



Kalamazoo
Nature
Center

2021
ANNUAL
REPORT

In a year of uncertainty, KNC charted a bold and bright future



**NATHAN
SMALLWOOD**
President & CEO

Even though the pandemic began in early 2020, KNC's 2021 fiscal year will always have an asterisk next to it marking one of the most challenging and unusual years in its storied history.

Thanks to the generous support of past and current donors, as well as the SBA Payroll Protection Program, KNC weathered the pandemic better than many nature centers and cultural institutions nationally. Other centers suffered much deeper cuts to staff and programs, and a few shut their doors permanently.

Community engagement during the ongoing pandemic required our staff to rise to countless challenges. Even through the worst of times, KNC remained one of few accessible cultural amenities in the region. Providing outdoor programs while keeping staff and participants safe required extreme flexibility, vigilance, and adaptability - traits that will serve us well going forward.

Closing the Visitor Center, as required during the pandemic, gave us time to continue its renovation. Among the many upgrades, we have retrofitted our heating and cooling system to attain high standards of energy conservation - no small feat for a 1962 architectural wonder designed by Alden Dow. This centerpiece project is grounded in our strategic plan commitment to sustainability, and will help KNC achieve the ambitious goals stated in our Carbon Neutral by 2035 Plan. We have also begun to transform our Exhibits Hall within the Visitor Center. When complete, it will allow us to host more travelling exhibits and programs, along with self-curated presentations that better portray KNC's vast work in research and land management. We're eager to share these lesser-known contributions with our community.

During a year when the nation tragically struggled anew with the persistent impact of racial inequity, KNC completed the first of a two-year commitment to deepen our training for leadership and staff around issues of equity. This reflects our strategic plan goal to become more relevant, vital and representative of our broader community.

But the past fiscal year, while ultimately successful and full of accomplishments, will always be shaded by the surreal isolation many of us experienced. For me, working remotely was lonely, but meant that I got to know the woods around me more intimately, including a family of great horned owls that I monitored daily. It began from the time they started to nest in late January to when their nest blew down one April day before the two chicks were flighted or ready to fledge. Eventually, I witnessed the parent owls as they continued to feed and protect their chicks as they defied all odds to survive. Their odyssey was a reminder of the simultaneous fragility and yet extraordinary persistence we see in nature. Like these owls, through all of the challenges, KNC landed squarely on its feet to spread its wings and fly boldly toward a bright future.

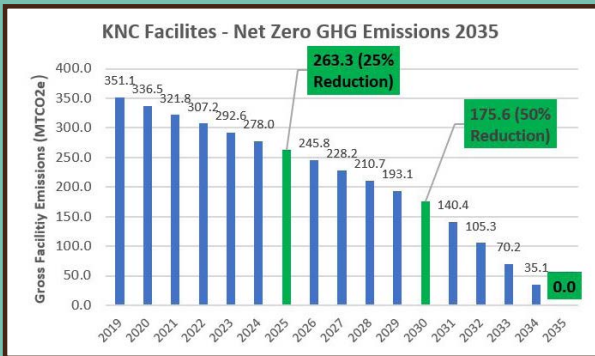


KNC Sets Carbon Neutrality Goal

By scientific consensus, the world must dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the coming decades if we're to avoid catastrophic climate outcomes. The U.S. now aims to have a net zero emissions economy by 2050. KNC recognizes its own role in this work and has made it a strategic priority to develop its own local climate response strategy. In a vote unanimously approved by the Board of Directors in May, 2021, KNC will now aim for total carbon neutrality by 2035.

