



UNIVERSITY OF MOUNT UNION
HUSTON-BRUMBAUGH
NATURE CENTER

Discover the Wonder of Nature's Ever-Changing Story



Fall/Winter
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John T. Huston – Dr. John D. Brumbaugh Nature Center

Mission Statement

The John T. Huston - Dr. John D. Brumbaugh Nature Center provides and supports opportunities for enjoying and learning about our natural and cultural heritage.

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Thank You, Chris!

The staff of the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center reluctantly said goodbye to its Director, Dr. Chris Stanton, at the end of June. Chris was both Nature Center director and professor of biology in Mount Union's department of Biological and Environmental Sciences for the past four years, earning tenure this past spring. His leadership, calm voice, and friendly smile will be missed by many on campus and at the Nature Center.

Chris made numerous contributions during his tenure at Mount Union. One of the most impactful is the expansion of student research activities at the Nature Center. Chris inherited a fledgling Brumbaugh Scholars program and expanded its reach across academic disciplines by recruiting students and faculty members from across the University's three academic colleges to participate in the program. The Brumbaugh Scholars Program provides students the opportunity to work with faculty for hands-on research and an hourly wage to compensate them for their time. Chris's leadership established the program as a competitive and desirable opportunity for Mount Union's undergraduate students. The summer 2022 cohort had an all-time high of nine student researchers from five different academic disciplines.

With expansion of research activities, a need for an accessible location with limited human disturbance/interference of research activities was identified and resolved with the acquisition of nearly 100 acres of property adjacent to the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center. Chris's role in the planning and utilization of the additional research space has spawned many research projects and field study opportunities to support learning for students in a variety of courses across the College of Natural and Health Sciences at Mount Union. Many of the high-quality projects were selected for acceptance in state-wide scientific conferences and Mount Union's competitive SCHOLAR Day.

In addition to research activities, Chris's influence on student experiences was reflected in his work with the Green Raiders and as a faculty leader on Mount Union's annual Wilderness Experience. He was selected as a 2022 Green Raider Award recipient as a faculty member who showcased "a strong awareness of sustainability through dedication to promoting the principles of social, financial, and environmental responsibility both to the University and Alliance community." His dedication to student learning and engagement will be sorely missed. Thank you, Chris, for all of your contributions to the Nature Center and the University. We wish you well on your current and future adventures!

Red Fox Den

Adam Zorn

In April 2022, Nature Center neighbors shared an audio recording of an animal vocalizing in the forest after dark. The series of “screaming” vocalizations was eerie and a little haunting, not the typical coyote howls, owl calls, or raccoon quarrelling most of our neighbors are quite familiar with. After a little sleuthing, we determined the vocalizations were likely that of a Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). The onset of the vocalizations seemed curiously in sync with the pup-rearing season for foxes in our area, so a search for a potential den site ensued.

After a short search, a potential den site was located. Upon closer inspection, bits and pieces of animal hide, some bone fragments, and scat were all found around the site. The prospect of an active den site was very promising but further evidence would be needed to know for sure. A trail camera or two would be helpful to strategically monitor the site for activity, so the investigation was continued the following day.

Upon returning the next afternoon, the bits of animal hide had obviously been moved around since the day before. Something was surely living here, and our cameras would eventually show us who. But before the first camera was fully secured to a tree, a fuzzy red head was spotted peering from behind a fallen log. A young fox kit was curiously watching the camera installation. The mystery creature was already revealed, but now we would like to know how these animals were spending their days eating, growing, and developing into fully developed foxes.

Through several weeks of monitoring, a total of seven kits were counted living at the site. By the time the den was discovered in late April, the kits were about six weeks old and were spending



nearly all their time above ground. Kits spent large amounts of time without the adults present. They occupied themselves by running, wrestling, playing, eating, and napping. The parents would periodically check in and drop off food.

The fox family left the den site in mid-May but have made several return visits to the site throughout the summer. The last photos of a fox at the site were at the end of July, presumably a quick check on the site which is a familiar outpost in the family’s home range at the Nature Center. At this time of the year, the kits are fully grown and have likely been foraging on their own for about two months. Eventually the kits will disperse to their own territories before the onset of breeding and pup-rearing season next spring.

21st Annual Photography Contest



Save the date!

