Looking Up While We Look Ahead

While the Annual Report always looks back on the year that was, what we mostly remember from 2021-2022 is looking up. We did that a lot in June and July, as workers replaced our building’s 60-year dome with a new one. It’s hard not to crane your neck when, overhead, a dome dangles from a crane like a flying saucer waiting for liftoff.

Once it was off, we removed the overgrown trees that had crowded the dome’s ceiling. And, we were surprised to see how much brighter the building’s interior became. The few vines and plants that remain have enjoyed a sunshine-fueled growth spurt.

It doesn’t take an English major to see some clear metaphors here for KNC. With the pandemic’s clouds behind us, we’ve seen new growth in staff, programs and facilities. For one, we added new staff to oversee museum-quality exhibits for our Visitor Center. The exhibits will rotate at least twice a year, with both national and KNC-curated programs that meld art, science and hands-on learning to tell our story of conservation and ecological research.

A case in point is our new Up In The Air: Birds in the Anthropocene exhibit. It features the stunning illustrations of Olivia Mendoza, whose work glows with vibrant color and precise detail. It includes a replica bird-banding station; a naturalist nook for kids, complete with an LED-screen microscope. Don’t miss the tiny hummingbird nest hidden in a string of Christmas lights, complete with eggs the size of Tic-Tac mints, that was rescued from a Kalamazoo apartment balcony.

In the coming year, we’ll continue our Visitor Center upgrades. We’ll refresh the interior to reflect more of the mid-Century design intended by the building’s architect Alden B. Dow. We’ll also develop new plans for the Sun-Rain Room, but it’s too soon to comment on those yet. Outside, you’ll see a new mews (bird enclosure) that’s being built in a string of Christmas lights, complete with eggs the size of Tic-Tac mints, that was rescued from a Kalamazoo apartment balcony.

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Public Programs and Events

- 1,874 people attended Maple Sugar Festival, KNC’s first major event since the onset of COVID, generating more than $28,000 in admissions and sales. The event featured an opportunity to highlight the foundational role that the Anishinaabe and Black communities have played in Southwest Michigan’s sugaring history.
- KNC’s Earth Day celebration was attended by 1,258 visitors and included the popular Raccoon and SK run, both fundraisers for youth programs. An electric vehicle showcase and a range of public programs rounded out the event.
- Programs like “Kids’ Night Out” and “Preschool Explorers” provided opportunities to help KNC visitors strengthen their connection to nature. New programs included “Returning and Reskilling,” a series that teaches traditional land skills such as orienteering and campfire cooking. Another new series, “Beneath the Surface,” allows youth to explore some of the hidden secrets of Southwest Michigan ecosystems. Additionally, with expertise from KNC’s Conservation Stewardship team, a range of hands-on workshops were developed to inform and empower the community about native and invasive species.

KNC Highlights Two New Podcast Series

Off the Trail Thanks to intern Nora Duncan, KNC released “Off the Trail,” a five-episode podcast series that focuses on KNC’s relationship with environmental restoration efforts at the Fort Custer Training Center near Battle Creek. Highlights include climate change, invasive species, prescribed fire, butterfly conservation, and avian research. The series can be found on Spotify and Anchor.fm. Learn more and listen at NatureCenter.org/Podcast.

Raising Hay and Planting Roots Dr. Michelle Johnson, local historian, storekeeper, artist and activist, used her talents to illuminate the historical and contemporary experiences of Black farmers and the land they stewarded in and around Kalamazoo County. The four-part podcast, “Raising Hay and Planting Roots,” is available at NatureCenter.org/RaisingHay.

The Community Emergence Series

The Community Emergence Series was one of the most collaborative projects KNC has ever developed, with programs hosted by 16 partner organizations and individuals. After unprecedented disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the racial reckoning of 2020, Community Emergence invited local individuals to work together and build a “new normal,” as inspired by the natural world. The series was based on the New York Times best-selling book, “Emergent Strategy,” which offers a framework for interacting with self, others, and our planet that mimics patterns found in nature.

Visit NatureCenter.org/TTISS for a list of participating programs and partner organizations, including a virtual talk by Adrienne Maree Brown, author of “Emergent Strategy,” a Terry Todd International Speaker Series presentation.
The large lower-level classroom in the camp barn at KNC was alive with activity as the first school group returned to participate in Annie’s BIG Nature Lesson (ABNL) during spring 2022. Students bundled up in winter gear and gathered their notebooks and portable stools before setting off on the trail for observational journaling. This moment is one of many in the week-long immersive experiences of ABNL.