As a first step, KNC's Carbon Neutrality Committee recently completed a study of our 2019 facility and vehicle-related greenhouse gas emissions. We found that these operations produced 422.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e) that year. After accounting for on-site solar energy production, KNC's net emissions were 397.6 CO₂e. We expect current renovations

and improvements to the Visitor Center's HVAC, lighting, and electrical systems to provide immediate gains in energy efficiency that will reduce carbon emissions. KNC has also contracted with Foresight Management, a Grand Rapids-based sustainability consultant, to support annual energy inventories. Foresight will monitor emissions and provide data management, analysis, and reporting necessary to maintain progress toward our 2035 net-zero goal. Additionally, a forest carbon assessment (funded by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Urban and Community Forestry Program) will help KNC's conservation team to include carbon considerations in land management planning.



KNC Invests in Equity

As part of its new 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, KNC has made a strong commitment to Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (EID). Our intent is to "further a vision of equitable access, reflection, and universal engagement across our entire community." This includes providing long-term, in-depth equity and inclusion training for staff.

In October, KNC's executive team and directors completed a formal six-month EID training program that was funded by generous private donors. The training builds on the essential groundwork done by KNC's EID Committee. It was carried out by The Truth & Titus Collective, an organization "dedicated to fostering, co-creating, and sustaining organizational change with equity at the core." Truth & Titus will continue working with KNC in coming years to equip staff with "tools, knowledge, and support to move toward being a more equitable, intersectional organization... putting the community at the center of [KNC's] work." To learn more visit TruthandTitus.com.

EID Committee Members:

Afifa Thaj (KNC Trustee) | Amber Hejl | Becca DeLong | Jen Meilinger
Jenny Doezeema | Jen Rice | Jessica Simons | Lisa Panich
Lucas Mansberger (KNC Trustee) | Nathan Smallwood | Tanequa Hampton | Tom Springer



2020-21 Board of Trustees

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Outdoor Education Experiences

Kalamazoo families were left scrambling in the 2020-21 school year as the pandemic closed the doors of our school buildings. The privilege to stay home and stay safe was wrought with disparity along racial and income lines. The Kalamazoo Youth Development Network (KYD Net) mobilized local community partners forming 14 area Learning Hubs, serving a total 350 students. KNC collaborated with KYD network by offering a Learning Hub for 40 youth and their families. These were families otherwise unable to make ends meet while staying home with their school age children, including several children experiencing homelessness. KPS, Loaves and Fishes, and KYD Net supported the Hubs with weekday meals and take-home weekend meal kits. KNC provided daily transportation and supported communication with school counselors and teachers.

KNC maintained connections with several Hub families, providing scholarship support for summer camp and subsidized KNC memberships. These experiences built new nature connections for young ones. We are proud to be part of a Kalamazoo that prioritizes children and families.

Learning & Engagement Department highlights:

- The Preschool Explorers program made nature connections through hikes, crafts, and story time, even in the snow.
- The Nature in Your Neighborhood program brought KNC school programs to students at local Learning Hubs across the Kalamazoo area.
- With grant support from KYD Net, KNC educators safely adapted programs to serve over 1,200 participants at 160 programs.
- KNC educators introduced 451 students and community members to our Animal Ambassadors over the summer at on- and off-site programs.



KNC Camp - What a year it's been!

Summer camp is all about groups of children engaging in hands-on activities, which simply did not mix with keeping people safe during a pandemic. KNC Summer Camp staff adapted experiences with safety foremost in mind, including increased counselor-to-child ratios, lower weekly capacity numbers, developing new systems for pick up, drop off, and modifying daily activities.

A safe and successful summer camp season served nearly 700 youth in 2021. This number, while lower than "normal" years, met our goals. We added a new camp experience at DeLano Farms for middle schoolers, pairing traditional camp fun with project leadership, farm fresh cookouts, and soil-connected environmental learning. This new opportunity was received with rave reviews.

It gave us all renewed hope to see splashing feet in Trout Run Stream, small hands weaving nature into art, arrows flying toward their targets at the archery range, tired campers relaxing in the grass after a long hike, and simply being safely together. We were encouraged by the positive feedback and support we received from families. Acknowledgement from children and parents is valuable in any year - this year it kept us going!



