Spring is a beautiful time to enjoy forest wildflowers, welcome back migratory birds, and hear early breeding frogs like wood frogs, spring peepers, and western chorus frogs at the James H. Barrow Biological Field Station (JHBBFS). During this unprecedented time of rapid change and uncertainty in the wake of the coronavirus, I understand the importance of finding ways to enjoy the outdoors as a respite to being isolated at home. Therefore, we welcome you to hike our extensive trail system and take in the fresh air and exercise. At this time, our visitor’s center is closed to the public and events have been postponed as we continue to follow the College’s procedures for COVID-19.

While we continue to monitor the governor’s recommendations and mandates, we are, for the time-being, continuing to accept registration for summer programs. Contact Jane O’Brien to register. To receive regular updates on events, feel free to contact me to join the Friends of the Field Station email listserv. We are always looking for ways to improve our programming and your experience at the Field Station. Please do not hesitate to share your concerns, questions, suggestions, or memories with me our staff, and faculty.

Professor Barrow’s Amazon Artifacts on Exhibit

In 1977, Hiram Professor James H. Barrow took a group of students to South America to study in the Amazon Rainforest and to visit Monkey Island. While they were there, he made a positive impression on the Ticuna people and received many gifts from them. Through generous donations, JHBBFS has acquired a beautiful collection that is currently on exhibit in the brick room. Prof, as his students called him, began his career at Hiram College in 1957 as a Professor of Biology. He founded the Field Station in 1967 to begin a long tradition of giving students hands-on scientific research experiences. We hope that you will visit this exhibit when the visitor’s center reopens!
Meet our Gray Rat Snake

The main lobby of the visitor’s center is home to many amphibian and reptile species native to Ohio. One of our most popular animals on exhibit is our gray (black) rat snake. The JHBBFS adopted this snake from the Lake Metroparks Penitentiary Glen Reservation about a year ago and it is estimated to be 10-12 years old. Unfortunately, it cannot be released back into the wild as it has a fractured vertebra in its neck but has found a good home at JHBBFS and has become an excellent ambassador animal.

Gray rat snakes (Pantherophis spiloides), formerly called black rat snakes, are Ohio’s largest snake, typically reaching 4-6 feet in length. They are completely black in color with the exception of a bright white chin. This snake is common in forests throughout Ohio and can often be found high up in tree cavities.

Terrestrial Salamanders in our Forests

Forest habitats at the JHBBFS are unique and diverse, supporting a wide variety of flora and fauna with some being species of concern in the state of Ohio. Over the past two years, Nicole Ryman ‘19, Henry Schwendler ‘21, and Andrew Runyon ‘19, JHBBFS research technician, have been comparing salamander communities in transitional secondary forest and un-timbered, old-growth beech-maple forest. Surveys show that both salamander abundance and the number of different types of species is higher in old-growth forest than transitional forests, indicating that these mature habitats may provide important habitat for these amphibian species. Our most exciting finding is the presence of four-toed salamanders which are generally only found in undisturbed forested wetlands with heavy moss growth. This species is designated as a species of concern in Ohio as it is rare and irregularly distributed across the state.
Managing for Diverse Grasslands

Over the last eight years, JHBBFS has invested substantial time and effort to transform an old agricultural field into a more diverse community of native grasses and forbs. When agricultural fields are abandoned and eco-management techniques are not put into place, they can become hotspots for noxious weeds and invasive species. At JHBBFS, we have used a variety of techniques to transform this space, including winter seeding, strategic mowing, controlled burns, and plantings with the goal of maximizing biodiversity. Our planting program begins in late February using seed from last summer’s harvest that has been stratified in cold storage. Then, the new grass seedlings begin life under grow lights in our studio barn. The seedlings will continue to grow indoors until early April, at which time they will become healthy plugs that will be transferred into cold frames, awaiting to be planted. Planting will begin in late May and will continue until early August. By midsummer, the 30-acre meadow is a riot of tall grasses and colorful flowers that attract birds and pollinators, such as goldfinches and monarch butterflies. You can enjoy this beauty as you hike the trails along the Hills vista.

JHBBFS
FACULTY AND STAFF

Jennifer Clark, Ph.D., Director
clarkjm@hiram.edu

James Metzinger, Associate Director and Curator of Animal Programs
metzingerje@hiram.edu

Rebecca Moore, Animal Care Manager
moorer1@hirame.edu

Jane O’Brien, Education and Community Outreach Coordinator
obrienjs@hiram.edu

Emliss Ricks, Land Stewardship Manager
rickseo@hiram.edu

James Tolan, Manager of Operations
tolanje@hiram.edu

James Kercher, Ph.D., Faculty, Chemistry
kercherjp@hiram.edu

Sarah Mabey, Ph.D., Faculty, Environmental Studies
mabeys@hiram.edu

Mary Quade, M.F.A., Faculty, English
quadeMR@hiram.edu

Ellen Walker, Ph.D., Faculty, Computer Science
walkerel@hiram.edu

Students, Faculty, & Staff Present at Regional Conferences

Over the winter and spring, JHBBFS students, faculty, and staff have been busy presenting their work at regional conferences. In November, students Halle Hovance and Carah Katzendorn, traveled to Columbus, Ohio along with Associate Director Jim Metzinger, and Dr. Sarah Mabey to attend the Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Association Annual Conference. They presented on sensory perception in captive birds, Blue-winged Warbler nesting behavior in scrub-shrub habitats, student safety during summer camps, and innovative concepts for holding wild animals. In March, five students attended the Midwest Ecology and Evolution Conference at Western Illinois University along with Research Technician, Andrew Runyon, and Dr. Jenn Clark. Students and staff presented posters and talks on their independent research projects at the Field Station. Presentations covered grassland snake surveys, effects of forest type on salamander communities, diet composition of largemouth bass, and impacts of restoration on bumblebees.