Photo submissions for the Nature Center’s 21st Annual Nature Photography Contest and Exhibit will be accepted beginning in February 2023. There is still plenty of time to capture the perfect shot of your favorite subject, season, or landscape. Participation is free, but submissions are limited to nature photos captured in eastern Ohio, including Lake Erie and the Ohio River basin. Photographers must be amateurs.

The contest requires photo submissions being printed at 8”x10” size and matted (no frame or glass). An artists’ reception and exhibit opening are scheduled for Sunday, February 26, 2023 from 1-5 p.m. Contest details and entry forms will be available by February 1.

Photo credit: Adam Zorn

Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center's Schedule of Events

General Information

All events begin at the Visitors Center and are held rain or shine unless otherwise indicated. Events marked with an asterisk (*) require registration. All other events are informal, open to adults and families, and are available without registration.

To register or inquire about events, call (330) 823-7487 or email naturecenter@mountunion.edu.

Relax and De-stress Event

Sunday, October 2 | 1-5 p.m.

EVERYONE needs to manage their stress these days. Take advantage of some free, relaxing activities such as a chair yoga, strolling through the peaceful woods, walking the labyrinth, relaxing by the pond, listening to live music, making s'mores, and more. Come alone or bring the family – there is something for everyone!

*Wildflower Seed Collection

Saturday, October 8 | 1-2:30 p.m.

Assist the staff with collection of seeds from a variety of flowering plants. Participants will learn how to collect and process seeds for future planting and can take some seeds home. Wear sturdy shoes and long pants. ***Registration is required.**

The Big Sit!

Sunday, October 9 | 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

It's a "tailgate party for birders" with the objective to tally as many bird species as can be seen or heard inside a 17-ft count circle. Last year we tallied 36 species from our lawn chairs at the North Woods! Join us for a couple of minutes or a couple of hours during this annual, international, noncompetitive birding event.

*Introduction to Volunteer Opportunities

Sunday, October 9 | 2-4 p.m.

Have you been interested in Volunteering at the Nature Center but do not know where to begin? Then join us this afternoon to learn about the mission of the Nature Center, the history, the staff, what we do to achieve our mission and the vital roles that Volunteers provide to help us accomplish this endeavor. There are opportunities available for individuals and families of all ages. No commitments will be requested during this informational program. ***Register by October 8.**

*Diversity of Dahlias

Sunday, October 16 | 2-3 p.m.

Join Stan Vuletich a.k.a. 'Stan the Dahlia Man', a certified Senior Dahlia Judge by the American Dahlia Society and volunteer at the Nature Center, in this hands-on and in-depth dive into the wonderful world of dahlias! Learn the common forms of dahlias, how to dig up tubers, store tubers over the winter, and collect seeds. Cut some of your favorite dahlia flowers and take free tubers and seeds! Event will be moved indoors for inclement weather. ***Registration required and limited to 16 people.**

*Wildflower Seed Collection

Saturday, October 22 | 1-2:30 p.m.

Assist the staff with collection of seeds from a variety of flowering plants. Participants will learn how to collect and process seeds for future planting and can take some seeds home. Wear sturdy shoes and long pants. ***Registration is required.**

Summer Research Showcase

Sunday, October 23 | 12-4:30 p.m.

See the work of outstanding University of Mount Union students in this showcase event. The 2022 cohort of Brumbaugh Scholars and Sit Lux researchers undertook summer-long research projects with University mentors. Each student will make a presentation about their research. Your attendance is appreciated in support of the students, their mentors, and their academic research!

*Invasive Trees and Shrubs

Sunday, October 30 | 1-2:30 p.m.

Think ghosts and goblins are scary? You should learn about the things invasive trees and shrubs are doing to our forest ecosystem! We will ID common species and discuss management techniques for each on a walk outdoors. Dress for the weather. ***Register by October 28.**

*Hike in the Dark

Friday, November 18 | 6-7:30 p.m.

The sun sets so early this time of year! If you are missing your after-work walks, join us for a hike in the dark. Bring a flashlight and prepare appropriately for the weather and trail conditions. ***Registration is required.**

Holiday Celebration Open House

Sunday, December 4 | 1-5 p.m.

The Visitors Center and Huston Cabin are dressed up for the holidays. Drop in from 1-5pm to make some ornaments, enjoy acoustic music, and walk to the cabin. Great photo opportunities indoors and outdoors. Free and fun for the whole family.