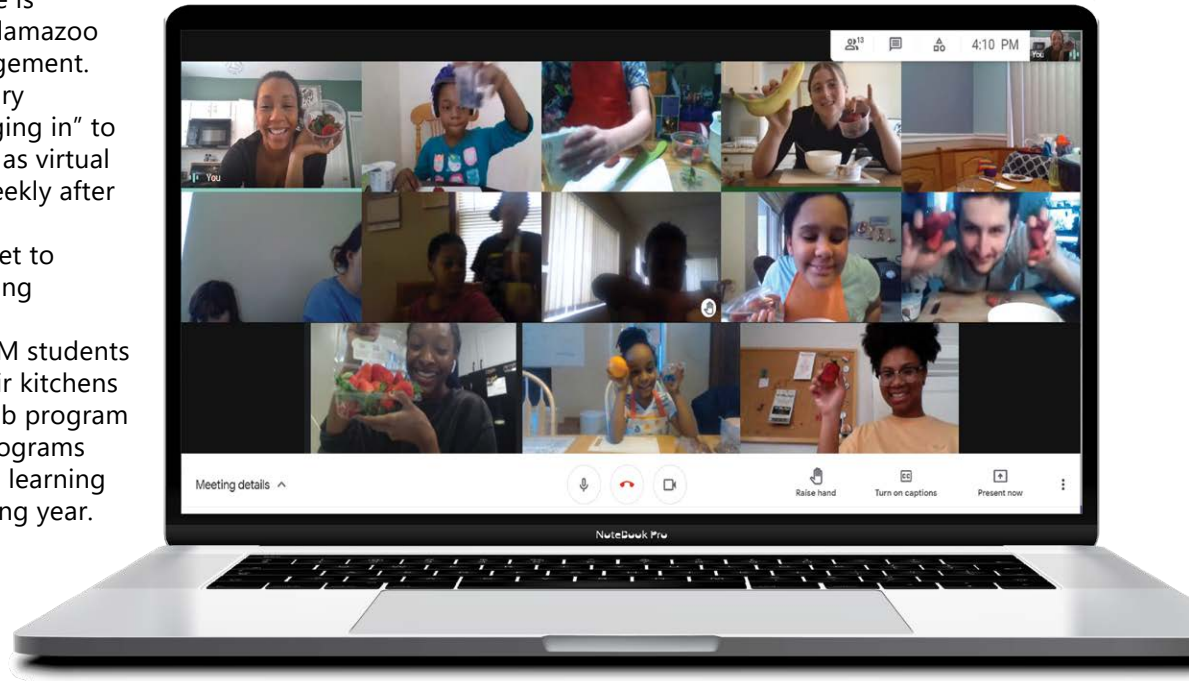
Fair Food Matters

The Fair Food Matters (FFM) program at Woodward Elementary School wrapped up its 2nd season as a KNC program, continuing its mission to provide food and garden-based education to educate, connect, and empower youth through hands-on learning experiences. New funding helped expand learning opportunities with the addition of fruit trees to the school grounds, an outdoor kitchen, and a newly built "EcoShed". The EcoShed now provides curriculum connections to green infrastructure and renewable energy for our classroom and garden learning experiences. Students track, calculate, and dig into energy science related to new solar panels, and water managed by a new green roof and rain barrel catchment system. Youth from El Concilio helped out by painting our new shed over the summer.

FFM's innovative learning-scape is supported by students from Kalamazoo College's Center for Civic Engagement. Together, college and elementary students get outdoors for "digging in" to sustainable food systems, even as virtual learning continued. In FFM's weekly after school

Club Grub program, children met to celebrate the harvest by exploring seasonal

cooking and good nutrition. FFM students and families gathered from their kitchens to use hand-delivered Club Grub program kits. During and after school programs were both models of successful learning virtually after another challenging year.



New programs, opportunities at Nature's Way Preschool

Engaging with families is an important part of the Nature's Way Preschool experience. We were excited to introduce two new programs that expanded our impact on children and caregivers over the past year - Sprouts and Woodland Wonders. Both programs met at the Stryker Nature Preserve and were guided by a Nature's Way Preschool teacher. Participants explored and learned together, developing peer relationships and connecting to the natural world.