Annie’s BIG Nature Lesson is different from a field trip. Teachers, students, and parents come to KNC’s campus for focused study. Teachers lead lessons and independent observation after working with KNC staff. The daily journaling session is a favorite part of the week for participants and onlookers, as an entire class of elementary students sits along a trail to spend an hour immersed in nature study.

ABNL was developed by master educator Margaret Holtschlag in Lansing. The BIG Nature Lesson is named in honor of Ann Mason, an environmentalist from Clinton County, Michigan. Mason devoted her life to environmental stewardship and educating the public about their duties as stewards of the natural world. The program at KNC is largely funded through a generous donation from one local family.

After an 18-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, KNC invited previous ABNL teachers to participate in early spring. Twelve classes from four schools - about 260 students - returned to KNC classrooms and grounds for this unique experience. KNC is now scheduling ABNL sessions for the 2022-23 school year.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity
KNC continues to prioritize partnerships that help us better understand and serve our whole community, welcome community members who may not have previously felt connected to our work, and provide culturally responsive offerings. Our Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity committee brings staff and board members together to transform KNC’s leadership, programs, and policies to further a vision of equitable access, reflection, and universal engagement across our entire community. Some important gains have been made in 2022:

- KNC’s website offers new translation options (in 16 languages), accessibility profiles, and content adjustment features. Over 100 local households received financial assistance for free or reduced KNC memberships.
- A second group of KNC staff began equity training with the Truth & Titus collective.
- Local partners and organizations were offered no-cost rentals and free admissions for Juneteenth celebrations.
- KNC’s Financial Aid Fund awarded $30,000+ in assistance for students to attend summer camps, community programs, Nature’s Way Preschool, and Heronwood.

Learn more at NatureCenter.org/Equity.

KNC Camp
KNC Camp had another successful summer, despite managing labor shortages and ongoing COVID-19 concerns. KNC provided nearly 500 happy campers with memorable connections to nature and new friends. 2022 marked the first year that KNC offered a neurodiversity camp, serving 13 campers. Neurodiversity Camp is a week-long camp experience that encourages campers to explore nature through their own lens. These camps are aimed at supporting the needs of KNC campers with special needs. Camp staff are trained and supported by a teacher with a special education certification.

“On a scale of one to ten, how did you like KNC Camp?”
-CAMPER PARENT

“Infinity out of ten!”
-KNC CAMPER

Nature’s Way Preschool
The heart of any school is its teachers! In a difficult year when many educators left the field, the Nature’s Way Preschool staff worked together to support our students, school families, and each other. We are grateful for our teachers’ dedication during this challenging time. Their commitment to provide engaging nature-based lessons with enthusiasm, in all sorts of Michigan weather, makes our program shine. Together with school families, we enjoyed bird banding at KNC, campfire nights at the preschool fireplace, maple sugaring, a winter candlelight hike on our trails, Earth Day celebration, the trail run fundraiser, and a student art show. And, preschool families enjoy the many parent nights where caregivers learn and connect with each other. The Nature’s Way Preschool staff welcomes all families with love and respect.

DeLano Farms
DeLano Farms CSA expanded to 80 shares in 2022, a 25 percent increase over the previous year. Our enthusiastic CSA members return each week to enjoy and harvest fresh vegetables, herbs, flowers, and camaraderie. KNC also introduced the first annual Dinner on the Farm, an outdoor, long table experience which filled to capacity. Guests enjoyed a four-course dinner prepared by Eric Gillish, executive chef for Millennium Catering, who used produce grown at DeLano Farms. At the end of the evening, there were smiles all around.

Outdoor Education Experiences
The large lower-level classroom in the camp barn at KNC was alive with activity as the first school group returned to participate in Annie’s BIG Nature Lesson (ABNL) during spring 2022. Students bundled up in winter gear and gathered their notebooks and portable stools before setting off on the trail for observational journaling. This moment is one of many in the week-long immersive experiences of ABNL.

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Exciting and meaningful culinary arts and food systems education. A 6-week version of the program for Communities in Schools' After School Program, connecting more Kalamazoo students to the food systems in their neighborhood, then share food that they've prepared together. This fall, Club Grub expanded to pilot College students through the Center for Civic Engagement. The elementary and college students collaboratively learn about the garden at Woodward Elementary School this spring. Over 200 students helped plant and tend crops of greens, tomatoes, eggplants, herbs, and berries. In the garden, students investigated soil health, explored wetland ecosystems, and learned to identify plant parts while playing games and solving puzzles. Students provided input on what they’d like to see growing in the garden next spring. The winners? Broccoli and watermelon! Families were invited to visit the garden throughout the summer to check on the progress of plants and enjoy the lush outdoor classroom.

