

Berkshire Community College Announces
Sixth Annual Berkshire Natural History Conference
Naturalists, authors to cover wide range of fascinating topics

PITTSFIELD, MA — The Sixth Annual Berkshire Natural History Conference, featuring presentations by local and regional naturalists and acclaimed authors, will take place on Saturday, October 1 from 9 am to 3:30 pm at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, located at 375 Church Street in North Adams, Massachusetts.

Highlighting topics that range from rare birds to tiny organisms that live within the layers of a leaf, the event includes several renowned speakers and exhibitors. It is open to the public, and students of all ages and disciplines are especially encouraged to attend. General admission tickets are \$25; student tickets are \$15 and include forum credit. To purchase tickets, visit www.berkshirecc.edu/bnhc or call (413) 236-2127.

“This event brings natural history home to the Berkshires,” said Berkshire Community College Professor of Environmental Science Tom Tynning, a lead organizer of the event. “We are excited to gather programs and like-minded people together to help understand and appreciate the deep natural heritage that surrounds us.”

Schedule of Events

9 am: Welcome and announcements with MCLA President James F. Birge and MCLA Professor of Environmental Studies Elena Traister

9:20 am: Heather Bruegl, “The Land is Living.” To Indigenous peoples, the land is more than just land. It is a living and breathing entity, and it is part of us. Learn what the land means to Indigenous peoples, as well as how they are fighting to keep it protected and have it returned.

9:50 am: Brian Hawthorne, “Massachusetts BioMap 3: Land Protection, Habitat Restoration, Climate Resilience.” To protect our rich natural heritage of animals, plants and habitats in the face of land development, pollution, climate change and other threats, it is essential that we continue to strategically protect, restore and manage these invaluable treasures. The new web-based BioMap program envisions a future that allows the full complement of Massachusetts plants, animals and habitats to survive and flourish alongside people who have ample access to nature and outdoor recreation, all while ensuring a climate-resilient landscape. Learn how BioMap’s features, including an interactive map and habitat restoration resource center, can help ensure a robust, healthy future for us all.

10:10 am: Jonathan Pierce, “The Rare Birds of Berkshire County.” This talk is a summary of some of the rarest of the rare birds that have been found in the Berkshires within the past few years.

Jonathan will highlight some of the stories of these rare birds, how to look for rare birds on your own, and the best way to document a sighting.

10:30 am: Break. Visit exhibits, take a natural history quiz and bid on silent auction items.

10:55 am: Noah Siegel, “An Introduction to the Mushrooms of Western Mass.” Edible, or non-edible? These are only two items of interest in the fungi that blanket the hills and valleys of Berkshire County.

11:10 am: Matt Kelly, “A History of Natural History Writing: The S. Waldo Bailey Journals 1902 – 1963.” Matt tells the story about the fascinating life of one of New England’s great natural history observers as he delves into samples of S. Waldo Bailey’s observations and nature writing. Bailey was not only an extraordinarily keen observer of nature, but he also meticulously recorded his prodigious observations with wonderful prose. His best years were here in Berkshire County.

11:25 am: Tom Tynning, “Bailey’s Unknown Salamander.” As understanding of climate change increases, attention has been focused on both terrestrial and aquatic ecological communities. Not surprisingly, a fair amount of research has concerned itself with economically important species. At the last Berkshire Natural History Conference, Williams College Assistant Biology Professor Ron Bassar pointed out potential threats to our native brook trout. Within a few weeks of that meeting, Tom came across a passage from S. Waldo Bailey describing a salamander he had never seen before in Windsor, and he wondered if it was still there. Find out what he learned.

12:00 pm: Lunch buffet in Venable Gymnasium

1:30 pm: Reminders and announcements

1:35 pm: Vivian Orlowski, “Operation Pollination: Creating Community Partnerships for Pollinator Protection” (via Zoom). This is an opportunity to support pollinators in the region. By acting together to cooperatively conserve our ecological heritage, we can protect pollinator health and habitat, which is so critical for regional food and ecosystems.

2:00 pm: Ben Nickley, “The Berkshire Bird Observatory: Origins, Current Projects and Tales from the Field.” Ben will discuss the Berkshire Bird Observatory’s origins, aims, current research projects and future endeavors. He will also show many beautiful pictures of birds in hands and relate stories from the pilot spring, summer and fall seasons at Jug End State Reservation in Egremont, Massachusetts.