Sprouts welcomed children under 3 to get messy, observe, explore, and dive into nature play. Woodland Wonders welcomed unique learners and children with special needs ages 3 to 9 years old to engage their whole body through sensory experiences designed to build confidence and foster independence. The early success of these new programs was encouraging to our efforts to reach new and more diverse audiences.





Conservation Education at Heronwood Field Station

The classroom is small, but the outdoors is huge! Heronwood Field Station's Conservation Biology students have 95 acres to safely social distance and study nature. Kalamazoo County, Otsego, and Plainwell high school students can enroll in the Conservation Biology course through KRESA's Career and Technical Education Program (formerly Education for Employment). The Conservation Biology course is an elective class for 11th and 12th grade students interested in learning about the field of Conservation Biology, or about our environment.

Students of the course have an opportunity to apply for a Conservation Biology Internship the following year. Interns spend part of their school week at Heronwood doing an independent conservation project. Another part of their week is spent in a job placement for hands-on work in the field. Last year,

two interns worked with our Delano Farm Manager Kirsten Clemente where they explored regenerative agriculture.

Another intern worked with our Animal Care Manager Meg Heft learning about care, feeding and handling of KNC's ambassador animals. Additionally, due to the pandemic limiting volunteers, KNC's River Guardians community science project was slated to be cancelled. But our interns, along with a first year student, stepped up to ensure we would not have a gap year in our data collection. These four students learned how to use D-nets for water sampling and to identify the macroinvertebrates collected. With this data they learned how to identify indicator species in order to analyze water quality. These additional experiences enhanced each student's capacity for future work in the field of Conservation Biology.



Youth Climate Change Leaders

This year, through community support and collaboration with Schools for Climate Action, KNC was able to provide Heronwood Field Station as a space for Kalamazoo County youth to learn together about Climate Change and become peer educators in their schools. The Youth Climate Leaders (YCL) Peer Education program provided a comprehensive 40-hour training program. The curriculum was interactive and thought provoking, covering a multitude of topics giving teens the tools to advocate for a resilient future and share accurate information with peers and community.

Our first group of climate leaders chose the name Ardea Youth Climate Coalition. Ardea is the genus name for the Heron family which they saw fit to represent them as Heronwood was the place where their coalition began. Learn about their accomplishments at NatureCenter.org/ArdeaYCC.

Top left: Caleb Followell, Adah Roman, Lukas Kilian, and Cristian Hernandez sampling macroinvertebrates in a stream off of business loop 94. Right: Students work on graphing a chart outside on the pavement. Below: Ardea Youth Climate Leaders hold a meeting overlooking the pond at Heronwood Field Station.



Delano Farms Continues to Grow

This past summer at DeLano Farms was full - of an abundant and nutritious fresh produce, the sounds of children exploring and learning, and CSA shareholders, farm interns and volunteers tending the land.

In the fall of 2020, DeLano Farm's growing area was doubled using compost generously donated by Kalsec. We added 27 new CSA shares for the 2021 season, bringing total shares to 67. We also added programs for elementary and middle school children to give them a fuller appreciation of where their food comes from. Their experiences also demonstrated how well-managed farms can provide food for our world's population while supporting and enhancing wild areas, native species, and climate.

This spring KNC said goodbye to Farm Assistant Chaz Rawls, who is now managing his own Rooted Luv Farm. KNC welcomed a new Farm Assistant, Mariah Armstrong, who has been enormously helpful. We hope she can return in spring 2022. Allisan Barrett created and implemented our hands-on Farm Club for elementary kids, which received rave reviews from participants and their parents. We also hosted a fantastic group of interns, who worked hard to manage the farm while learning about regenerative no-till agriculture and CSA management. Lastly, we benefited from the consistent aid provided by our farm volunteers. They planted some of the first seeds of spring and will help put the garden to bed for the winter.