Students in Heronwood’s Youth Climate Leadership Program took on many new projects in their efforts to become climate crisis peer educators in the community. Teens from area high schools developed and operated their own environmental club, signed their school on as an affiliate of the Kalamazoo Climate Crisis Coalition, and created an EnRoads presentation to share in classrooms. Additionally, the team participated at local events to converse with people about their relationship to nature, knowledge of the climate crisis, and more.

Heronwood Field Station

Heronwood’s Conservation Biology students, offered in partnership with the Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, experienced new and exciting hands-on learning opportunities this year. These included lessons and activities to support KNC’s Mitchell Satyr butterfly rearing program and work with the Motus system, a wildlife tracking system which uses antennas to track the flights of migrating birds. The curriculum also featured climate change, zero net energy, and a certification in Leave No Trace practices. With these additions, the program now focuses more on community, self-responsibility, and current issues in conservation.

Second-year Conservation Biology CTE Interns get hands-on experience and leadership skills in professional settings. These include Animal Care at KNC, designing trails and wayfaring signage at Heronwood, and learning about regenerative agriculture practices at DeLano Farms.

EcoAdapt Community Climate Resilience Workshops

KNC helped to bring EcoAdapt’s community climate resilience workshops to Kalamazoo in February. These workshops brought together more than 30 community leaders to identify opportunities to enhance climate resilience in habitats and ecosystems, agriculture and food systems, and connected communities (including housing and transportation).

Over three days, the stakeholders – who represented local government, organizations, academic institutions, businesses, and advocacy networks – reviewed climate projections for Kalamazoo, discussed the city’s unique vulnerabilities, and identified opportunities for adaptation as a community.

Climate impacts (such as extreme heat, intense storm events, and changes in precipitation) are likely to compound existing challenges for Kalamazoo, including racial inequality, homelessness, safe access to food and water, and habitat loss. Several organizations are now exploring ways to build templates for local climate action plans. See the Climate Vulnerability and Adaptation Report for Kalamazoo at EcoAdapt.com/workshops/kalamazoo-adaptation-workshop for more information.

KNC Progresses Toward Carbon Neutrality Goals

KNC has continued to make remarkable progress toward its organization-wide carbon neutrality goals. Last year, KNC pledged to work toward a goal of zero net carbon emissions by the year 2035. We have aligned with Foresight Management to track annual progress and create accountability. To promote the Nature Center’s role in acting locally and thinking globally, we are also reporting our progress using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Action Manager, a worldwide tool to track, manage, and improve sustainability performance.

After aggressive energy efficiency improvements were made to the Visitor Center, KNC’s net greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) for 2021 came in much lower than expected — 262.22 metric tons CO2e, a 35% reduction from the initial 2019 baseline of 381.1 metric tons CO2e. This reduction shows a level of cumulative progress to date that already meets KNC’s goals for the year 2027.

With sustainability as one of the four pillars of KNC’s current strategic plan, it will be important to further these improvements. KNC’s board and staff are prioritizing investments for the coming years, including new solar installations and new energy efficiency improvements in smaller buildings.

As a Nature Center with the responsibility of managing over 1,500 acres of land, KNC has also been eager to pursue nature-based strategies for climate action. By studying the carbon stored in our forests, KNC has set a benchmark to protect existing carbon stocks and has developed plans to improve the land’s ability to sequester carbon in the future. Taken together with our emissions reduction strategies, KNC is making sustainable climate action a priority in how we operate, how we engage our community, and how we care for our land. View our Story Map to learn more at NatureCenter.org/LandManagement.
From pulling garlic mustard in spring to surveying birds for the Winter Feeder Surveys, nature enthusiasts across Michigan participate year-round in KNC’s Community Science activities.

- KNC hosted the first annual Garlic Mustard Games in June, a friendly competition to pick as much garlic mustard and dame’s rocket as possible in an afternoon. The 10 volunteers (above) removed over 700 pounds of invasive plants in a single afternoon, helping to improve the quality of habitats at KNC.

- Thanks to ongoing grant funding from the Michigan Clean Water Corps (MiCorps), the fall 2021 and spring 2022 River Guardians macroinvertebrate sampling days engaged 35 community scientists to monitor the health of the Kalamazoo River. Sampling data is submitted to the MiCorps Data Exchange platform, which allows statewide partners to share and access information that can guide state and local water quality management efforts.