***Hike in the Dark**

Friday, December 9 | 6-7:30 p.m.

The sun sets so early this time of year! If you are missing your after-work walks, join us for a hike in the dark. Bring a flashlight and prepare appropriately for the weather and trail conditions.

***Registration is required.**

122nd Christmas Bird Count

December 14 – January 5

Participate in the Audubon 122nd Christmas Bird Count as a volunteer in the Canton (Dec 15), Wilmot (Dec 16), or Quail Hollow (Dec 17) count circles. Join a team of volunteers to count birds in the field, or you may be able to participate at home. Visit the Audubon Society online at audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count.

Holiday Break

December 23 – January 2

The Visitors Center will be closed as part of the University of Mount Union's holiday break. Staff will be present daily for limited hours to respond to email, voice messages, and care for the animals. The Visitors Center will reopen on Tuesday, January 3.

***Trail Camera Treasures**

Sunday, January 22 | 2-3 p.m.

Nature Center trail cameras run nearly all year long on over 250-acres of land managed by the Nature Center. Thousands of photos of local wildlife are recorded, and we are looking forward to sharing some of our recent images and sequences captured on camera. ***Register by January 20.**

***Maple Sugaring Crash Course**

Sunday, January 29 | 2-3 p.m.

Thinking about making your own maple syrup, and you're not sure how to start? Take a crash course to learn the basics. This event should help you decide if you will or won't make syrup when the weather breaks! ***Register by January 27.**

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 17-20

Join Nature Center staff as participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count in the comfort of the Bird Observatory. Save the dates!

Photo Contest and Exhibit Open House

Sunday, February 26 | 1-5 p.m.

Save the date! See page 2 for preliminary contest details.

Recurring Programs

Acoustic Jam

2-4 p.m. on October 2, November 6, December 4, January 8, February 5

Join us at the Nature Center for a music jam. Bring an instrument or just come to listen. Beginners are welcome. Make new friends, have fun, and learn a new tune or two! No registration required.

Get Wild & Wooly

2-4 p.m. on October 9, November 20, December 11, January 15, February 12

Bring your spinning wheel, knitting, crochet, needle felts, looms, etc. for a wooly sharing of the fiber arts. Open to all interested in participating or curious to watch and learn.





Three swifts share incubation duties on the nest.

Chimney Swifts

Ava Fornara

Since October 2015, the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center has housed a wooden tower near the Forest Buchanan Trail. The purpose of this tower is to house chimney swifts, a native bird species that utilizes chimneys and other towers for nesting and roosting. Over the summer of 2022, the Nature Center hosted a family of chimney swifts, the very first to build a nest in the tower.

As a Brumbaugh Scholar, my research involved traversing the Nature Center's trails for 2-4 hours, listening and watching for different bird species and making notes of their behaviors, as well as any active nests along the trails. I would then compile my findings into a list on eBird, an app for keeping track of local birds, and submit them to the app's database. I discovered over 60 bird species living and raising young in the area, both summer migrants and year-round residents. Most of these species had nested in the area before, and were easy to monitor, but chimney swifts required more work and improvisation.

Chimney swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are the only member of the swift family (*Apodidae*) found in the eastern United States. They are relatively small birds, often described as "flying cigars," with a compact body and long sickle-shaped wings. During the summer months, they can commonly be seen high in the air, twittering, and flying with quick wingbeats. Swifts are designed for the air: they eat, drink, bathe, and even mate on the wing. Since they land so infrequently, they cannot perch and can only cling to vertical surfaces, such as rock faces, walls of chimneys, or towers like that of the Nature Center.



Pictured: An adult swift brings food to five nestlings.

Their nests are made of small sticks, glued to the side of a wall with hardened saliva. The nest had been built in May, but there was no real way to find out if it was active or had been abandoned in a past unsuccessful attempt.

To monitor the swift nest, we set a trail camera on the removable floor of the tower and set it to take three pictures at any sign of movement. Every week, we would remove the camera to clean it and replace the memory card before putting it back. Activity at the nest was first recorded on June 9, and incubation started becoming lengthier about a week later.