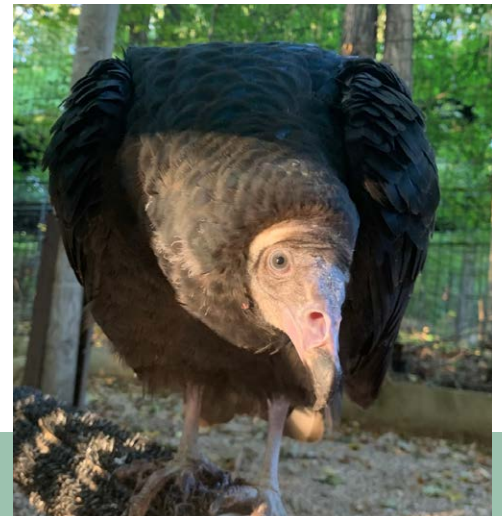
Animal Care Welcomes New Ambassadors

KNC's Animal Care Program expanded over the last year! In 2021, KNC welcomed four new birds of prey animal ambassadors. Welfare and engagement are foundational aspects of these decisions as KNC strives to emphasize conservation through ambassadors and better practices serve to highlight these messages. Educators and handlers now train ambassadors to develop better relationships with animals and improve programming as a whole. Visitors are welcome to stop by and observe!

Chester (pictured below with KNC Animal Care Director Megan Heft) is a 2020 hatch-year broad-winged hawk who joined KNC from the Lake Milton Raptor Center. Persephone, a peregrine falcon (not pictured), also comes from Lake Milton. Fudge (below, left) is a juvenile rough-legged hawk who comes from Wildside Rehabilitation Center. Each of these birds sustained slight wing injuries which prevent them from maintaining the sustained flight necessary for release into the wild. Tukey (below, right), is a hatch-year turkey vulture, and KNC's most recent addition. He also came from Wildside. While she has no physical injury, she is non-releasable since she imprinted on humans.

KNC's Animal Ambassadors serve as important reminders of the impact we have on the natural world. Migratory species - like our new ambassadors - face a number of challenges along their migration routes as a direct result of human activity. Urbanization causes significant habitat loss and introduces direct threats to birds as they encounter unfamiliar habitats. Window collisions, fragmentation, light pollution, and habitat destruction are just a handful of the other threats faced by birds. Through our Animal Ambassadors, we hope to shed more light on our role in their conservation.

KNC's birds of prey trained by KNC staff and volunteers to build trust and prepare for programming. In order to build relationships with birds, KNC uses food as a reinforcement for developing various behaviors. Training is important for our birds to feel comfortable in programs and on display. It allows more positive interactions with our Animal Ambassadors in general.



Ecological Services Team Restores Wetlands

Through support from a Sustain Our Great Lakes grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, KNC, Fort Custer Training Center, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (at their Bow in the Clouds Preserve), and Pierce Cedar Creek Institute have implemented restoration activity and/or monitoring over 2,134 acres of southwest Michigan's fen wetlands in the last year. Led by KNC, the team completed 10 weeks of invasive plant treatment and removal activity over 70 priority acres of high-quality habitat. In addition, the team and partners conducted several rounds of vegetative surveys, marsh bird surveys, prescribed fire activity, and eastern massasauga rattlesnake monitoring in the project areas.