- Over 270 volunteer monitors with the Michigan Butterfly Network (MiBN) conducted 391 surveys and reported 10,362 butterfly observations across the state last fiscal year. Data from the MiBN was used in a 2021 study of monarch butterfly dynamics published in Nature Ecology & Evolution. After studying correlations of breeding season weather with summer population size, Zylstra et al. determined that climate change is likely an important contribution to the decline of monarchs. Learn more at NatureCenter.org/Publications.

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Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory

Fall bird banding has been an annual tradition at KNC since 1974, and KNC’s Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory (KVBO) is one of the country’s oldest continuous banding observatories. For the 2021 fall banding season, the KVBO survey efforts totaled over 13,000 “net hours,” resulting in 4,235 banded birds.

The bird banding team had an exciting find this summer with the recapture of a female hummingbird. First tagged in summer 2014, this tied the record for the oldest recaptured hummingbird on file with the U.S. Geological Survey’s Bird Banding Laboratory. All banding efforts at KVBO follow standard survey and reporting protocols, which allow for records of banded birds to be submitted to the banding laboratory. The KVBO’s records are compiled, shared, and analyzed with that of other observatories throughout North America. This year, KNC published its inaugural KVBO Annual Report, which provides details on the 2021 banding season. See it at NatureCenter.org/KVBO.

Ecological Services and Land Management

The Conservation Stewardship department expanded its field teams in 2022, improving the team’s capacity for managing habitats across KNC properties and those owned by clients across southwestern Michigan. Altogether, the crews managed over 600 acres and provided ecological services for 100 client projects. The crews managed invasive species, planted native prairies, conducted prescribed burns, and performed a variety of biological surveys, including:

- For the second year, KNC has continued work on a $137,000 fen restoration grant from the Sustain Our Great Lakes program with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant has allowed the team to manage high quality habitats at KNC, Fort Custer Training Center, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute, and Bow in the Clouds Preserve.

- A new Chronolog photo-monitoring station was installed by a trail that overlooks the restored area along KNC’s Habitat Haven fen. This station allows visitors to help track habitat changes over time.

- Pesticide exposure has been identified as a potential threat to all of our beloved Lepidoptera, including two federally endangered butterflies, the Mitchell’s satyr and the Poweshiek skipperling (pictured at left). To better understand the risks faced by these two species, KNC is collaborating with the Michigan Natural Features Inventory to screen protected prairie fen habitats. Understanding this risk is critical for the future management of these vital habitats.

The team is also proud to work with partners on important local projects:

- Oshtemo Charter Township received a $150,000 Planet Award grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation to restore two miles of habitat along the historic Fruit Belt Rail corridor that the township purchased to provide public recreation and natural resource protection along the historic Fruit Belt Rail corridor. KNC’s Ecological Services team, with help from Heronwood students, will manage the habitat restoration for this project. “We’re excited to be able to invite the community to participate in the restoration and learn more about the importance of native plants and climate resilience,” said Libby Henry-Cogswell, Oshtemo Township supervisor.

- KNC provided survey, habitat restoration, and planning support to the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi’s Environmental Department. These services further the Tribe’s goals of “sustainably preserving and protecting the land, water, air and wildlife for the next Seven Generations for the NHBP Community” at the Pine Creek Indian Reservation in Athens and other Tribal properties.

Pictured above: Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi’s Lehr Lake fen.

Below, left to right: KNC staff remove invasives at Bow in the Clouds Preserve, a hike along the Fruit Belt Trail in Oshtemo, and KNC staff collecting butterflies.
Total Revenues $3,844,269

- Includes insurance claim revenue for fiscal year ended August 31, 2022.

Includes development.

Numbers At a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32,988 KNC Visitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4,235 Birds banded at Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>100,600 Ecological Services projects/ acres of habitat managed at KNC and for clients</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,362/391 Individual butterflies/surveys for Michigan Butterfly Network butterfly monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/2/106 School &amp; community programs/ participants</td>
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<td>86/1/2021 Heronwood student enrollment/ Youth Climate Leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>45/8/366 Facebook/twitter/instagram followers as of August 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79,830 KNC Visitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>77,455 People viewed KNC’s profile on Google</td>
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</tbody>
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Southwest Michigan’s Cultural Membership Exchange was moved to October. KNC’s Visitor Center was closed in October, 2021 for construction.

1,727 KNC members enjoyed free admission to the participating organizations, and 355 partner members visited KNC trails.

The names listed 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 Tom Springer, Vice President of Development, at (269) 381-1574 ext. 35.
Cooper’s Glen Legacy members support KNC’s future through planned gifts that honor their connection to the natural world. Planned gifts to KNC ensure access to preserved lands and wonderful programs for generations to come.

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