2:20 pm: Zach Adams, “Nocturnal Flight Calls.” Nocturnal flight calls are an intricate part of bird migration that is as much a phenomenon as a kettle of broad-winged hawks or a swarm of nighthawks, but it occurs when most of us are sleeping. The reality of migration for songbirds is that they are mostly migrating at night where their brain activity drops, and they are just flying and making subtle calls. These calls are often just “zips” or “pips,” but with a little patience you can hear some incredible sounds that are distinct and identifiable. Zach will share tips and tricks to making the most of nocturnal flight calls as well as introduce a few prominent calls that are great ways to get started experiencing birds at night and understanding what birds are flying over the Berkshires.

2:45 pm: Kyle Bradford, “Ants in Pine Barrens of Western Massachusetts.” Pine barrens and other dry, disturbance-dependent natural communities provide habitat for many rare and threatened wildlife, including ants. However, the ant fauna of inland Massachusetts barrens is not well

documented. In 2020, Kyle and co-authors Michael Akresh and Chris Buelow sampled 18 barrens sites, including three in Berkshire County, to document ant diversity and better understand the effects of management, vegetation structure, and other biotic factors on ant diversity and abundance. This talk will discuss what they learned about the ant fauna in Berkshire County and their findings and management implications for inland Massachusetts barrens.

3:05 pm: Rene Wendell, “Early Detection of Exotic Invasives – What’s Next?” Rene will take a look at a few of the recent invasive species to Berkshire County. With first-hand experience with all of these species, Rene will discuss their identification, habitat preferences and why it’s important to be on the lookout for them.

3:30 pm: Silent auction winners announced

Sponsors of the Berkshire Natural History Conference include Berkshire Community College, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Green Berkshires, Inc., Orion magazine, Berkshire Environmental Action Team, Hoosic River Watershed Association, Williams College Center for Environmental Studies, Massachusetts Audubon Berkshire Sanctuaries and Hoffmann Bird Club.

About the Presenters

Zach Adams is a lifelong naturalist who started studying birds at a young age and has never looked back. He graduated from Juniata College in 2017, where he studied the relationship of migrating songbirds and berry producing plants. He has worked as an educator for most of his career, including at the National Audubon Society where he worked with adults, kids and live birds of prey. Zach is currently a Teacher Naturalist with Mass Audubon, working in the schools, in the community and leading nature-based programming for adults throughout the year.

Kyle Bradford is a biologist with the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program in Ghent, New York. His research concentrates on insect ecology within agricultural contexts, and he provides outreach and research on the biodiversity of Columbia County, New York. He is also pursuing a master of science degree in Conservation Biology from Antioch University New England. Kyle has been interested in the ant fauna of the northeastern United States for the last 10 years, during which he has been a part of efforts to survey ants in Columbia County, New York, Baxter State Park, Maine, southern New Hampshire and Massachusetts inland pine barrens.

Heather Bruegl is a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and first-line descendent Stockbridge Munsee. She is a graduate of Madonna University in Michigan and holds bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees in U.S. History. Her research comprises numerous topics related to American history and legacies of colonization and Indigeneity, including the Dakota War of 1812, the history of American Boarding Schools, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (#MMIW). Currently, Heather is a public historian, activist and independent consultant who works with institutions and organizations for Indigenous sovereignty and collective liberation.

Brian Hawthorne is a lifelong naturalist who left a technology career to pursue his love of the forest. He holds a master of science degree in Forest Resources from UMass Amherst and has worked for MassWildlife since 2003. Brian is the Habitat Program Manager at MassWildlife, where he oversees an interdisciplinary team responsible for the restoration and management of wildlife habitat on the agency’s 200,000 acres of wildlife management areas across the Commonwealth. He also provides habitat technical assistance to public and private conservation partners.