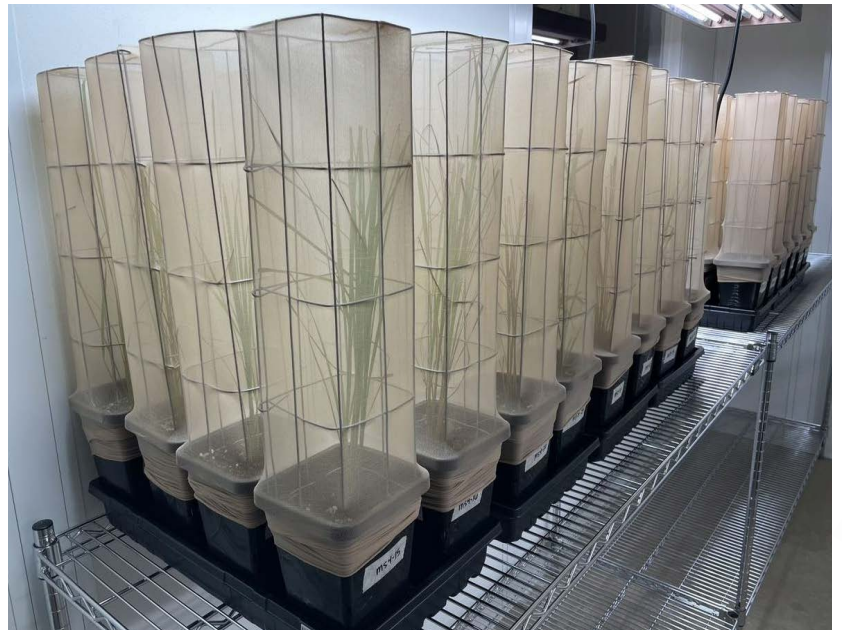
In addition to KNC's own restoration work, KNC's Ecological Services team also provides land management services to support habitat restoration and conservation for public and private clients in the Kalamazoo region. In the last year, the Ecological Services team managed invasive species, performed biological surveys, implemented prescribed fire, and/or installed native plants on approximately 300 additional acres of land.



New Mitchell's Satyr Butterfly Rearing Room Now Open

The Kalamazoo Nature Center is home to one of just two propagation facilities in the country for the Mitchell's satyr butterfly (MSB), one of the rarest butterflies in the world. As part of the Federal Recovery Plan for this critically endangered species, KNC's captive breeding efforts aim to support the butterfly's dwindling natural populations. Only 9 MSB populations remain of the 30 that previously existed across the northeastern United States, 8 of which are located in Michigan.

Each summer, wild-caught butterflies are briefly held in KNC's propagation facility to lay eggs, which metamorphose in captivity. Through support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and in partnership with Michigan State University, KNC constructed a new room to house these developing caterpillars at the Heronwood Field Station in 2021. In contrast to the room previously used to rear caterpillars, the new room's temperature and humidity settings are programmable. This allows staff to better mimic the conditions found in the butterfly's natural prairie fen habitat. Over 100 MSB caterpillars have recently been transferred into the new room, where they will soon enter a period of dormancy known as diapause. If all goes well, they will emerge as adults next summer and be released to augment wild populations.





Community Scientists Continue Program Support

Despite the uncertainties of the last year, nature enthusiasts across Michigan have continued robust participation in KNC's Community Science activities.

- A grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, (EGLE) along with Michigan State University, allowed KNC to modify this long-term community science project to keep participants safe during the pandemic. The fall 2020 and spring 2021 data collections were performed by KNC's Heronwood Field Station Conservation Biology high school students. Water samples were surveyed for macroinvertebrate biodiversity as a measure of water quality in the Kalamazoo River (at both Merrill Park and along D Avenue), Davis Creek, and Arcadia Creek. Results from the May 2021 surveys showed water quality improvements at 3 of the 4 sites as compared to October 2020.
- The 45th annual Winter Feeder Count took place from November, 2020 to April, 2021. A total of 269 participants conducted 1,339 feeder counts, identifying 68,775 birds and 115 species. Some species that were scarce in the previous year's survey returned to more normal or above average numbers, including the pine siskin, common redpoll, and red-breasted nuthatch. Last winter was also unusually good for seeing the evening grosbeak. Carolina wrens and pileated woodpeckers were also reported to have a record high percentage of visits to feeders last year.
- For the second year, KNC's Michigan Butterfly Network ran successful virtual training programs, with 91 participants in 2021. A newsletter was created to help statewide butterfly enthusiasts to stay connected, and the project completed its first dedicated fundraising campaign.