Chimney swifts are unusual among birds in the sense that they are collaborative nesters, a fact that I had not previously known: a third unmated adult swift assisted the mated pair with incubation and feeding duties. After almost three weeks of incubation, the eggs hatched in early July. The five nestlings grew rapidly, making loud rasping noises whenever they were fed. When they were roughly two weeks old, the nestlings began climbing the walls of the tower and making short practice flights around the inside. In late July, they finally fledged for good, but the family still visits the tower, often with other swifts in tow. As migration season starts, as many as 11 swifts have been observed sleeping in the tower.

Dozens or even hundreds of chimney swifts have been known to roost together during the fall. Now that this tower has been settled, there is a chance that more pairs could be made aware of it and nest there. Since many chimneys suitable for swifts have fallen into disrepair, and many people intentionally remove their nests without a permit, swift populations have declined in recent years. This makes nesting sites like the Nature Center's tower especially important, and we look forward to seeing if any more birds use it in the future.

Quick Tips: Bird Feeding

Feeding birds is an excellent way to observe and connect with local wildlife in the winter months. The flashes of color – blue, red, gray, black & white – are a wonderful addition to the drab landscape of winter. Regardless of age, all members of a household can be involved in feeding and watching the bird species visiting your backyard. Here are a couple of quick tips to get you started:

Start small

Bird feeding can be complicated, but it does not have to be that way. Start with one bird feeder and one food type. We suggest a tube or small hopper feeder filled with black oil sunflower seeds. Additional feeders can be added later if desired.

Pick the right spot

Put the feeder where you can see it and enjoy the activity – typically outside a living room, dining room, or kitchen window. The feeder can be close to the house or further into the yard. This choice may be determined by proximity to trees/shrubs where birds can flee for cover when needed. Also consider the potential for squirrels to gain access to your feeder.

Prepare for mammal visitors

Feeder placement should hang 6 ft above ground, have an 8 ft radius from other obstacles, and 10 ft below overhanging branches for best squirrel avoidance. A baffle is helpful to restrict access by squirrels, chipmunks, and raccoons. Safflower seeds can be used in place of sunflower seeds if mammal visitors are problematic – they are less palatable for mammals and enjoyed by birds.

For more tips and information on feeding birds, check out our bird feeding video playlist on our Facebook page.



Volunteer Recognition

We extend a sincere thank you to our April, May, June, and July Volunteers! Our outstanding Volunteer staff assists us in maintaining high-quality programming and a beautiful facility. Thank you for ALL that you do!

| | | |
|------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Kim Anderson | Elayne Dunlap | Emily Maroni |
| Joseph Balogh | Madison Frank | Karen McLachlin |
| Rick Blessing | Sandy Gahan | Camryn Nouza |
| Adrianna Border | Joseph Haas | Sydney Parker |
| Katriel Border | Liza Harris | Karen Santee |
| Ruth Border | Kathy Hart | Alaina Schluneker |
| Thaddeus Border | Ann Hendel | and Troop #50 |
| Mike Bourne | Paul Hobe | Susan Smith |
| Patty Bruey | Gina Hoffman | Ann Sutton |
| Jacob Buttar | Judy Horn | Darla Sutton |
| Mark Clough | Amy Hosking | Rich Sutton (father) |
| Mike Cope | Allison Hrovat | Rich Sutton (son) |
| Paula Cope | Anse Kee | Gail Swift |
| Matt Cruz | Arlo Kee | Scott Swift |
| Kathy Daniels | Bert Knepper | Kylie Thouvenin |
| Shirley DeMaiolo | Mary Lindsay | Larry Thouvenin III |
| Seth Dillon | Hayley Maher | Stan Vuletich |

SPECIAL THANKS!

Additional gratitude is extended to DeHoff's Flowers & Greenhouses for donating seed packets for every 3rd grade student from Alliance City Schools and Regina Coeli School that participated in the Children's Hands-On Gardening Program this past May.



John T. Huston-Dr. John D.
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Discover the Wonder of Nature's Ever-Changing Story

Visitors Center and Bird Observatory Hours

April through October
Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, 1-5 p.m.
Closed Mondays

November through March
Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunday 1-5 p.m.
Closed Mondays and Saturdays

Our trails are open from dawn to dusk every day.

**The Nature Center is located six miles south of
the University of Mount Union on Daniel Street, just off Route 183**



Contact us at:

Phone: (330) 823-7487

Email: naturecenter@mountunion.edu
mountunion.edu/nature-center