Matt Kelly, a past president of the Hoffmann Bird Club, has been a nature enthusiast from the start. He is also a former board director of EarthSave International and a crew member of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

Ben Nickley is a researcher with a passion for birds and the natural landscapes they inhabit. Over the past several years, Ben has traveled across North America to do field studies in many exceptional places, mixing in college and grad school along the way. Of all the places he's been — from the Cypress swamps of the Southeast to the high meadows of the Sierra Nevada — he loves nothing more than the Northeastern Deciduous Forest. Ben feels truly privileged to have landed in the Berkshires and to have support from Green Berkshires, the parent organization of Berkshire Bird Observatory (BBO). BBO contributes data to Green Berkshires' four-year South Taconic biodiversity mapping project. Ben hopes to garner continued support from the Berkshire community to ensure the longevity of BBO as a social, scientific and conservation institution in this wonderful region.

Vivian Orłowski leads the Operation Pollination program for the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area (Housatonic Heritage). In partnership with Berkshire Community College's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), Housatonic Heritage sponsored Vivian's recent course titled, "Honoring Our Indigenous Heritage: Native People, Plants, Pollinators." Vivian represents Housatonic Heritage on the Steering Committee of the Massachusetts Pollinator Network. She is also a member of Operation Pollination Ambassadors, a national network linking National Heritage Areas and the National Park Service with Rotary Districts and Clubs. As chair of the Great Barrington Agricultural Commission, Vivian won town approval in 2016 for the first "Pollinator-Friendly Community Resolution" in New England. This inspired subsequent Agricultural Commission collaboration on the Great Barrington Pollinator Action Plan with the Conway School of Sustainable Landscape Planning + Design.

Jonathan Pierce loves birding and is one of the county's leading authorities on Berkshire avifauna. He is a past president of the Hoffmann Bird Club and has worked for Mass Audubon and The Trustees at Bartholomew's Cobble. Over the past decade of birding in the Berkshires, he has found such notable species as Say's Phoebe, Black-legged Kittiwake and Little Gull. He is ranked as the top birder for the county by eBird and has seen more species in the Berkshires than any other birder past or present.

Noah Siegel's field mycology skills are extensive. He has spent over three decades seeking, photographing and identifying macrofungi. He has hunted for mushrooms throughout the United States and Canada, as well as on multiple expeditions to New Zealand, Australia and Cameroon. He is one of the premier mushroom photographers in the nation, having won numerous awards in the North American Mycological Association (NAMA) photography contest. With unrivaled technique and attention to detail, Noah's photographs have appeared on the covers and in articles of multiple issues of *Fungi Magazine*, as well as in numerous mushroom books and club publications. He authored, along with Christian Schwarz, *Mushrooms of the Redwood Coast*, a comprehensive guide to mushrooms on the northern California coast, and *A Field Guide to the Rare Fungi of California's National Forests*. He is currently working on *Mushrooms of Cascadia*, a reference guide for Pacific Northwest fungi. Noah travels and lectures extensively across America, following the mushrooms from coast to coast and everywhere in between.

Tom Tynning has been teaching Environmental Science courses at BCC since 1999. Previously, he was a Field Biologist and Master Naturalist for Mass Audubon, where he spent 24 years. For 15 years he was an adjunct professor in the Environmental Studies Program at Antioch New England

Graduate School. His book, *A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles*, is part of the Stokes Nature Guide series. He continues to work with endangered species, particularly timber rattlesnakes in Western Massachusetts.

Rene Wendell is a true homegrown naturalist. He has degrees in Environmental Science from both Berkshire Community College and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Rene has been battling invasive species in the Berkshires for almost 20 years, including in some of the most beloved and sensitive habitats such as Bartholomew's Cobble and Schenob Brook. He currently works as the Land Steward for The Nature Conservancy, where he helps protect 8,000 acres in western Massachusetts. He enjoys hiking, wild edibles, collecting and long walks on the beach looking for shorebirds.

About Berkshire Community College

Berkshire Community College (BCC), situated on 180 park-like acres, is located four miles from the center of Pittsfield in the heart of the beautiful Berkshires of Western Massachusetts. Founded in 1960, BCC was the first community college established in the Commonwealth. As a public, fully accredited community college, BCC strives to place higher education within reach of all residents of Berkshire County and beyond, offering associate degree and certificate programs to approximately 2,000 enrolled students per year. The mission of BCC encompasses five core values: integrity and engagement; innovation; diversity and inclusion; service; and sustainability. Visit BCC online at www.berkshirecc.edu.