Altogether in Michigan, 452 butterfly monitoring surveys were submitted in 2021, with 3,115 individual butterfly observations recorded in the national PollardBase system.



Motus wildlife tracking system gets statewide coverage

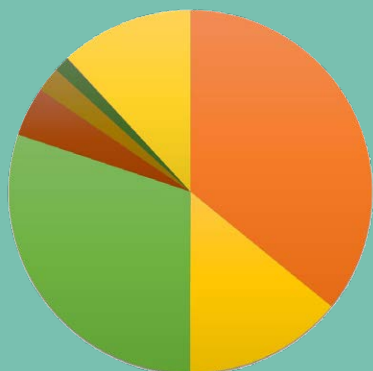
The Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory (KVBO) has been very active in the last year, building on KNC's nearly half-century legacy of avian research. The team completed KNC's 48th season of bird banding with approximately 4,500 birds observed and recorded, conducted annual spring migration surveys at Kleinstuck Preserve, and monitored marshbirds as part of a regional wetland restoration program.

This year, the KVBO team also provided statewide leadership for two different large initiatives to spread Motus Wildlife Tracking Network receivers across Michigan. Through support from a multi-state Cooperative State Wildlife Grant, contracts from the Michigan Army National Guard, and investment by private partners, Rich Keith and John Brenneman strategically installed 13 new radio antenna towers that will detect flyover movements of any tagged birds flying north or south through Michigan. These receivers will allow researchers to learn more about the habitat needs of priority neotropical migrant birds during their annual life-cycles and can inform management practices to improve these native habitats. More information about all KVBO-tracked Motus receivers can be found at Motus.org/data/

Below: Rich Keith and John Brenneman stand atop a platform near a newly-installed Motus tower.

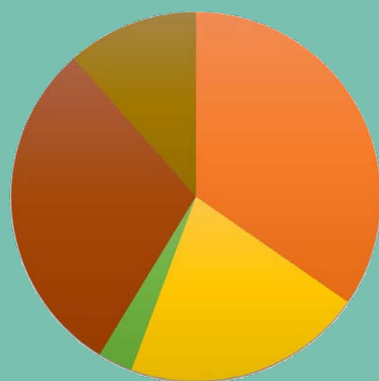


2020-21 Numbers



Total Revenues
\$3,382,753

Endowment Income	36%
Contributions and Grants	14%
Tuition and Program Fees	30%
Memberships	4%
Rental Income	2%
Admissions and Special Events	1%
Retail Operations	0%
PPP Loan Forgiveness	12%



Expenditures
\$3,104,357

Learning & Engagement	35%
Conservation Stewardship	21%
Member/Guest Services	3%
Administration	30%
Development	12%

Net Surplus **\$ 278,396**

Note: These charts represent unaudited financial information for fiscal year ended August 31, 2021.

Numbers At a Glance

40,089

KNC Visitors

5,564

Birds banded at Kalamazoo
Valley Bird Observatory

67/294/31

Ecological Services projects/
acres managed/consultations

13,978/91

Individual butterflies/participants
for Michigan Butterfly Network
butterfly monitoring

655/\$21,844

KNC Campers/scholarships
awarded

67

Community Supported
Agriculture U-Pick shareholders
at DeLano Farms

104

Nature's Way Preschool
enrollment

34/2,198

Facility rentals/guests

178/1,399

Volunteers/volunteer hours

71/833

Public programs/participants

187/1,922

School & community programs/
participants

35/18

Heronwood student enrollment/
Youth Climate Leaders

14,216/3,565/3,472

Facebook/Twitter/Instagram
followers as of August 31

69,646

Website visits (NatureCenter.org)

547,137

People found KNC on Google



Southwest Michigan's Cultural Membership Exchange was moved to October, 2020. While the Exchange saw fewer visitors due to capacity restrictions from COVID-19, 5,139 members enjoyed free admission to the participating organizations.

