carefully managed and monitored with help from the American Chestnut Foundation. This year, two of the trees flowered--a rare event, as most trees succumb to the chestnut blight before reaching maturity. Through thinning the understory species such as maples and sourwoods, more sunlight was able to reach these chestnuts, encouraging flowering. These trees are now on a state list as potential sources of pollen or trees ready for pollination in the coming year.

White oak in the College forest is being managed sustainably through efforts like horse logging and timber stand improvement. The forest's white oak stands have led to collaborative research with



Top: Phil with a chestnut tree
Middle: A chestnut tree
Bottom: White oak tree



professors from the University of Kentucky's Forestry and Natural Resources department: Dr. John Lhotka (silviculture), Dr. Lance Vickers (forest management and stand dynamics) and Dr. Sybil Gotsch (forest ecophysiology). They, along with their undergraduate research students, are studying how white oak saplings respond to "pre-commercial thinning practices designed to promote the recruitment of oak trees into competitive, overstory crown positions." - Dr. John Lhotka, 'Inform' fall 2023

Similarly, thinning the understory benefits the growth of shortleaf pine trees and improves ruffed grouse habitat.

To foster these outcomes, the foresters conduct prescribed burns annually, each year burning a plot adjacent to the last. In April of 2023, with help from the Kentucky Division of Forestry and Berea students, the foresters burned about 20 acres. You can learn more and see the results of these controlled burns by walking the Burn Loop at the Pinnacles.

A Continued Partnership

This spring, representatives from the Plimoth Patuxet Museum in Massachusetts visited the forest to collect bark from tulip poplar trees. The bark is used to build wetuash, the traditional homes of indigenous people in the region, at the museum's Patuxet Homesite. The museum has utilized Berea's forest in the past to collect the unique types and lengths of wood for repairs of the Mayflower II.

Horse program specialist John Hite made it up to Plymouth over the summer to see the finished product of this endeavor (pictured right).



Look out when you visit...

Head Forester Clint Patterson created a grove across from the walking bridge at Brushy Fork. His hope is that this is a space where folks may go to sit and contemplate their place in nature, to pray, and perhaps meet others that share this mindset.

Thanks to Forester Glen Dandeneau and his students, there are new blazes to guide your way on Kelly's Trail at the Pinnacles!



Through a partnership with the Berea Makerspace, there is now a chimney swift tower outside of the FOC! Chimney swifts (pictured right) migrate during the fall and spring, making rest stops in hollowed out trees. Due to human expansion and deforestation, chimneys became a more accessible accommodation. Now that many people choose to cap their chimneys, the swifts are losing places to rest and nest. We are hopeful this tower will get used by many birds next year!



Graduating Seniors

It is always bittersweet when we must say "see you later" to our labor students. Jasmine Reitze (FOC) and Simon Davies (Forestry) will be moving on to their next adventures this month. We know whatever the future holds for them, it will be bright.