Many Thanks to our donors

The names listed below represent gifts of both general support and special areas of donor interest. As always, we have made every attempt at accuracy. If you see an error or omission, please contact Rayline Manni, Vice President of Development, at (269) 381-1574 x35.

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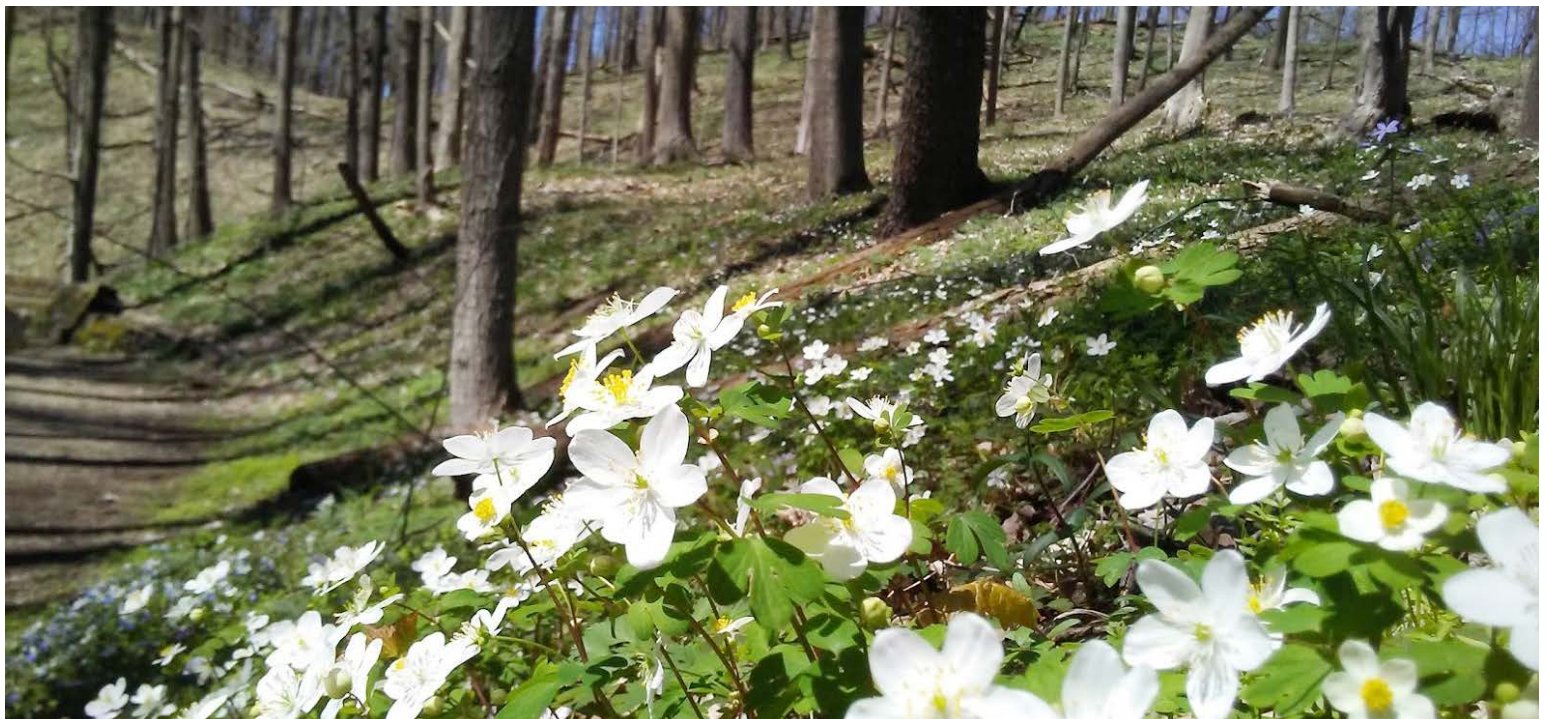
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